

# Critics call pornography report unscientific, fear censorship

By Joe Michael Feist  
 Washington (NC) — The voluminous report of the attorney general's Commission on Pornography has drawn criticism from civil rights groups, members of the commission itself and social scientists whose testimony was utilized by the panel.

Barry W. Lynn, legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union, said that rather than clarifying the issue for Americans, the commission has "largely polluted the debate over sexually explicit materials and censorship."

The commission, Lynn said during a late June news conference, was biased from the beginning, ignored studies that didn't agree with its members' preconceived notions, and issued a "drastic" report that is a blueprint for censorship.

When "bad thoughts or bad attitudes can regulate free speech," he added, "we've eviscerated the Constitution."

In a 200-page summary of the final report, the ACLU conceded that the commission's conclusions "about the message of much pornography is accurate."

But, the ACLU added, "when our nation abandons the view that offensive imagery and ideas are best handled with alternative,

affirmative ... speech and turns instead to governmental censorship or moral mob rule, we are all the losers."

Other criticisms were voiced by several social scientists whose work was used by the commission to reach one of its central conclusions — that exposure to most pornography plays a role in causing antisocial or violent behavior.

Edward Donnerstein, a University of Wisconsin professor, said the commission went "beyond the evidence" to reach its conclusion.

"It is the violence more than the sex — and negative messages about human relationships — that are the problem. And these messages

are everywhere," Donnerstein told the New York Times.

Murray Strauss, a sociologist at the University of New Hampshire, also disputed the commission's findings relating to pornography and violence. He suggested that the commission confused correlations with causes, thus violating basic scientific principles.

A sharp dissent to the final report was issued by two members of the commission — Ellen Levine, editor of Women's Day magazine, and Judith Becker, a Columbia University psychologist who has written extensively about sexual aggression.

Pointing to time and money constraints,

the two commissioners said it is, "simply unrealistic" to think that "11 individuals studying in their spare time could complete a comprehensive report" on so complex an issue.

Only the child pornography recommendations, the two said, received thorough discussion.

Among other deficiencies, the two said, material presented to the commission was "skewed to the very violent and extremely degrading," which "may have distorted the commission's judgment about the proportion of such violent material" to the total pornography market.

## Genesee Street

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Raised in the 19th Ward, Cowart has lived there for the past 18 years. "I have contacts here, and I know what kids in the area need," she said.

Cowart also knows the harsh paths to which street life can lead. For five years, she worked as a corrections officer for the Division of Youth Services. Then she spent four and one-

half years working with Persons In Need of Supervision, (PINS) at Hillside Children's Center.

She chose to work with the CYO program because, after nearly a decade of experience with the juvenile justice system, she longed to reach young people before they were institutionalized.

The need for such intervention is exemplified by the experience of youths who attended recent youth dances sponsored by the Boys' and Girls' Club. The club, located in the same

building as the new CYO office, offered the dances in response to the problem of youths on the streets. But the atmosphere was tense outside the building after the dance.

"When the kids came outside, they found a whole bunch of police cars parked all around," Cowart said. "That puts kids on the defensive. The police need civilians who know how to work with kids. They need to understand the trials and tribulations kids in this area are going through."

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