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On the offensive to protect marriages from assault of porn

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WHEN A MILITARY chaplain appeared on ABC News last week talking about how pornography is becoming a problem for troops overseas, I listened. When the chaplain said real women at home couldn't measure up to the impossible pictures, I thought of this woman I had seen years ago in a bookstore on base in Japan.

I shouldn't remember her. The woman was not one of those people you even notice, much less remember. She had no distinct hair color, no charm of face. She reminded me of wide egg noodles and cream of mushroom soup and Minute Rice.

But I noticed her when her sailor husband handed her a stack of magazines maybe 5 inches thick. Penthouse. Playboy. Hustler. Worse. He must have picked up every single porn mag the bookstore offered.

While I watched and the people behind me watched, the wife took the stack from him. She held it in hands that had probably stroked his face, patted his back, clutched his thighs. She handed the stack to a clerk. Then, in front of a line of 10 people, with her husband waiting impatiently by the door, she slowly signed her name to the bottom of her personal check. She did it as if pornography were something you brought home weekly, like milk or eggs or Minute Rice.

Until that moment, I'd always thought pornography was no big deal, a boys-will-be-boys kind of thing. Seeing her in person shook me – her pasty face, her quiet resignation.

So I paid attention to the news segment. It talked about these 11,000 sexual purity kits that are going to military members in Iraq. Following the popular "Every Man's Battle" series from New Life Ministries, the kits promote Bible-based abstinence: no pornography, adultery, nonmarital sex or masturbation.

I heard that and kind of winced. It seemed too old fashioned a solution for a time when pornography is as available as a paper-wrapped burger. It made me think of some of those goofy venereal disease movies from World War II.

It also made me think of two couples I know who have divorced over pornography addiction, and the stories I read every week about how it's becoming more of a problem for every age group.

But a religious text? I just didn't know. I picked up a copy of one of the books at a Christian bookstore. At first I was uncomfortable reading it. I'm Christian. I practice my faith, but this book was written by men who are far more zealous in their faith than I am in mine.

The authors write about sexual purity and a man's relationship to God. Their recommendations seem a little extreme – suggesting that men avoid not only pornography but also magazine advertisements and movies with a rating over PG-13.

The more I read, the more I understood why the chaplains had ordered the book. The second half of the book is about protecting the marriage. It talks about how to handle yourself if you become attracted to someone else. It offers a behavior strategy should someone become attracted to you.

The authors don't say if; they say when. They don't write as though men are idiots or slaves of passion. They remind their male readers to honor and cherish the women they married, to remember what their wives gave up to

be married to them.

I am a little leery when it comes to imposing a specific faith's teachings on military men. Still, I can't stop thinking about that woman in the bookstore. I can't stop thinking about her husband. This sexual purity kit is a tool that chaplains are turning to to help families like that one. It isn't the only tool against pornography, but it certainly may be the most powerful one yet.

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