

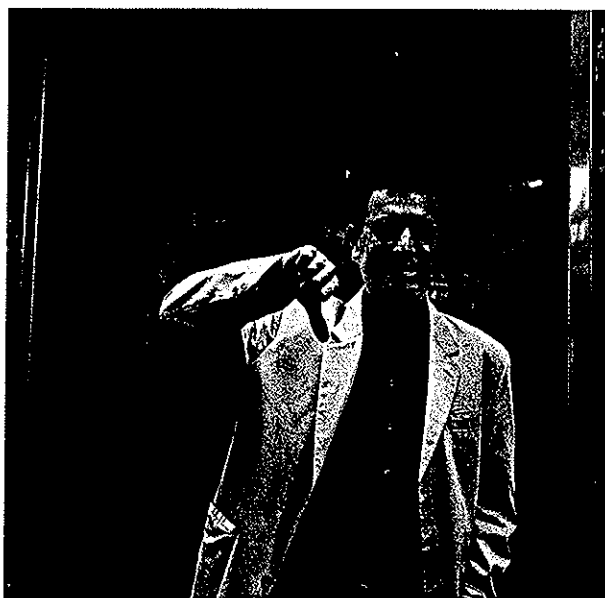
# how porn harms men, too

**W**hen I walk into a paper shop my eyes automatically flick up to the top shelf. But I'm more excited these days when the usual array of pornographic magazines is missing. And I'm not alone. There's an increasing number of men who are sick of being manipulated by the £500 million a year porn industry into having an instant willy-jerk response to sexist and demeaning images of women.

I have never sought out pornography, but it's been foisted on me as part of my experience of growing up as a man. I saw my first porn at the barber's when I was nine; it was passed around at school, college and work; it was laid out in my local steam baths on men's days; friends would give me a pile as a bedtime treat when I visited, saying, "Have a good wank".

What did I see? In the regular high-street magazines, endless photos of women in sexually explicit and submissive poses. Occasionally, I saw pictures of women chained up or being punished by men in Nazi-style uniforms. These images were accompanied by even more explicit writing containing every sort of male fantasy.

What did all this tell me about women? That they are simply vaginas on legs; they are always "desperate for it" and when they say "no" they mean "yes". That they love being dominated and humiliated and that inside every woman there's a "tart" longing to be sexually exploited. And I regret I believed much of this misinformation for too long. Searching in vain for the bimbo of my fantasies certainly didn't help me to form satisfying relationships with real women. Whenever I met a woman I found attractive, I was also terrified that I would be unable to quench her voracious sexual appetite. It wasn't until my late 20s that I discovered from personal experience that relationships with women can be much more than the transient, one-sided bonks of pornographic fantasy. Through



**BY PETER BAKER**

"Many men now reject  
the rape-inducing,  
woman-hating image  
they've been fed"

my training as a counsellor and finding out about feminism, I also realised how my male conditioning to be unemotional, aggressive and competitive was being reinforced by pornography, making me feel isolated and cut off from my feelings. Listening to other men's experiences as a counsellor, I heard a lot of grief and anger about the effects of pornography on their sexuality and their feelings about women.

I learned, too, that pornography can be positively dangerous. Research has shown that exposure to pornography desensitises young men to violence against women. In an interview before his execution in America last year, sexual murderer Ted Bundy described how he looked for harder and harder pornography until he reached

a "jumping off point where you begin to wonder if maybe actually doing it would give you that which is beyond just reading or looking at it."

But the tide is beginning to turn. Since I started to campaign against pornography, I have made contact with many men who now reject the rape-inducing, woman-hating images they've been fed, and are now prepared to speak out against the damage that's been done to their sexuality, their relationships and their perception of women. I decided that it is time to get these men together and have organised the first national conference for men who oppose pornography, under the auspices of the Campaign against Pornography and Censorship (CPC).

The conference is for men because pornography is mainly produced, sold and consumed by men. I think we have a special responsibility to tackle it. Many men feel too embarrassed to discuss porn in front of women, so this all-male event will provide a unique opportunity for them to discuss porn's impact on their lives.

Any man who feels that pornography contributes to sexism and sex discrimination will be welcome at the conference, but we particularly want to attract those who work with other men - youth workers, probation officers, teachers, doctors and social workers - as well as writers, politicians and men in the media, who are largely responsible for the way in which images of women are produced.

Of course, we will be criticised for ruining "harmless fun". But I'm not anti-sex, a killjoy or a prude. I'm in favour of a genuine sexual liberation that leads to men forming tender, loving and equal relationships both with women and with each other. Pornography has limited and dehumanised us all for too long, but I'm convinced that it's within our power to end it. ■  
For details about the conference on September 15, write to CPC, PO Box 844, London SE5 9QP.