



“The Centerfold Syndrome” Destroys Relationships Between Men and Women

TVC SPECIAL REPORT

SOFT-CORE PORNOGRAPHY is a significant threat to relationships between men and women, according to psychologist Dr. Gary R. Brooks, author of **The Centerfold Syndrome**.

According to Dr. Brooks, magazines like **Playboy, Penthouse, Hustler**, and others teach men to view women as sex objects. The result is that many men—including husbands—cannot develop intimate non-sexual relationships with women. They prefer the air-brushed images of a centerfold to a real woman who may be flawed.

Both men and boys are being conditioned to accept what Brooks calls "The Centerfold Syndrome." Brooks, assistant chief of psychology services at the Department of Veteran Affairs in Temple, Texas, says the Centerfold Syndrome makes men (and now boys who view pornography) incapable of entering into a long-term relationship with a woman.

In **The Centerfold Syndrome**, Dr. Brooks lists five characteristics of this pornography-induced emotional disorder:

- **Voyeurism.** The person prefers to look at women rather than interact with them. Brooks believes that our culture's promotion of sexualized images of women creates unrealistic expectations in men. Pornography distorts physical reality and creates an obsession with visual stimuli—to the exclusion of real relationships.
- **Objectification.** Women become objects to be rated by size, shape, and harmony of body parts. In fact, the character of a woman doesn't matter, only the parts of her body that give a man sexual satisfaction.
- **Validation.** Men (or boys) who become obsessed with the perfect woman shown in pornography only feel masculine when they are with beautiful women. The beautiful companion only maintains this man's interest until she becomes less than perfect—through aging, childbirth, or other changes. A woman's value is judged only by her beauty, not her character.
- **Trophyism.** Men who are obsessed with pornography view beautiful women as trophies to be displayed. A beautiful woman is looked upon as property and a conquest.
- **Fear of true intimacy.** Pornography's false images of women create a loneliness and a fear of real intimacy in men. While pornography continually stimulates a man's sexual desires, it does little to build emotional intimacy. The nude image on paper or in a video has no expectations and can give nothing but sexual stimulation. An addiction to pornography robs a man of his ability to relate emotionally or spiritually to a woman.

According to Brooks, "We have to challenge the idea that [pornography] is harmless." **The Centerfold Syndrome** can have devastating effects on impressionable boys and men who become addicted to pornography.

In a speech before the American Psychological Association in August, 1996, Dr. Brooks told his audience that The Centerfold Syndrome is contributing to rising divorce rates, spousal abuse, as well as boredom and dissatisfaction in marriage.

Dr. Brooks began studying the connection between soft-core pornographic images in magazines like **Playboy** when he noticed his own attitudes changing toward his wife. He had grown up in post-war America and learned much of his views about women by gazing at pornographic maga-

zines. His earliest relationships with women frequently failed because he was always looking for the “perfect” woman—the fantasy woman displayed in pornography magazines. He would break off relationships because of his girlfriend’s flaws. After 15 years of marriage, he began noticing himself losing interest in his wife because she was getting old. At that point he realized he had to let go of his fantasy image of the perfect woman. It was pornography that had given him this false image of what the perfect woman should look like.

Dr. Brooks is deeply concerned over the impact that pornography is having on pre-teen and teenage boys. In an interview with a reporter from the *Chicago Tribune* in 1997, Brooks observed, “Boys learn that they become men by desiring strangers, women they don’t even know. They don’t learn to feel comfortable in relationships with real girls.” He noted that pornography teaches boys that sex is only for recreation instead of a way for two people to express love for each other. Pornography “is not harmless. Once boys become sexual, they learn to see their bodies as sex machines.”

The Centerfold Syndrome destroys the ability of boys and men to have truly loving and meaningful relationships with women. Tragically, says Dr. Brooks, boys are being socialized by pornography to view women as conquests, not individuals to be loved and respected. As they grow into adults, they continue to view women as sex objects to be conquered, not loved.

According to Dr. Wendy Stock, author of “Men and the Problems of Non-Relational Sex,” in one study of teenage boys, 29% of them rated pornography over their parents, teachers, books, school and peers as their source for the most useful information about sex.

Young men who are enrolled in some of our nation’s finest colleges are consuming pornography in greater numbers than ever before. For example, a survey of young men in the Stanford University School of Business Administration showed that their favorite magazines were **Playboy**, and **GQ** (Gentlemen’s Quarterly). Researcher Debbie Then was alarmed by the attitudes these men had toward women. According to Then, consumers of pornography were critical of women who were overweight, and they wanted their sexual companions to look like *Playboy* centerfolds. Her findings, said Then, “... confirm women’s worst fears that first and foremost they are judged by appearance and that their intelligence is secondary in importance. The men who view these magazines say they are more critical of real-life women—and that’s even when they are aware that the pictures they’re looking at are air-brushed and altered.”

The bottom line is that boys who are exposed to pornography and who slowly become addicted to these images, are being socialized to view women as sex toys and body parts, not as human beings made in the image of God. Boys who are addicted to pornography will find it difficult to form lasting relationships with girls because they are always looking for a girl to fulfill a fantasy created by pornography. If these boys do marry, they will frequently be dissatisfied with their wives because these women can never compare with the fraudulent images and behaviors of women who act out in pornographic magazines, videos, and internet sites.

By creating false images and unrealistic expectations in men, pornography is a destroyer of marriages and normal relationships between men and women. Husbands who become secretly addicted to pornography frequently act out their sexual fantasies by committing adultery or by molesting their own daughters to satisfy their sexual urges. **VictimsofPornography.org**’s web site contains dozens of horror stories about how pornography has broken up families. Likewise, in the business world, men in power who are addicted to pornography are more likely to engage in sexual assaults, adulterous affairs, or to treat women with contempt. Pornography is a destroyer that must be eliminated from our culture if we wish to protect women and children from sexual assault.

Traditional Values Coalition is an inter-denominational public policy organization comprising over 43,000 member churches. For more information on the work of TVC, call our Washington, DC office at 202-547-8570 or access our web site at: www.traditionalvalues.org. TVC, 139 C Street, SE, Washington, DC 20003.
