

# WORLD MAGAZINE

## Allies against porn

*Pornography's opponents now include an assembly of secular activists*

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She speaks with the fervor of a tent preacher, proclaiming a message that resonates with Christians, but the Bible isn't her handbook. Gail Dines is a self-described radical feminist who wants pornography stopped.

Dines, of the Boston porn-fighting nonprofit Culture Reframed, is part of a growing secular movement to eliminate violent, degrading sexual images, especially on the internet. Feminists, medical professionals, and legislators are working together, sometimes alongside Christians, in a multipronged attack on porn.

Christians like Patrina Mosley of the Family Research Council appreciate the help. She highlights FRC's partnering with secular organizations to correct and clarify app ratings to better protect children from online porn.

Patrick Trueman of the nonreligious National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE) said, "It's not just a moral issue, it's a public health crisis."

NCOSE, a coalition of more than 350 disparate organizations and individuals, annually spotlights "The Dirty Dozen," 12 entities as diverse as Google and the state of Nevada that profit from sexual exploitation, pressuring them to change.

Dines helps parents. She calls porn a stealth public health crisis: "Many parents don't have a clue their kids are accessing porn, don't know how violent it is, and have no idea how to talk to kids about it."

Her organization has developed scripted videos parents can use to speak with children about porn. She says some material may offend certain cultural or religious groups.

Another feminist, Taina Bien-Aimé, of Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, calls porn "prostitution with a camera": "Victims of porn, prostitution, and trafficking are often one and the same."

For Heidi Olson, another secular ally to Christians, that harm is personal.

When she was 14, a prominent man in her community sexually abused her friend. Now, as a sexual assault nurse examiner at Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, Mo., she helps violated children.

Olson is disturbed by the increasing prevalence of child-on-child sexual abuse. Crime and survey data from the United States and the U.K. suggest children under age 18 (including preteens) commit one-third to two-thirds of all incidents of sexual abuse against minors. The National Center for Victims of Crime says estimates vary widely because these crimes often go unreported.

In 2017, 44 percent of 444 cases of sexually abused children treated at Children's Mercy Hospital were child-on-child. The 11- to 15-year-olds constituted the highest concentration of perpetrators.

"Children have been so desensitized by porn that imitating violent sexual abuse is normal," Olson said. She recently testified before a Missouri Senate committee for a bill to block kids from porn websites by requiring passwords. The bill failed, but Olson says legislators will bring it up again in the next session.

Common efforts have convinced 15 states to declare porn a public health crisis, including Arizona.

Not all legislators affirmed that declaration. *Arizona Capitol Times* reported Sen. Victoria Steele, D-Tucson, voted against it. "The real issue is not necessarily pornography," she said. "The real issue is around violence against women, and toxic masculinity."

Bien-Aimé calls feminists who defend porn "patriarchal feminists." Dines said, "If you're a feminist you have to be anti-porn ... otherwise you become PR machines for the porn industry."

David Boaz, writing for the libertarian Cato Institute, argued against the public health crisis designation, saying research doesn't show connections between porn use and violent sexual crime.

Dines calls this attitude a willful refusal to deal with reality, noting children especially become victims. Having porn designated a public health crisis helps legislators introduce stronger laws against porn, and it gives activists ammunition to confront corporations and public libraries to block porn.

Dines and others say it took coordinated campaigns on multiple fronts to battle problems like drunken driving and HIV/AIDS. They see fighting porn as a similar battle.