

Pornography Objectifies Women

1. Women as Sex Objects

[Pornography](#) fosters the idea that the degradation of women is acceptable. Since males use pornography much more frequently than females,¹⁾ exposure to sexual and even semi-sexual material from the [Internet, magazines, and television](#) is associated with stronger notions that women are sex objects or sexual commodities.²⁾ Men thus exposed are more likely to describe women in overtly sexual terms, rather than by other personal attributes.³⁾

2. Violence against Women

A study of widely [distributed x-rated films](#) by Gloria Cowan and colleagues, professors of psychology at California State University, San Bernardino, determined the range and extent of domination and sexual inequality depicted of women in a random selection of movies in family video rental stores in California. [Physical aggression](#) was present in 73 percent of the films, and rape scenes were present in 51 percent, with the woman as the victim every time. The films depicted gender-role inequalities as well, typically portraying the men as professionals and the women as school girls, secretaries, or housewives.⁴⁾ During the sexual scenes, the man usually remained at least partially clothed, whereas the woman was usually naked.⁵⁾

3. Acceptance of Rape

After prolonged exposure to pornography, [men especially, but also some women](#), trivialize rape as a lesser offense.⁶⁾

Similar results emerge in assessments of college men. Sarah Murnen of Kenyon College, Ohio found that fraternity members, who displayed many more pornographic pictures of women in their rooms than those from the non-fraternity group, had more [positive attitudes toward rape](#).⁷⁾

Pornographic films also degrade women through "[rape myth acceptance](#)" scenes, which depict women being raped and ultimately enjoying the experience. These scenes foster the belief that women really "want" to be raped. Jeannette Norris of the University of Washington conducted a study in which a group of students read two versions of the same story depicting a woman being raped. The story, however, had two different endings: one version ended with the woman deeply distressed, the other ended with the woman seeming to enjoy herself. Even though the two stories were identical in every way except for the woman's reaction at the end, the students viewed the scenario more positively when the story depicted the woman as enjoying the rape. They perceived the raped woman as having a greater "desire" to have sex and were thus more accepting of what the man had done.⁸⁾

4. Women's View of Pornography

Women tend to view pornography as more degrading of women than men do. When a sample of students was asked about their feelings toward pornography, 72 percent of the young women but only 23 percent of the young men stated their feelings were negative. Moreover, when asked if pornography is degrading, almost 90 percent of young women but only 65 percent of young men agreed that pornography is degrading.⁹⁾

Whether they think pornography is degrading or not, women who [view pornography](#) regularly unwittingly engage in a form of self-degradation: they develop a negative body image about themselves because they do not measure up to the depictions in the pornographic materials.¹⁰⁾

¹⁾ Häggström-Nordin, Elisabet, Ulf Hanson, and Tanja Tydén, "Associations Between Pornography Consumption and Sexual Practices Among Adolescents in Sweden," *International journal of STD & AIDS* 16, no. 2 (2005): 103.

²⁾ Peter Jochen and Patti M. Valkenburg, "Adolescents' Exposure to a Sexualized Media Environment and Their Notions of Women as Sex Objects," *Sex Roles* 56, (2007): 381-395, 390.

³⁾ Deborah E.S. Frable, Anne E Johnson, and Hildy Kellman, "Seeing Masculine Men, Sexy Women, and Gender Differences: Exposure to Pornography and Cognitive Constructions of Gender," *Journal of Personality* 65, (1997): 311-355, 333.

⁴⁾ Gloria Cowan, Carole Lee, Daniella Levy, and Debra Snyder, "Dominance and Inequality in X-Rated Videocassettes," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 12, (1988): 299-311, 306-307.

⁵⁾ Gloria Cowan, Carole Lee, Daniella Levy, and Debra Snyder, "Dominance and Inequality in X-Rated Videocassettes," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 12, (1988): 308.

⁶⁾ James B. Weaver III, "The Effects of Pornography Addiction on Families and Communities" (Testimony presented before the Subcommittee on Science, Technology, and Space of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Washington, D.C., November 18, 2004), 3.

⁷⁾ Timothy E. Bleecker and Sarah K. Murnen, "Fraternity Membership, the Display of Degrading Sexual Images of Women, and Rape Myth Acceptance," *Sex Roles* 53, (2005): 487-493, 490.

⁸⁾ Jeanette Norris, "Social Influence Effects on Responses to Sexually Explicit Material Containing Violence," *The Journal of Sex Research* 28, (1991): 67-76, 70-73.

⁹⁾ Thomas Johansson and Nils Hammaren, "Hegemonic Masculinity and Pornography: Young People's Attitudes Toward and Relations to Pornography," *The Journal of Men's Studies* 15, (2007): 57-70, 62.

¹⁰⁾ Sheilah Siegel, "Applying Social Comparison Theory to Women's Body Image and Self-esteem: The Effects of Pornography" (Doctoral dissertation, Palo Alto, CA: Pacific Graduate School of Psychology, 1997).

This entry draws heavily from [The Effects of Pornography on Individuals, Marriage, Family and Community](#).

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