

# Pornography — sex or subordination?



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In 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

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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 buried 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 lead 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 pornography 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 pornography

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 in 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 pornogrphahy, 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 further 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 pornography 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 can't define pornography, but I know it when

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

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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 public's 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.

Pornography's 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 study, standing out

from the rest, that tends to shatter this illusion.

The study done by 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 woman's

body isn't 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 isn't 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 everybody's 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 of 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 she's 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 gauge

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, possibly infecting the minds of millions.

Pornography 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 pornogrphahy 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 woman's 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 don't fit society's 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 pornography 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 pornography 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 pornography 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 pornography's 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 Marshall's 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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