



## Psychiatry & Behavioral Science Section – 2010

### I20 Pornography and Sexual Violence: Is There a Connection?

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By attending the presentation, attendees will understand the connection (or lack of connection) between pornography and sexual violence. Presenters will explore whether a causal link exists between child pornography and pedophilia.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing the forensic scientist, law enforcement personnel, and judicial officers techniques to differentiate legitimate science and “junk science” related to this topic.

In 2005, the Department of Justice (DOJ), under then-Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, created the Obscenity Prosecution Task Force (OPTF) and the Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section. The theoretical basis for the creation of these entities was the belief there was a strong link between pornography, violent sex crimes, and the sexual exploitation of children. The DOJ websites gave direct links to anti-pornography organizations such as [www.obscuritycrimes.org](http://www.obscuritycrimes.org), a website of Morality in Media (MIM). Robert Peters, president of MIM, raised concerns that while pornography was widely accepted as harmless, “common sense, anecdotal evidence, and social science research all point in the opposite direction.” Hearings on pornography were conducted on Capitol Hill, where experts on pornography such as Dr. Judith Riesman (Scientific Advisor, California Protective Parents Association) and Mary Anne Layden (Co-Director, Sexual Trauma and Psychopathology Program, Center for Cognitive Therapy, University of Pennsylvania) testified before the United States Senate’s Subcommittee on Science on “The Brain Science Behind Pornography Addiction.” Dr. Riesman informed that August body, “Thanks to the latest advances in neuroscience, we now know that emotionally arousing images imprint and alter the brain, triggering an instant, involuntary, but lasting biochemical memory trail. Pornography triggers a myriad of endogenous, internal, natural drugs that mimic the ‘high’ from a street drug.” Those testifying highlighted the “grave consequences” of pornography’s being available 24/7 and how it resulted in an epidemic of sexual violence toward women and children. This testimony appeared to be a significant influence on the Bush administration’s “War on Porn.” The only problem with Dr. Riesman’s elegant “erototoxins” theory was that facts stood in the way of her opinion and testimony. The overwhelming scientific evidence is that the increasing availability of pornography has been inversely related to the number of sex crimes committed.

This presentation reviews the current social and scientific literature on pornography and its impact on both adults and children. The connection (or lack of connection) between child pornography and pedophilia will be reviewed; the case of *United States vs. Ira Isaacs* will be discussed; and, the legal issues involved in obscenity cases will be discussed.

#### **Pornography, Sex Crime, Child Exploitation**