



THE WITHERSPOON INSTITUTE

THE WITHERSPOON INSTITUTE PRESENTS FINDINGS FROM THE SOCIAL COST OF PORNOGRAPHY PROJECT

*Consultation is the first multifaceted, multidisciplinary, scholarly exploration of
pornography in the Internet age*

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Washington, DC (March 16, 2010) – A growing body of research suggests that the habitual use of pornography — especially Internet pornography — can damage people of all ages and both sexes, negatively impacting their relationships, productivity, happiness and their ability to function in society. These are among the social costs of pornography, according to The Witherspoon Institute at Princeton, New Jersey.

The Witherspoon Institute released today *The Social Costs of Pornography: A Statement of Findings and Recommendations*. The consultation was the first multifaceted, multidisciplinary, scholarly exploration of pornography since the advent of the Internet. The proceedings, research and recommendations are available in booklet form and as a two-DVD set of the actual two-day meeting that assembled leading experts in several fields, including economics, psychology, sociology, and law to present a rigorously argued overview of pornography in today's society.

“Since the beginning of the Internet age, pornography has been consumed in greater quantities than ever before in human history, and its content has grown more graphic,” says Mary Eberstadt, research fellow of the Hoover Institution. “Recent research suggests that pornography consumption — especially consumption of a more hard-core or violent sort — has negative effects on individuals and society. Widespread pornography consumption appears to pose a serious challenge to public health and to personal and familial well-being.”

Mary Anne Layden, director of the Sexual Trauma and Psychopathology Program, Center for Cognitive Therapy, Department of Psychiatry, University of Pennsylvania noted that the overall the body of research indicates that the realistic and accessible nature of Internet pornography can lead to addiction that is so severe that users lose their marriages, families and jobs.

“Pornography, by offering an endless harem of sexual objects, hyperactivates the appetitive system. Porn viewers develop new maps in their brains, based on the photos and videos they see. Because it is a use-it-or-lose-it brain, when we develop a map area, we long to keep it activated. Just as our muscles become impatient for exercise if we've been sitting all day, so too do our senses hunger to be stimulated,” says Norman Doidge, M.D., Columbia University's Center for Psychoanalytic Training who presented at the consultation.

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The research presented includes: “The Impact of Pornography on Women,” “How Porn Became the Norm,” “Pornography’s Effect on Interpersonal Relationships,” “The Economics of Pornography,” “Acquiring Tastes and Loves,” “On the Abuse of Sex,” “Settling the Question in Principle,” “Climbing Mount Purgatorio,” “Freedom, Virtue and the Politics of Regulating Pornography,” “Moral Principles Governing Legal Regulation of Pornography.” All of the presentations can be viewed online or ordered at www.socialcostsofpornography.org beginning March 16.

“Particularly on the Internet, where much of pornography today is consumed, the type of sexuality depicted often has more to do with violence, extreme fetishes and mutual degradation than with sexual or emotional connection,” said Pamela Paul, author of *Pornified*.

The compilation of the consultation resulted in eight findings documenting the ubiquity of pornography, the qualitative difference in today’s pornography, and its harmful effects on women, children, users, as well as society at large.

With regard to its impact on children, according to Layden, “There is evidence that the prevalence of pornography in the lives of many children and adolescents is far more significant than most adults realize, that pornography is deforming the healthy sexual development of these young viewers, and that it is used to exploit children and adolescents.”

More than 50 academic signatories endorsed the document concluding that, “With concerted action from legislators, the therapeutic community, educators, policymakers, and responsible corporate leaders, however, some of the negative effects of pornography consumption can be combated.”

To purchase/obtain copies of the booklet and/or DVDs visit www.socialcostsofpornography.org

The Witherspoon Institute is working with Preserve Innocence, an initiative of the American Principles Project, on the dissemination of this important interdisciplinary research. Preserve Innocence is especially concerned about helping parents understand the implications of this report, and will be providing factsheets for parents via their website at www.preserveinnocence.org.

About The Witherspoon Institute: The Witherspoon Institute is an independent research center that works to enhance public understanding of the moral foundations of free and democratic societies. Located in Princeton, New Jersey, the Institute promotes the application of fundamental principles of republican government and ordered liberty to contemporary problems. In light of this purpose, the Institute has a special interest in higher education and the formation of the next generation of scholars. For more information on the Witherspoon Institute, the consultation and its research and/or publications, visit www.winst.org.

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