

# [Pornography — sex or subordination?](https://assignbuster.com/pornography-sex-or-subordination/)

Word Count: 4391In the late Seventies, America became shocked and outraged

by the rape, mutilation, and murder of over a dozen young,

beautiful girls. The man who committed these murders, Ted

Bundy, was later apprehended and executed. During his

detention in various penitentiaries, he was mentally

probed and prodded by psychologist and psychoanalysts

hoping to discover the root of his violent actions and

sexual frustrations. Many theories arose in attempts to

explain the motivational factors behind his murderous

escapades. However, the strongest and most feasible of

these theories came not from the psychologists, but from

the man himself, as a teenager, my buddies and I would

all sneak around and watch porn. As I grew older, I

became more and more interested and involved in it,

pornography became an obsession. I got so involved in

it, I wanted to incorporate porn into my life, but I

couldnt behave like that and maintain the success I had

worked so hard for. I generated an alter-ego to fulfill

my fantasies under-cover. Pornography was a means of

unlocking the evil I had burried inside myself (Leidholdt

47). Is it possible that pornography is acting as the key

to unlocking the evil in more unstable minds?

According to Edward Donnerstein, a leading researcher

in the pornography field, the relationship between

sexually violent images in the media and subsequent

aggression and . . . callous attitudes towards women is

much stonger statistically than the relationship between

smoking and cancer (Itzin 22). After considering the

increase in rape and molestation, sexual harassment, and

other sex crimes over the last few decades, and also the

corresponding increase of business in the pornography

industry, the link between violence and pornogrpahy needs

considerable study and examination. Once the evidence you

will encounter in this paper is evaluated and quantified,

it will be hard not come away with the realization that

habitual use of pornographic material promotes unrealistic

and unattainable desires in men that can leac to violent

behavior toward women.

In order to properly discuss pornography, and be able

to link it to violence, we must first come to a basic and

agreeable understanding of what the word pornography

means. The term pornogrpahy originates from two greek

words, porne, which means harlot, and graphein, which

means to write (Websters 286). My belief is that the

combination of the two words was originally meant to

describe, in literature, the sexual escapades of women

deemed to be whores. As time has passed, this definition

of pornography has grown to include any and all obscene

literature and pictures. At the present date, the term is

basically a blanket which covers all types of material

such as explicit literature, photography, films, and video

tapes with varying degrees of sexual content.

For Catherine Itzins research purposes pornogrpahy

has been divided into three categories: The sexually

explicit and violent; the sexually explicit and

nonviolent, but subordinating and dehumanizing; and the

sexually explicit, nonviolent, and nonsubordinating that

is based upon mutuality. The sexually explicit and

violent is graphic, showing penetration and ejaculation.

Also, it shows the violent act toward a woman. The

second example shows the graphic sexual act and climax,

but not a violent act. This example shows the woman

being dressed is a costume or being talked down to in

order to reduce her to something not human; such as a

body part or just something to have sex with, a body

opening or an orifice. Not only does erotica show the

entire graphic sexual act, it also depicts an attraction

between two people. Her research consistently shows

that harmful effects are associated with the first two,

but that the third erotica, is harmless (22). These

three categories basically exist as tools of discerning

content. Although sometimes they overlap without a true

distinction, as in when the film is graphic in the

sexual act and also in violence, but shows the act as

being a mutual activity between the people

participating.

In my view, to further divide pornography, it is

possible to break it down into even simpler categories:

soft and hard core pornography. Hard core pornography is

a combination of the sexually explicit and violent and the

sexually explicit and nonviolent, but subordinating and

dehumanizing categories, previously discussed. Soft core

pornography is thought to be harmless and falls into the

category known as erotica; which is the category based

on mutuality. In hard core pornogrpahy, commonly rated

XXX, you can see graphic depictions of violent sexual

acts usually with a man or group of men, deriving sexual

gratification from the degradation of a woman.

You can also see women participating in demoralizing

sexual behavior among themselves for the gratification of

men. In a triple-X movie all physical aspects are shown,

such as extreme close-ups of genitalia, oral, vaginal, and

anal penetration, and also ejaculation. Much of the time

emphasis is put on the painful and humiliating experience

of the woman, for the sole satisfaction of the male. Soft

core pornography, or X-rated pornography, is less explicit

in terms of what is shown and the sexual act is usually

put in the light of mutual enjoyment for both the male and

female parties(Cameron and Frazer 23). Triple-X

pornography is manufactured and sold legally in the United

States. Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer point out

that other forms of hard core pornography that have to be

kept under wraps, made and sold illegally in underground

black markets. These are ultraviolent, snuff, and

child pornography. Ultraviolent tapes or videos show the

actual torture, rape, and sometime mutilation of a woman.

Snuff films go even future to depict the actual death of

a victim, and child pornography reveals the use of

under-age or pre-pubescent children for sexual purposes

(17-18). These types of pornogrpahy cross over the

boundaries of entertainment and are definitely hard core.

Now that pornography has been defined in a fashion

mirroring its content, it is now possible to touch upon

the more complex ways a community, as a society , views or

defines it. Some have said it is impossible for a group

of individuals to form a concrete opinion as to what

pornography means. A U. S. Supreme Court judge is quoted

as saying, I cant define pornography, but I know it when

I see it (Itzin 20). This statement can be heard at

community meetings in every state, city, and county across

the nation. Community standards are hazy due to the fact

that when asked what pornography is to them, most

individuals cannot express or explain in words what

pornography is, therefore creating confusion among

themselves.

Communities are left somewhat helpless in this matter

since the federal courts passed legislation to keep

pornography available to adults. The courts assess that

to ban or censor the material would be infringing on the

publics First Amendment Right (Carol 28). Maureen

OBrien quotes critics of a congressionally terminated

bill, the Pornography Victims Compensation Act, as saying

That if it had passed, it would have had severely

chilling effects on the First Amendment, allowing victims

of sexual crimes to file suit against producers and

distributors of any work that was proven to have had

caused the attack, such as graphic material in books,

magazines, videos, films, and records (7). People in a

community debating over pornography often have different

views as to whether or not it should even be made

available period, and some could even argue this point

against the types of women used in pornography: A far

greater variety of female types are shown as desirable in

pornography than mainstream films and network television

have ever recognized: fat women, flat women, hairy women,

aggressive women, older women, you name it (Carol 25).

If we could all decide on just exactly what pornography is

and what is acceptable, there wouldnt be so much debate

over the issue of censoring it.

The bounds of community standards have been stretched

by mainstreaming movies, opening the way even further for

the legalization of more explicit fare (Jenish 53). In

most contemporary communities explicit sex that is without

violent or dehumanizing acts is acceptable in American

society today.

These community standards have not been around very

long. When movies were first brought out, they were

heavily restricted and not protected by the First

Amendment, because films then were looked upon only as

diversionary entertainment and business. Even though sexual

images were highly monitored, the movie industry was hit

so hard during the Great Depression that film-makers found

themselves sneaking in as much sexual content as possible,

even then they saw that sex sells (Clark 1029). Films

were highly restricted throughout the 30s, 40s, and 50s

by the industry, but once independent films of the 60s

such as: Bonnie and Clyde and Whose afraid of Virginia

Woolfe? (Clark 1029-30), both with explicit language,

sexual innuendo, and violence started out-performing the

larger wholesome production companies, many of the

barriers holding sex and violence back were torn down in

the name of profit . Adult content was put into movies

long ago, we have become more immune and cant expect it

to get any better or to go away. Porn is here for good.

Pornography is a multi-million dollar international

industry, ultimately run by organized crime all over the

world, and is produced by the respectable mainstream

publishing business companies (Itzin 21). Although the

publishing companies are thought to be respectable,

people generally stereotype buyers and users of

pornographic material as dirty old men in trenchcoats,

but most patrons of adult stores are well-educated people

with disposable income (Jenish 52). Porno movies provide

adults of both genders with activities they normally

wouldnt get in everyday life, such as oral pleasures or

different types of fetishes. Ultimately adult

entertainment is just a quick-fix for grown-ups, as

junk-food would be for small children.

Pornographys main purpose is to serve as

masturbatory stimuli for males and to provide a sexual

vent. Although in the beginning, society saw it as

perverted and sinful, it was still considered relatively

harmless. Today there is one case studie, standing out

from the rest, that tends to shatter this illusion.

The study done my Monica D. Weisz and Christopher M.

Earls used eighty-seven males . . . that were randomly

shown one of four films, by researchers William Tooke and

Martin Lalumiere: Deliverance, Straw Dogs, Die Hard II,

and Days of Thunder, for a study on how they would react

to questions about sexual violence and offenders after

watching. In the four films there is sexual aggression

against a male, sexual aggression against a female,

physical aggression, and neutrality-no explicit scenes of

physical or sexual aggression. Out of this study the

males were more acceptable of interpersonal violence and

rape myths and also more attracted to sexual aggression.

These same males were less sympathetic to rape victims and

were noted less likely to find a defendant guilty of rape

(71). These four above mentioned movies are mainstreamed

R-rated films. If a mainstream movie can cause this kind

of distortion of value and morality, then it should become

evident that continuous viewing/use of pornographic films

depicting violent sex and aggression could lead vulnerable

persons into performing or participating in sexual

violence against their partners or against a stranger.

Bill Marshall, psychology professor at Queens

University and director of a sexual behavior clinic in

Kingston, interviewed one-hundred and twenty men, between

the years 1980 and 1985, who had molested children or

raped women. In his conclusion he found that pornography

appeared to be a significant factor in the chain of events

leading up to a deviant act in 25% of these cases (Nicols

60). The results of this study should prove that

pornography obviously has a down side to it.

According to Mark Nicols, a psychology professor at

the University of Michigan, Neil Malamuth, concludes quite

cautiously that some messages combined with other factors,

including the viewers personality type, in pornography

can lead to antisocial behavior and make individuals less

sensitive to violence. Dr. Marshall also quotes men in

Nicols article as saying, that they looked at pornography

with the intent to masturbate, but then became aroused,

and decided to go out and assault a woman or child. Men

who are drawn into pornography and use it frequently, have

also been proven to suggest more lenient prison terms for

sex offenders (60). If this previous statement is true,

should we reevaluate how many men serve on juries for

these trials?

Itzin gives possible support for these theories. It

can be found in the case of an ex-prostitute who had her

pubic hair removed with a jackknife and was forced by her

pimp to be filmed reenacting what they had seen in

pornographic movies; she was sexually assaulted and forced

to have intercourse with animals, generally dogs. Another

such case is one of a woman who reports having metal clips

attached to her breasts, being tied to a chair, and being

raped and beaten continuously for twelve hours (22-24).

The dehumanizing, degradation, and reduction of a womans

body isnt just a result of viewed pornography, it is

often inseminated into the production of a pornographic

project. During the making of Deep Throat, a 1970s

pornographic film, Linda Marchiano (a. k. a. Linda

Lovelace), was presented to the public as a liberated

woman with an ever present and unfulfilled appetite for

fellatio. What isnt known to the general public is that

during the making of the movie, she was hypnotized to

suppress the natural gagging reaction, was tortured when

caught trying to escape, and also held at gun-point by her

boss, who threatened her with death (Itzin 22). Ms.

Marchiano did escape and when her story was told, it was

repeated by a number of women in the pornography business.

According to DArcy Jenish many children are lured

into the pornography industry by choosing first to model.

These young teens egos are boosted when they are told

they have good bodies, and are asked if they work

out?. More often than not, they are told to take off

their shirts, and then asked Do you feel nervous?

(36). These youngsters honestly dont know when too much

is too much, and what they dont know could put them in

serious danger.

Calvin Klein, once known for being a reputable

clothing designer, is now known for his racy ads using

teens. Some feel he crossed the line when he chose this

type of advertising. Jenish observes that these

advertisements featured an array of . . . teen-aged

models dressed in loose jeans or hiked-up skirts, one

showing bare breasts, others offering androgynous models

kissing (36). If adults in positions of power act this

way, these youngsters cannot expect other adults to act

any differently. Therefore they accept this type of

behavior as normal.

Diana Russell claims that tactics like these are

being used more often in advertising and television, which

has led media watchdogs and anti-porn activists to believe

that this sort of masked imitation of pornography tricks

mainstream television viewers into having an everybodys

doing it attitude about pornography. She also feels that

this attitude subconsciously leads them into seeking

pornography out (39). We need to show the younger

generation that everyone is not doing it, and that it is

all right not to have sex if they feel pressured.

Another problem anti-pornography activists believe

arises from regular viewing of pornography, is the

acceptance of rape myths. Rape myth is a term

pertaining to peoples views on rape, rapists, and sexual

assaults, wherein it is assumed that the victim of a

sexual crime is either partially or completely to blame

(Allen 6). To help understand the rape myth a Rape Myth

Acceptance Scale was established, which lists some of the

most prominent beliefs that a person accepting the rape

myth has. They are as follows:

1. A woman who goes to the home or apartment

of a man on their first date implies that

she is willing to have sex.

2. One reason that women falsely report a rape

is that they frequently have a need to

call attention to themselves.

3. Any healthy woman can successfully resist

a rapist if she really wants to.

4. When women go around braless or wearing

short skirts and tight tops, they are just

asking for trouble.

5. In the majority or rapes, the victim is

promiscuous or has a bad reputation.

6. If a girl engages in necking or petting and

she lets things get out of hand, it is her

own fault if her partner forces sex on her.

7. Women who get raped while hitchhiking get

what they deserve.

8. Many women have an unconscious wish to be

raped, and may then subconsciously set up

a situation in which they are likely to be

attacked.

9. If a woman gets drunk at a party and has

intercourse with a man shes just met

there, she should be considered fair game

to other males at the party who want to

have sex with her too, whether she wants to

or not (Burt 217).

Pauline Bart reports that studies held simultaneously

at UCLA and St. Xavier College on students, demonstrate

that pornography does positively reinforce the rape myth.

Men and women were exposed to over four hours of exotic

video (of varying types; i. e. soft, hard core, etc.) and

then asked to answer a set of questions meant to gage

their attitudes of sex crimes. All the men were proven to

be more accepting to rape myths, and surprisingly, over

half of the women were also (123). Once again, the women

in these films were portrayed as insatiable and in need of

constant fulfillment. After so much exposure to women in

this light from films and books, it is generally taken for

granted that women should emulate this type of behavior in

real life(125). comment?

Of all the studies and examples from real life

situations connecting pornography with violent behavior

and sexual aggressiveness, none are more concrete than the

activities the Serbian military are part of every day now

in the Bosnian war. Part of the ethnic cleansing

process the Serbs are practicing in Bosnia involves the

gang-raping of all Muslim and Croatian women. Andrea

Dworkin states that it is mandatory for the Serbian

soldiers to rape the wives and female children of Muslim

men. Concentration camps are set up as brothels where

women are ordered to satisfy the soldiers in the most

painful and dehumanizing ways imaginable. The women in

these camps are taped with cam-corders and the videos are

displayed everywhere throughout the camps to lower the

womans will and need to resist. Were do the soldiers get

the inspiration to commit these crimes, from commercial

pornography. Serbian troops are basically force-fed porn;

it is present all through training and is made readily

available to (even pushed upon) the soldiers. They are

basically asked to watch and learn. After the seed is

planted not much is needed to be done, because they are

naturally instilled with the desire to repeat what they

have seen, and are not concerned with the feelings of the

women. They have seen that some women have no feelings

and are meant to be used merely for sexual gratification

(M2-M6). To add insult to injury, some of the tapes of

these women being victimized have entered the black

market, being sold internationally, possible infecting the

minds of millions.

Pornogrpahy has enamored itself as a large part of

our modern society. It is seldom discussed and often

hidden as a dirty secret, but porn still seems to play a

major part in the shaping of our morals and behaviors.

Although some say pornography is relatively harmless, a

considerable larger group seem to uphold the assumption

the porn works in negative and disruptive ways on those

who view it and participate. Nearly all the research

supports this assumption, so it is evident the the topic

is in need of much more examination and debate.

Even though the majority of modern society views

pornography as objectionable and sometimes obscene, there

are some that do not agree with the assumption that

pornography is guilty of the defamation of women and their

sexual roles. Social observationalists, such as Mary

White, at the University of Michigan often agree with her

statement on the part women play in pornogrpahy which

explains that since most pornographic material plays up

to male fantasy, women are usually the aggressors, hence

women are given a semblance of empowerment. Also, the

majority of these women in the material are very

attractive, therefore seen as the forms of beauty and

desire, something to be respected and worked for (72).

Although White may not realize it, this statement

reinforced most of the arguments made in support of the

notion that pornography is subordinating and degrading to

women. By saying that being sexually aggressive gives a

woman empowerment, she limits a womans ability to reach

empowerment to sexual activity alone, and by claiming that

the use of attractive women in pornographic material lends

to a view of women being desirable, she inadvertently

excludes women that dont fit societys mold of the model

physical female, (i. e. overweight, small breasted, short,

etc.). Most of the arguments similar to Whites follow

the same line of reasoning, and are easily broken down in

the same manner as hers.

In regards to pornogrpahy perpetuating violent acts

toward women, pornography defenders claim that the use of

pornographic material can act as a cathartic release,

actual lessening the likelihood of males committing

violent acts. The reasoning is that the pornogrpahy can

substitute for sex and that the want to commit sexual

crimes is acted out vicariously through the pornographic

material (Whicclair 327). This argument, however, does

not explain the crimes committed by serial killers like

Ted Bundy and John Wayne Gacey, who regularly viewed

pornography during the lengths of their times between

murders and rapes (Scully 70). By saying that pornogrpahy

would reduce harm to women through cathartic effects,

pornography defenders display a large lack in reasoning

because through their argument the rise in the production

of pornography would have led to a decrease in sexual

crimes, but as has been shown previously, that simply is

not true.

Pornographers and pornography defenders proclaim that

the link between pornography and violence is exaggerated

and that the research linking pornography to sexual crimes

is inconclusive. They state that the fundamentals of sex

crimes are found inherently in the individuals and that

the sexual permissiveness of American society cannot be

blamed on the increase of pornographys availability

(Jacobson 79). David Adams, a co-founder and executive

director of Emerge, a Boston counseling center for male

batterers, states, that only a minority of his clients

(perhaps 10 to 20 percent) use hard-core pornography. He

estimates that half may have substance abuse problems, and

adds that alcohol seems more directly involved in abuse

than pornography (Kaminer 115). The statement made by

Adams and the view that pornography does not contribute to

the act of sex crimes is heavily outweighed, however, by

the various studies connecting violence and pornography.

Bill Marshalls observations on his patients and the

examples of individual crimes originating from

pornography, show this acclimation to be invalidated.

Some also say that attacks on pornography merely

reflect the majority of feminists disdain for men,

cynically stating that people who fear pornography think

of all men as potential abusers, whose violent impulses

are bound to be sparked by pornography (114). Researcher

Catherin MacKinnon, says that pornography works as a

behavioral conditioner, reinforcer, and stimulus, not as

idea or advocacy (114). However, this idea is proven to

be false by the use of pornography in and by the Serbian

military. This example shows that pornography does

advocate sex crimes and that ideas of sexual violence are

able to be stemmed from the viewing of pornography.

Pornography has become to most just another one of

those cold, nasty facts of life that cannot be stopped, so

some choose to ignore it. This attitude has to change.

After reviewing the abuse and subordination delegated to

women as an almost indisputable result of the mass

infiltration of pornography into modern society, it should

be impossible for someone not to want to do something

about it. What can be done is for those concerned to try

to spread the word and educate others as much as possible

to the dangers of this sort of material. If people knew

the roots of some of their more violent behavior, it could

be deminished, thus protecting the future and health of

our communities.

From its inception, in most cases, pornography is a

media that links sexual gratification and violence

together. This fact can only lead a rational mind to the

conclusion that a chain of events will begin, combining

sex and violence further in the minds of those who watch

pornography and will ensure an unhealthy attitude towards

women and their sexual identities. Only through

discussion and individual action can the perpetuation of

the negative impacts of pornography be swept from the

closets and dark corners of the American household.

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