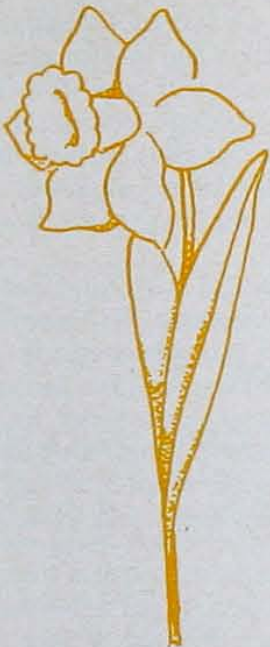


# Pornography and the Child



Many people feel that there should be no censorship of obscene books, magazines and films, believing that everyone has the ability to decide for themselves what they might wish to see or read.

Because adults do have doubts and fears about the effects of such a policy on children, an open forum looks at pornography, particularly as it relates to children.

Does pornography harm children? Under what conditions?

Does easy access to pornography help to protect children by providing an alternative outlet for child molesters, etc?

Does censorship increase the harmful effects of pornography?

Are there better ways of protecting children from the ill effects of pornography?

All these questions were asked and discussed at an open forum recently. Panelists were in varying fields of education, and family counselling.

Over the years, resolutions dealing with pornography have been sustained by FWIO Provincial Board Directors. No member will deny the fact that pornography creates problems for all of society, but somehow we are most aware of the effect this abuse has on the children. Especially the psychological abuse.

There have been many discussions, equally as many questions and still there remains that unanswered question, how does society cope? What is the right approach, if indeed there is a right approach or a single approach?

The panelists all expressed opinions that freedom of expression was a better method than that of censorship, but still there is no 'whole' answer.

It was interesting that the old theory — everyone has the ability to decide for themselves. (if you do not like what you see on TV, turn it off) was not a valid point. In fact one panelist felt no child under 12 should be allowed to watch television alone. Under parental guidance, explanations could be made and a broader understanding of many programs could be more fully understood by the child.

On the other hand, a participant felt children should be allowed to make choices on their own, in concert with parental guidance.

It was pointed out, that in Denmark in 1969, when censorship of pornography was lifted, that acts of violence and exploitation of children decreased 60%.

Interestingly, this whole subject of 'porno' was approached from an entirely different point of view. Whether this is the right approach is possibly not as important as the fact that it gives us another dimension to explore.

As many positive and reinforcing avenues are needed as can be mustered, to combine strength, to approach this distasteful attitude by a minority over the majority. How the child will benefit is important.

One point came through loud and clear many times "do talk to your children", especially the 3-11 age group. The question was asked, do parents talk enough about marriage, divorce, birth and death. Statistics prove less than 15% of parents talk about sexual intercourse. Parents are continually putting off 'talking' until the day when the child is a little older. Remember, children are sexually curious, when they ask a question try to give a direct answer.

Parents should be concerned about educational sensitivity to the entire environment, children need active and vigorous interplay, children talking to parents and parents talking to children. A good point to remember, the way children see things is not necessarily the way adults interpret the same situation. Children need a cushion, someone to help (parents, clergy, teacher) put day to day happenings into proper perspective. Discussions, a feeling of openness, someone to talk to just about the day's activities, will help children feel secure, loved, and a part of the family unit.

When children ask questions, be mindful of a positive and reinforcing answer.

The panel members felt censorship could encourage an attitude of hatred. Pornography need not be a problem unless we make it so. The point the panelists were attempting to make, children need a sounding board, someone to lean on. Someone to ask questions of, and to feel comfortable with, during the discussion. Someone who will be honest.

We are talking about pornography and the child, not the adult. From an adult point of view it's a different situation.

Think about your own approach as a parent. How you handle the questions when your child brings home a picture or tells about a situation, in your adult opinion, should not be seen or heard by children?

The thought projected was — there are better ways of protecting children from the ill effect of pornography. Panic and fear tactics are not the right approach. Kindness, understanding, truthful statements, and good value judgements, will gain the confidence of your children.

Never, are we trying to minimize pornography as it affects the child. Only to point out, that as parents, this approach just might help the child to talk at home, about situations, that otherwise might always remain unspoken.

Margaret Goeller