

Recruits Sought for Porn Squad

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The FBI is joining the Bush administration's War on Porn. And it's looking for a few good agents.

Early last month, the bureau's Washington Field Office began recruiting for a new anti-obscenity squad. Attached to the job posting was a July 29 Electronic Communication from FBI headquarters to all 56 field offices, describing the initiative as "one of the top priorities" of Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales and, by extension, of "the Director." That would be FBI Director Robert S. Mueller III.

Mischievous commentary began propagating around the water coolers at 601 Fourth St. NW and its satellites, where the FBI's second-largest field office concentrates on national security, high-technology crimes and public corruption.

The new squad will divert eight agents, a supervisor and assorted support staff to gather evidence against "manufacturers and purveyors" of pornography -- not the kind exploiting children, but the kind that depicts, and is marketed to, consenting adults.

"I guess this means we've won the war on terror," said one exasperated FBI agent, speaking on the condition of anonymity because poking fun at headquarters is not regarded as career-enhancing. "We must not need any more resources for espionage." Among friends and trusted colleagues, an experienced national security analyst said, "it's a running joke for us."

A few of the printable samples:

"Things I Don't Want On My Resume, Volume Four."

"I already gave at home."

"Honestly, most of the guys would have to recuse themselves."

Federal obscenity prosecutions, which have been out of style since Attorney General Edwin Meese III in the Reagan administration made pornography a signature issue in the 1980s, do "encounter many legal issues, including First Amendment claims," the FBI headquarters memo noted.

Applicants for the porn squad should therefore have a stomach for the kind of material that tends to be most offensive to local juries. Community standards -- along with a prurient purpose and absence of artistic merit -- define criminal obscenity under current Supreme Court doctrine.

"Based on a review of past successful cases in a variety of jurisdictions," the memo said, the best odds of conviction come with pornography that "includes bestiality, urination, defecation, as well as sadistic and masochistic behavior." No word on the universe of other kinks that helps make porn a multibillion-dollar industry.

Popular acceptance of hard-core pornography has come a long way, with some of its stars becoming mainstream celebrities and their products -- once confined to seedy shops and theaters -- being "purveyed" by upscale hotels and most home cable and satellite television systems. Explicit sexual entertainment is a profit center for companies including General Motors Corp. and Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. (the two major owners of DirecTV), Time Warner Inc. and the Sheraton, Hilton, Marriott and Hyatt hotel chains.

(CORRECTION TO THIS ARTICLE

A Sept. 20 Federal Page article said that General Motors Corp., as one of two major owners of DirecTV, is among the mainstream corporations earning profits from explicit sexual entertainment. It is the carmaker's subsidiary, the General Motors Investment Management Corp., that owns about 15 percent of DirecTV. GM sold its direct stake in the satellite television company in 2003.)

But Gonzales endorses the rationale of predecessor Meese: that adult pornography is a threat to families and children. Christian conservatives, long skeptical of Gonzales, greeted the pornography initiative with what the Family Research Council called "a growing sense of confidence in our new attorney general."

Congress began funding the obscenity initiative in fiscal 2005 and specified that the FBI must devote 10 agents to adult pornography. The bureau decided to create a dedicated squad only in the Washington Field Office. "All other field offices may investigate obscenity cases pursuant to this initiative if resources are available," the directive from headquarters said. "Field offices should not, however, divert resources from higher priority matters, such as public corruption."

Public corruption, officially, is fourth on the FBI's priority list, after protecting the United States from terrorist attack, foreign espionage and cyber-based attacks. Just below those priorities are civil rights, organized crime, white-collar crime and "significant violent crime." The guidance from headquarters does not mention where pornography fits in.

"The Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's top priority remains fighting the war on terrorism," said Justice Department press secretary Brian Roehrkasse. "However, it is not our sole priority. In fact, Congress has directed the department to focus on other priorities, such as obscenity."

At the FBI's field office, spokeswoman Debra Weierman expressed disappointment that some of her colleagues find grist for humor in the new campaign. "The adult obscenity squad . . . stems from an attorney general mandate, funded by Congress," she said. "The personnel assigned to this initiative take the responsibility of this assignment very seriously and are dedicated to the success of this program."