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## The AIDS Scare in the Porn Industry—A Wake Up Call

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**Tuesday, May 4, 2004**

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Nevertheless, most Americans were likely shocked when an AIDS scare recently erupted in the porn film industry.

A medical alert was issued in mid-April when the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services reported that two porn actors had been infected with the H.I.V. virus. Early reports indicated that a majority of adult-movie producers had decided to accept a “voluntary” suspension of all filming for sixty days, in order to allow performers to be tested for exposure to H.I.V., the virus that causes AIDS. The immediate concern was fifty-three porn actors and actresses who were involved in sexual acts with the H.I.V.-infected actors.

According to The New York Times, the H.I.V. crisis “has forced an unusual cohesion among industry players.” Jim South, a talent agent with over three decades of experience in the business, explained that “everyone comes together in the adult industry when there’s any kind of a problem like this.” He quickly added: “This is not an epidemic.” Perhaps that all depends on how you define an epidemic.

Tim Myren, identified as a “talent booker” and manager of the “Naughty Modeling” agency, reported that porn actresses were in a near panic—not because of the possible danger of AIDS—but because of the loss of income. “I had 18 girls calling me crying, all upset, saying, ‘What do I do?’” Myren responded with professional calm: “So I’m trying to figure out some other things for them, like car shows and maybe shooting some solo stuff.”

The H.I.V. scare and the porn industry’s response have alerted many Americans to the deep and sinister immorality that lies at the heart of the “adult entertainment industry.” Issues of hygiene aside, this industry is built upon a “product line” that is directed to the very essence of sexual immorality. The industry makes billions of dollars each year by perverting human sexuality into the most debased and debauched carousel of sexual distortions. Actors and actresses are paid to have sex on film in order to fulfill the depraved fantasies of viewers—mostly young males—who live in a sexual fantasy world of twisted lusts and never-ending desire.

The perversity of the logic behind the porn industry is apparent in the response to the AIDS scare. Ira Levine, editor of Taboo, one of the pornographic magazines owned by Larry Flynt, sought to assure those concerned about a shortage of pornographic products. “There are lots of clever, creative people in the community, and they’re finding ways to have sex without the exchange of fluids,” he said.

One of the factors frustrating health officials is the anonymity behind the pornography business. Investigators with the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services struggled to get a list of the legal names of the 53 adult-movie actors who were known to have had sexual contact with the infected actors—or with someone else who had had sex with the

infected pair. The list was obtained from the Adult Industry Medical Health Care Foundation, run by Dr. Sharon Mitchell, a former porn actress who now holds graduate degrees in public health and human sexuality.

“We’re not happy about this,” Dr. Mitchell told The New York Times. “The legal names of our talent have always been held in the strictest confidentiality and privacy. We’ve been persuaded to cooperate.”

Dr. Jonathan E. Fielding, the county’s public health director, has requested a state investigation into the adult-film company where the infections took place. According to a letter sent by Dr. Fielding to Len Welch, acting chief of the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the infected actors, Darren James and Lara Roxx, “performed high risk sexual acts” that presumably led to the H.I.V. infection.

In an op-ed column published in the May 2, 2004 edition of The New York Times, Sharon Mitchell presented a hardcore defense of the porn industry. Her column appeared just after a third porn actor had tested positive for H.I.V. Mitchell warned that governmental regulations of the porn industry would ultimately fail. “In 80,000 tests my organization has conducted since 1998, there have been only fourteen diagnoses of H.I.V. infection. We’re doing an excellent job. But if a crusading government takes advantage of the three positive diagnoses to try to shut down the industry or mandate condoms, it won’t work. The segment of the industry that refuses to use condoms will simply go underground.” We’re doing an excellent job? Are 14 cases of H.I.V. infection a mark of excellence?

So, now a public figure deeply involved in the porn industry warns the government that pornographers will simply go “underground” if the government intervenes. Instead, she brazenly suggests that the government should “reward the producers, distributors, and actors who use condoms with a ‘seal of approval’.” Did you get that? Dr. Mitchell now wants a federal “seal of approval” in order to recognize pornography producers and distributors who achieve recognized “excellence” in perverting human sexuality. How about an award for efficiency in embezzlement?

The pervasive influence of pornography has warped the minds of millions of young Americans, and entrapped millions of its “consumers” in a never-ending pattern of sexual degradation. The entire “food chain” of pornography is an exercise in packaging sin for the masses. The immorality includes everything from the degraded acts performed for video production, to the women who are reduced to material for sexual gratification, to the “adult entertainment” businesses that distribute and sell this moral sewage, to the user who buys, watches, and is corrupted by the porn, to the family unit that is gravely weakened by pornographic influences, and eventually to the society at large, which experiences a range of social and sexual pathologies directly traceable to pornography’s impact and influence.

Dr. Mitchell has a message for America—just deal with it. “Films have become increasingly hardcore because that is what sells. Rejection of condom use is purely and simply a financial issue. Filmmakers believe that viewers prefer the ‘reality’ of unprotected sex,” she argued. She also offered what, at least to her, is the conclusive argument in the matter: “Pornography has been around for a long time, and it’s not going to go away.”

Mary Carey, a well-known porn star who ran for governor of California last year, declared the situation an emergency. “This is a wake-up call for everybody,” she said. Few would argue with that assessment.

The H.I.V. scare in the porn industry reveals the logic of a culture that, at its highest aspiration, appeals for what it calls “safe sex.” This is moral rebellion in its most graphic and grotesque form. The scare in the porn industry should be a wake-up call for sure, but this is not a problem that can be solved with “safe sex.” The H.I.V. scare should put that myth to rest once and for all.

