

Fawning over Flynt film shows twisted values

By CHRISTOPHER McCLUSKEY
Psychotherapist, Clearwater, Florida

"As far as best films go, the nod is to **The People Vs. Larry Flynt...**" the article said. I was sitting in a booth at a restaurant across from my office eating lunch. On each table was a pamphlet entitled "Entertainment Guide - Special Year-End Issue." These were the opening lines of the cover story on the movies they felt would win Academy Awards in February.

I had to read the sentence three times to convince myself of what it said. This was the film that had been forced to redesign advertising posters that pictured actor Woody Harrelson, who plays Flynt, clothed in a diaper and standing in a crucifix position, flanked by a woman in a bikini. The movie had to be cut considerably to gain an R rating instead of the NC-17.

Since that day, the movie has received rave reviews at the Golden Globe Awards.

Many Americans know Larry Flynt as the multimillionaire founder of *Hustler* magazine and its myriad of spinoff hard-core porn magazines. Although he has not had the degree of press exposure given Hugh Hefner, founder of the *Playboy* empire, he is perhaps best known for his highly publicized Supreme Court victory in the 1970s securing First Amendment protection for hard-core pornographers.

By now, in the aftermath of such high-profile sex films as *Showgirls* and *Striptease*, another movie about the sex industry doesn't come as much of a surprise. But there are at least two factors that set **The People Vs. Larry Flynt** in a category by itself in terms of impact for evil in the world.

The first is that the movie has ingeniously targeted the Generation X audience. The casting of Woody Harrelson (of the TV sitcom *Cheers* and star of the movie *Natural Born Killers*) creates instant appeal with the Generation X audience. Harrelson is one of Hollywood's most outspoken advocates for the legalization of marijuana. Recently on the cover of *Hemp* magazine, he is in the midst of a high-profile legal battle over his public displays of possession of marijuana. Harrelson's popularity with the youth culture will provide them immediate identification with the character he plays, a man who refers to himself in the movie as "The Pervert."

But it is the casting of rock star Courtney Love that provides the strongest draw for the younger generation. She plays the role of Flynt's fourth wife, Althea Leasure, and does many of the obligatory nude scenes including one of group sex.

Her character visibly wastes away throughout the movie, eventually dying of AIDS as a drug-addicted shell of a human being.

Love is extremely popular with Gen Xers, partly because she is the lead singer for the grunge band Hole. Her songs are often about death, drugs, despair and other themes that play well to the emptiness that characterizes so much of the grunge crowd. However, it was her marriage to Kurt Cobain, lead singer of the group Nirvana, whose suicide by gunshot made front-page news for weeks in 1995, that established her as a cultural icon. Kurt Cobain is the James Dean of the '90s, a charismatic rebel whose music and life captured the angst that so many Generation Xers feel. One of his classic songs was "I Hate Myself and Want to Die."

Several youths around the country killed themselves following Cobain's suicide. He still has a strong cult following not unlike that of Jim Morrison (of The Doors) in the 1960s. Cobain and Courtney Love had a daughter and her fans praise her as a mother in the same way that Madonna's fans are gushing over her recent motherhood.

By casting Courtney Love, director Milos Forman and producer Oliver Stone have virtually guaranteed a large attendance from Love's devoted fans. These young people, who have already had exposure to the sex-saturated material so prevalent in our society, will get an almost irresistible invitation into the harder core of the sex industry. Many who might not otherwise have ventured so far as the XXX bookstores and movie houses may now see them as a new way of trying to fill up the void in their spirits, becoming engulfed in the world of pornography.

Flynt's world of sex, drugs, wealth, power and irresponsibility

BACKGROUND: LARRY FLYNT

- Born in 1943, Flynt grew up in poverty in eastern Kentucky.
- He owned a number of cocktail lounges in Ohio, where he began *Hustler*, a newsletter to keep customers informed about their favorites among Flynt's 300 female dancers.
- *Hustler* went national as a pornographic magazine and achieved a reputation for degrading women with nude scenes of sexual bondage, rape, and dismemberment. One cover of the magazine showed a woman being shoved head-first into a meat grinder. The magazine was also famous for its extremely offensive humor, which included a regular cartoon feature about a pedophile, entitled "Chester the Molester." *Hustler* gained national attention with the publication of pictures surreptitiously taken of former first lady Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, as she vacationed nude on her husband's Greek island.
- In 1977, after spending time with evangelist Ruth Carter-Stapleton, sister of President Jimmy Carter, Flynt supposedly converted to Christianity. He determined to change *Hustler* into a magazine that would "hustle for God." The new emphasis was a financial disaster, and Flynt reversed his decision to mix God and pornography.
- In 1978, Flynt was shot by a would-be assassin which left him paralyzed from the waist down. In bitterness, he denounced God and Christianity, as well as religious leaders who opposed his magazine, such as Rev. Jerry Falwell, Moral Majority founder. Following an ad in *Hustler* which suggested that Falwell's first sexual experience was with his own mother in an outhouse, Falwell sued. A lower court awarded Falwell \$200,000 for emotional distress, but in a historic 1988 decision the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the decision on First Amendment grounds.



"The People Vs. Larry Flynt is a movie that is glorifying [my father's] life. And I'm opposed to that idea.... I think a lot of people don't realize what *Hustler* magazine is all about and the damage that it does to society and to women. And I am speaking on behalf of the victims – people that have been abused or that are caught up in pornography or in bondage because of pornography. There are a lot of those victims and they seem to be going unnoticed and unspoken for in the midst of all of this media frenzy surrounding this movie.... They are not talking about the prostitution that was involved in getting the money to start this magazine. They are not talking about the extreme violence against women and the way that the magazine promotes and advocates and causes rape and child sexual abuse."

TONYA FLYNT-VEGA, daughter of Larry Flynt

ity are contrasted with portrayals of the rest of America as uptight, judgmental, puritanical hypocrites. Flynt once professed to be a born again Christian after having been evangelized by Ruth Carter-Stapleton, sister of former President Jimmy Carter. Christianity is ridiculed throughout the movie, from Althea joking about her cousin shooting a Baptist preacher in the back, to the implied sexual advances of Ruth Carter-Stapleton toward Flynt, a moronic Jerry Falwell, and the name plate on Flynt's desk which reads "Jesus H. Christ, Publisher." Flynt even states that God is working through him, and wears a T-shirt that says "Jesus Is An Anarchist."

There is a second threat from this film that may prove even more devastating. The movie is absolutely wrapped in the American flag, and the political punch it delivers defies belief. Flynt is portrayed as a hard-working underdog ("I'm just trying to make an honest buck...") who fights the system and becomes a champion of American freedoms. When convincing his attorney to take his case before the Supreme Court, Flynt states, "I would love to be remembered for something meaningful." After winning his case, which protected his right to publish an ad lampooning Jerry Falwell as having intercourse with his mother in an outhouse, Flynt tells reporters, "If the First Amendment can protect a scumbag like me, it can protect all of you."

The cast includes some very powerful political figures. James Carville, key political strategist for President Clinton in both his 1992 and 1996 bids for the Presidency, plays the role of a federal investigator. The simple fact that he appears in this mockery of American justice suggests that Larry Flynt's Supreme Court victory is something of which Americans should be proud. Carville laughingly told *Entertainment Weekly* magazine, "Flynt's got a sixth-grade education. Becomes a millionaire. Gets mixed up with [Jerry] Falwell and [Charles] Keating. Goes through the Supreme Court stuff. Almost gets assassinated. When you put it all together, it's a Forrest Gump kind of thing." This man is one of our President's closest advisors.

The role of Ruth Carter-Stapleton is played by Donna Hanover from the TV journalism show **Good Day New York**. Hanover also happens to be the wife of Rudolph Giuliani, Mayor of New York City. She did an interview with Larry Flynt years ago when an issue of *Hustler* magazine ran nude pictures of Jackie Onassis. Flynt has apparently returned the favor by casting her in his movie. Asked for her thoughts on the film, Hanover told *Vogue* magazine, "It's a very political movie, and people think it raises some important issues. The First Amendment protects us all." Incredibly, her husband is in the middle of a highly publicized crack-down, vowing to shut down as many as 150 sex shops in New York City.

Half of the cast flew with Larry Flynt in his black jet to visit

Vaclav Havel, President of the Czech Republic, who is a life-long friend of director Milos Forman. These kinds of international connections, which Flynt, Stone, Forman, Carville, et.al. have formed throughout their highly public lives, create open markets for a movie that might not otherwise have gotten worldwide exposure. This movie will be viewed by millions who will see its portrayal of Larry Flynt's life as a triumphant example of American Democracy at work.

Many of these markets have only recently opened themselves up to the irreversible poisoning of Western-style pornography. Many countries have not had the steady rise of legal sex-oriented businesses we have seen in America since the 1950s. This movie serves as a two-hour award-winning commercial on what they have been missing. It sugar coats the poison with the greatest symbol of America – freedom. These countries are inviting an onslaught of the most depraved material mankind has ever mass produced, and they are doing it in the name of Westernization.

It is important to understand that hard-core porn is not just naked people in sexual situations. It frequently centers around graphic scenes of rape, torture, incest, sado-masochism, sexual slavery, bestiality, genital mutilation, urination, defecation, body dismemberment and murder. The impact of these images on society cannot be overstated.

An obvious example was a woman who was brutally gang-raped in a pool hall shortly after *Hustler* ran a feature called "Dirty Pool" picturing such a gang rape. In an unbelievable display of their indifference, *Hustler* responded to the crime by publishing a postcard of a nude woman on a pool table with the inscription, "Greetings from New Bedford, Mass, The Portuguese Gang-Rape Capital of America."

It is hard to identify any one thing that has had as much adverse impact on the moral decline of our culture as pornography. It seems to appeal to the voyeuristic part in us that cranes our necks as we pass an automobile accident. Its influence can be seen in the huge rise in sex crimes and Jeffrey Dahmer/Ted Bundy-style molestation murders. Bundy gave testimony to the intoxicating influence of pornography on his life in an interview with Dr. James Dobson just hours before his execution.

But its influence is seen far more universally in the way it has shaped our television and movie industries, art, theater, music, notions of public decency, and our basic institutions of marriage and family. Pornography's greatest harm is its ability to desensitize us to evil. It is impossible to measure how greatly it has rotted the core of our nation.

The People Vs. Larry Flynt is mainstreaming a key ingredient of our culture's decline. The greatest tragedy is that America is praising it for doing so.

