Pornography and Violence: 
What Does the New Research Say?

Diana E. H. Russell

As feminist social scientists examine past research (most of it done by the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography), it becomes clearer and clearer that the commission did not do a thorough job of exploring the effects of pornography on human beings. New research conducted in the last decade indicates that exposure to pornography does result in more aggressive, violent, and sexist behaviors on the part of the viewers. Dr. Diana E. H. Russell, Associate Professor of Social Sciences at Mills College in California, reports on this recent research.

Evaluating existing research on the effects of pornography is fraught with difficulties. First, distinctions are rarely made between "explicit sexual materials," "erotica," and "pornography." Second, precise descriptions of the films, pictures, or stories used in experiments are usually lacking, so that it is often impossible to know whether the findings are relevant to an evaluation of the effects of pornography or not. Third, many researchers have focused on the effects of "erotica" on sexual behavior, but a distinction is rarely made between destructive, sexist sexual behavior and healthy non-sexist sexual behavior. Another major focus has been on the relationship between sexual arousal and aggression, whereas my major concern in this article is with the relationship between pornography—regardless of arousal—and violence against women.

It is crucial to differentiate between pornography, erotica, and sexually explicit educational materials. By pornography, I mean explicit representations of sexual behavior, verbal or pictorial, that have as a distinguishing characteristic the degrading or demeaning portrayal of human beings, especially women.* Erotica differs from pornography by virtue of its not degrading or demeaning women, men,

* This is a simplified version of a definition formulated by Helen Longino in Section I of this book.
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or children. Like pornography, it is often intended to turn people on sexually. And like pornography, erotica may also be sexually explicit—though it often tends to be more subtle and/or artistic than is usual for sexually explicit materials. Sex education materials differ from erotica in that they are not designed to excite people but to educate them. Of course, they may also be sexually stimulating to some people, and are usually sexually explicit as well. Sex education materials are not supposed to be sexist; when they are they would meet my definition of pornography.

These distinctions are exceedingly important. As a feminist sociologist, I am in favor of erotica and sex education but against pornography. I will try to make these distinctions more real by referring to a particular experiment.

Pauline Bart and Margaret Jozsa, and Irene Diamond mention the research of Donald L. Mosher, who sought to ascertain the effects of two erotic movies on students. A measure of “sex calloused” attitudes toward women was administered to the 256 male students involved. This scale focused on attitudes approving of the sexual exploitation of women. Some examples follow, with the percentage of subjects who agreed shown in parentheses:

Most women like to be dominated and sometimes humiliated (58%);
When a woman gets uppity, it's time to _______ her (24%);
_______ teasers should be raped (51%);
A woman doesn't mean “No” unless she slaps you (39%).*

Not surprisingly, Mosher reports that “sex calloused males were more liable to use force to obtain coital access and to believe that force was justified (26%).”¹ Mosher found that these men were also more liable to use other exploitive techniques in order to try to obtain intercourse: attempting to get the woman drunk (39%), falsely professing love (25%), or showing a woman pornography or taking her to a “sexy” movie (16%).²

Contrary to expectation, after viewing the erotic movies, there was some decrease in these sex calloused attitudes.³

In trying to understand these results the description of the two films is particularly helpful.⁴ As Bart and Jozsa point out, Mosher admitted using “better-than-average” films that showed “more affection than is typical of much pornography,” and fewer genital closeups so that they might appeal more to women than would pornography,

* I assume the blanks were filled in for the students. However, they were not completed for the readers of the published article.
“which is oriented toward a male audience and more ‘kinky’ sex.” Although this description of the films is rather spare, it does seem they may well qualify as erotica rather than pornography. My own viewing of pornography films certainly confirms Mosher’s observation that it is very rare to see affection combined with sex. In this context it is interesting to note that G. Schmidt and his colleagues similarly found that increased feelings of aggression were evident only after the subject’s reading of “erotic” stories devoid of affection and love.

I believe that movies portraying respect, affection, tenderness, and caring along with sex—including totally explicit sex free of sex-role stereotypes—would be educative, erotic, and therapeutic, particularly for men with sex calloused attitudes. However, as the well-known psychologist H. J. Eysenck and his colleague D.K.B. Nias point out, most pornographic films are not like this:

Even when they do not overtly depict scenes of violence and degradation of women at the hands of men, such as rape, beatings, and subordination, the tone is consistently anti-feminist, with women only serving to act as sexual slaves to men, being made use of, and ultimately being deprived of their right to a sexual climax—in the majority of such films, the portrayal ends with the men spraying their semen over the faces and breasts of the women.

To bring my discussion of research on pornography down to the level of pornography, I will cite an example: An article entitled “Rape: Agony or Ecstasy?” was published in 1971 in a magazine called Response: The Photo Magazine of Sexual Awareness, described as “Educational Material for Adults Only.” This was just one year after the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography had declared pornography to be harmless. While reading the following extracts from the article, consider the likelihood that readers would realize that the “study” cited is a pornographer’s invention. The article is accompanied by seven graphic photo illustrations.

Nearly one-half of all women who are forcibly raped experience orgasm during the assault, according to a report recently released by researchers from the University of Michigan.

Dr. Coin was immediately impressed by the number of women who had actually found the coital stage pleasurable, as 73% did, and the 47% who had been stimulated to orgasm.

A number had been forced to perform or submit to activities which were not usual to their sex lives, such as anal intercourse,
fellatio, cunnilingus, rear entry, etc. Most found these new acts highly erotic within the context of rape.

"I felt like an animal," interviewers were told repeatedly, or "I lost control of myself." Nearly all reported that their physical actions, after arousal, were much more violent than usual. Many recalled biting and scratching their assailants, and cooperating with exaggerated coital motions of their own.

The physical struggle which typically preceded intromission also was undoubtedly of erotic significance. During man's origins, the report points out, the most physical and brutish of males were also the best equipped to defend and provide for offspring and mates. Thus they were the most sought-after sex partners. As psychologists have long known, we are not so far removed from the jungle but that such characteristics still contribute to erotic response in the female.

Fear, too, has a sexually exciting quality for most women. The fear rape victims feel certainly adds to their responsiveness.

When one allows for the many cases of rape where intercourse was of very short duration, even less than one minute, it appears that virtually every woman who became aroused achieved orgasm if given a reasonable chance.

The emotional impact of forced intercourse is also an aid to orgasm, the researchers have concluded. The situation in which the victim finds herself is so unique, the sensations so unfamiliar, that they command all of her attention.

"Only about one woman in twenty whom we contacted had trouble resuming her regular pattern of sex response," the doctor reports. "And most of these had been sexually unstable before being raped."

For the most part, American women can perhaps take some comfort in the fact that if they should ever become the victim of a rapist, neither the actual assault nor the aftereffects may be as traumatic as had been feared.

Do we really need research to tell us that such material reinforces or even fosters dangerous myths about rape? Material such as this not only can encourage men to rape, but it also serves to undercut the credibility of the victims, thereby contributing to their isolation and victimization by society.
In attempting to measure the effects of pornography, no research to date has used a stimulus such as the article above, even though the research design would be much easier to execute than much of that which has already been done. For example, people's attitudes toward rape, including the degree to which they subscribe to the myths about it, could be assessed before and after reading materials about rape published in pornographic magazines. Such an experiment would be much more relevant to the question of how pornography relates to rape and other violence against women than most research published until now. But neither women nor feminists have been given money to do this research. So at present we shall have to look with a feminist sensibility at what has been done.

Before reviewing some of the relevant work that has been done it is important to examine some of the characteristics of the population pornography caters to. For if men had no propensity to rape and beat women, or even if only a tiny minority of them have it, then pornography would have less violence-promoting potential.

Many feminist students of rape have pointed to the connection between rape and normative sex-role behavior. In The Politics of Rape, I suggested that if one were to see sexual behavior as a continuum, with rape at one end and sex liberated from sex-role stereotyping at the other, much of what passes as normal heterosexual intercourse would be seen as close to rape. Lorenne Clark and Debra Lewis articulate the same idea, arguing that given the unequal power relationship between men and women, coercive sexuality is the norm. In their chapter on "rapists and other normal men," they point out that "men are unwilling to acknowledge that there is anything abnormal about wanting sexual relations with an unwilling partner, because they fear that if full, consensual sexuality were to become the standard of acceptable sexual relations, they would be deprived of many . . . of the sexual acts they now enjoy." Out of this perspective comes their rhetorical question: "If misogyny and sexual aggression are the rule rather than the exception, then why are not all men seen as real or potential rapists?" Clark and Lewis conclude that "all men are shaped by the same social conditioning . . . , and they are all sexually coercive to some degree—at least, at some point in their lives."

Eugene J. Kanin's research over the past two decades on male sexual aggression and the victimization of females supports the notion that forced sex in the high school and college age population is widespread. Approximately 62 percent of a group of female first-year university students reported "experiencing offensive male sexual aggression during the year prior to university entrance," 21 percent
reported forceful attempts at intercourse, and 9 percent reported "more violent attempts at sexual intercourse accompanied by 'menacing threats or coercive infliction of physical pain.'" Similar figures were obtained for a more varied group of students.

More recently, Neal Malamuth, Scott Haber, and Seymour Feshbach asked a sample of ninety-one students (fifty-three males and thirty-eight females) to read a "rape story." As is customary in much psychological research, the students were not drawn in any random sampling process; they volunteered to participate in the research as part of a requirement of introductory psychology courses. After the male students had read the rape story, they were asked whether they personally would be likely to act as the rapist did in the same circumstances. The identical question was then repeated, this time with an assurance that they would not be punished. The results:

On a response scale ranging from 1 to 5 (with 1 denoting "none at all" and 5 "very likely"), 17 percent of the men specified 2 or above when asked if they would emulate such behavior "under the same circumstances"; but a total of 51 percent responded that they might do it if they were assured that they would not be caught!

Malamuth, Haber, and Feshbach further point out that "these men also found the rape story more sexually arousing, believed that the victim enjoyed it, and were more likely to try to justify the act." In interpreting these results, it is helpful to know the content of the rape story. The following is all that is reported:

An approximately 500 word passage was written depicting a male student raping a female student:

"Bill soon caught up with Susan and offered to escort her to her car. Susan politely refused him. Bill was enraged by the rejection. 'Who the hell does this bitch think she is, turning me down,' Bill thought to himself as he reached into his pocket and took out a Swiss army knife. With his left hand he placed the knife at her throat. 'If you try to get away, I'll cut you,' said Bill. Susan nodded her head, her eyes wild with terror."

The story then depicted the rape. There was a description of sexual acts with the victim continuously portrayed as clearly opposing the assault.

If 51 percent of this sample of male college students might be willing to act out such a violent rape on someone who had merely
rebuffed a mild advance, one wonders how much the percentage might increase if the story were about a man who forced intercourse on his wife after she had declined his sexual advances for over a week. Or consider the following story: A man invites out a very attractive woman, known to be promiscuous, wines and dines her in anticipation of sexual intercourse, proceeds to neck and pet with her at his home later in the evening, and then gets turned down in a rude and abrupt fashion. What percentage of men might be willing to rape a woman in such a situation? Alfred Kinsey allegedly said that the difference between rape and a good time may hinge on whether the girl's parents were awake when she finally came home. It would be truer to say that the difference between rape and a bad time is often that the woman goes ahead and agrees to have intercourse.

Research on how women experience the impact of pornography has so far been of little interest to male researchers. I would therefore like to present some preliminary results from my own research.*

Nine hundred thirty-three women 18 years and older, who were living in San Francisco during the summer of 1978, were interviewed to ascertain the prevalence of sexual assault in that city. These women were drawn from a random-household sample obtained by a San Francisco public-opinion polling firm—Field Research Associates. The women in the study were asked the following question: "Have you ever been upset by anyone trying to get you to do what they'd seen in pornographic pictures, movies, or books?" Of the 929 women who answered this question, 89 (10 percent) said they had been upset by such an experience at least once, while 840 (90 percent) said they had no such experience. Since the sample is a representative one, one can predict from this finding that 10 percent of the adult female population in San Francisco would say that they have been upset by men having seen something in pornography and then trying to get the women to do what they'd seen. Of course, it is possible that the women may be wrong in thinking that the men were inspired by what they had seen in the pornographic pictures, movies, or books. On the other hand, there are apt to be many instances of upsetting sexual contact in which the woman was unaware that the man's idea came from having viewed pornography; these instances would not get picked up by this question.

Those who answered "Yes" to the question were then asked to

* This research was supported by Grant RO1 MH2890 from the National Institute of Mental Health, Rockville, Md.
describe the experience that upset them the most. As will be noted
in some of the replies quoted below, although many of the women
were able to avoid doing what was asked or demanded of them,
others were not so fortunate. And even in cases where the be-
havior was avoided, the woman often ended up feeling harassed
and/or humiliated.

Selected Answers to Pornography Questions:

Have you ever been upset by anyone trying to get you to do
what they’d seen in pornographic pictures, movies, or books?
IF YES: Could you tell me briefly about the experience that
upset you the most?

Ms. A: Urinating in someone's mouth.

Ms. B: It was a three-girls-and-him situation. We had sex.
I was really young—like fourteen.

Ms. C: He was a lover. He'd go to porno movies, then he'd
come home and say, "I saw this in a movie. Let's try it." I felt
really exploited, like I was being put in a mold.

Ms. D: I was staying at this guy's house. He tried to make
me have oral sex with him. He said he'd seen far-out stuff in
movies, and that it would be fun to mentally and physically
torture a woman.

Ms. E.: It was physical slapping and hitting. It wasn't a turn-
on; it was more a feeling of being used as an object. What was
most upsetting was that he thought it would be a turn-on.

Ms. F: He'd read something in a pornographic book, and
then he wanted to live it out. It was too violent for me to do
something like that. It was basically getting dressed up and
spanking. Him spanking me. I refused to do it.

Ms. G: He forced me to have oral sex with him when I had
no desire to do it.

Ms. H: This couple who had just read a porno book wanted
to try the groupie number with four people. They tried to
persuade my boyfriend to persuade me. They were running
around naked, and I felt really uncomfortable.

Ms. I: It was S & M stuff. I was asked if I would participate
in being beaten up. It was a proposition, it never happened. I didn't like the idea of it.

*Interviewer:* Did anything else upset you?

*Ms. I:* Anal intercourse. I have been asked to do that, but I don't enjoy it at all. I have *had* to do it, very occasionally.

*Ms. J:* My husband enjoys pornographic movies. He tries to get me to do things he finds exciting in movies. They include twosomes and threesomes. I always refuse.

Also, I was always upset with his ideas about putting objects in my vagina, until I learned this is not as deviant as I used to think. He used to force me or put whatever he enjoyed into me.

*Ms. K:* He forced me to go down on him. He said he'd been going to porno movies. He'd seen this and wanted me to do it. He also wanted to pour champagne on my vagina. I got beat up because I didn't want to do it. He pulled my hair and slapped me around. After that I went ahead and did it, but there was no feeling in it.

*Ms. L:* I was newly divorced when this date talked about S & M and I said, "You've got to be nuts. Learning to experience pleasure through pain! But it's your pleasure and my pain!" I was very upset. The whole idea that someone thought I would want to sacrifice myself and have pain and bruises. It's a sick mentality. This was when I first realized there were many men out there who believe this.

*Ms. M:* Anal sex. First he attempted gentle persuasion, I guess. He was somebody I'd been dating a while and we'd gone to bed a few times. Once he tried to persuade me to go along with anal sex, first verbally, then by touching me. When I said "No," he did it anyway—much to my pain. It hurt like hell.

*Ms. N:* This guy had seen a movie where a woman was being made love to by dogs. He suggested that some of his friends had a dog and we should have a party and set the dog loose on the women. He wanted me to put a muzzle on the dog and put some sort of stuff on my vagina so that the dog would lick there.

*Ms. O:* My old man and I went to a show that had lots of tying up and anal intercourse. We came home and proceeded to make love. He went out and got two belts. He tied my feet together with one, and with the other he kinda beat me. I was
in the spirit, I went along with it. But when he tried to penetrate me anally, I couldn't take it, it was too painful. I managed to convey to him verbally to quit it. He did stop, but not soon enough to suit me.

Then one time, he branded me. I still have a scar on my butt. He put a little wax initial thing on a hot plate and then stuck it on my ass when I was unaware.

*Ms. P:* My boyfriend and I saw a movie in which there was masochism. After that he wanted to gag me and tie me up. He was stoned. I was not. I was really shocked at his behavior. I was nervous and uptight. He literally tried to force me, after gagging me first. He snuck up behind me with a scarf. He was hurting me with it and I started getting upset. Then I realized it wasn't a joke. He grabbed me and shook me by my shoulders and brought out some ropes, and told me to relax, and that I would enjoy it. Then he started putting me down about my feelings about sex, and my inhibitedness. I started crying and struggling with him, got loose, and kicked him in the testicles, which forced him down on the couch. I ran out of the house. Next day he called and apologized, but that was the end of him.

As may be clear from some of the quotations cited, there was often insufficient probing by the interviewers to determine the exact nature of the unwanted sexual experience. This means that the number of clear-cut cases of forced intercourse (i.e., rapes) reported in answer to this question is likely to be a considerable underestimate (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Assault</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completed vaginal intercourse with force</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse with foreign object, with force</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted oral, anal, vaginal intercourse with foreign object, with force</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
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While it cannot be concluded from these data that pornography is causing the behavior described, I think one can conclude that at minimum it does have some effect. The most notable is that 10 percent of the women interviewed felt they had been personally victimized by pornography. Regarding the men's behavior, at the very least it appears that some attempt to use pornography to get women to do what they want.* It also seems likely that some pornography may have reinforced and legitimized these acts, including the assaultive behavior, in those men's minds. In some cases the actual idea of doing certain acts appears to have come from viewing pornography—as in the suggestion that a dog be used on a woman, and in some of the S & M proposals.

Millions of dollars were spent on the research conducted by the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, which came up with the false conclusion that pornography is harmless. Just the few questions cited here, included in a survey on another topic, are sufficient to refute their irresponsible conclusion.

In recent years several researchers have been exploring the effects of sexual arousal by "erotic" stimuli upon aggressive behavior. Seymour Feshbach and Neal Malamuth write:

The typical procedure is to expose some subjects to a sexually arousing stimulus—an erotic film or written passage—and then provide them with an opportunity to act aggressively against someone else, usually a confederate of the experimenter who makes a preset number of errors in a guessing game. For each error, the subject may administer an electric shock to the confederate that ranges in intensity from the barely perceptible to the quite strong. (Unknown to the subject the shock leads to the confederate are disconnected.) The average level of shock the subject administers over the series of error trials provides researchers with an index of the level of aggression.21

Some of this research shows that exposure to "erotic" stimuli (we don't know if they are pornographic or erotic) can facilitate aggressive behavior,22 while other research shows an inhibiting effect.23 Various theories have been developed to try to explain the discrepancies. Some studies have also attempted to determine whether or not "erotica" has a differential effect on aggression toward women and men.

* Donald Mosher's finding that 16 percent of a sample of 256 male college students had "shown a girl pornography, or taken a girl to a sexy movie to induce her to have intercourse" was noted earlier in this section: "Sex Callousness toward Women," op. cit., p. 318.
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According to Edward Donnerstein, "The general conclusion has been that no differential sex effects occur." Donnerstein goes on to point out a number of problems with this research:

First, there is strong evidence that prior or subsequent anger instigation is critically important in facilitating aggression following erotic exposure. Second, previous researchers have found that only under conditions of high sexual arousal [does] a facilitative effect on aggression seem to occur.

Donnerstein also emphasizes that even now, the kind of research that would be most relevant to our concerns as women—i.e., the effects of aggressive cues juxtaposed with "erotica"—is almost nonexistent. Except for the study by P. H. Tannenbaum described by Irene Diamond, the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography neglected this issue, as have subsequent researchers. Happily, Donnerstein is one of the exceptions. He used two neutral, two "erotic," and two "aggressive-erotic" films, each of four minutes' duration. The neutral films were of a talk-show interview, the "erotic" films "depicted a young couple in various stages of sexual intercourse." The aggressive-erotic films contained scenes in which an individual with a gun forces himself into the home of a woman and forces her into sexual intercourse.

Donnerstein reported that an important difference emerged, depending on whether the "victim" of aggression was male or female:

When angered subjects were paired with a male, the aggressive-erotic film produced no more aggression than exposure to the erotic film. Those subjects paired with a female, however, only displayed an increase in aggression after viewing the aggressive-erotic film. In fact, this increase occurred even if subjects were not angered, although the combination of anger and film exposure produced the highest level of aggressive behavior.

Donnerstein's explanation is that "the female's association with observed violence was an important contributor to the aggressive responses toward her." In other words, the male subjects associated the victimized woman in the film with the woman in the experiment, making her "an aggressive stimulus which could elicit aggressive re-
Donnerstein concludes that if his interpretation is correct, "it would be expected that films which depict violence against women, even without sexual content, could act as a stimulus for aggressive acts toward women." Later Donnerstein goes a step further. "There is ample evidence," he maintains, "that the observation of violent forms of media can facilitate aggressive responses, yet to assume that the depiction of sexual-aggression could not have a similar effect, particularly against females, would be misleading." "Misleading" is quite an understatement, judging from the data from my own study. It would be inconsistent and dangerous!

Bart and Jozsa describe in some detail the very important experiment done by Feshbach and Malamuth which demonstrates that "one exposure to violence in pornography can significantly influence erotic reactions to the portrayal of rape." Bart also quotes their interpretation of the fact that men who had read a mild S & M story adapted from Penthouse were more sexually aroused in response to a subsequent violent rape story than were others who had read a non-violent story. In explanation, Feshbach and Malamuth write: "It is as if men who had read about a woman's pleasure at being mistreated had then interpreted the victim's pain in the rape scene as a 'sign of sexual excitement.'" To me, a more likely interpretation is that if men can see women as masochistic—i.e., enjoying pain—this alleviates their consciences and disinhibits their misogynistic enjoyment of hurting women, or at the least, of conquering them.

I believe that Neal Malamuth and his colleagues are doing the most significant work on the relationship between pornography and violence. However, while recognizing that useful information does emerge from some of their questions to the women respondents, I am appalled by their insensitivity. Adding the violent rape story described earlier (see page 223), women students were asked whether they were likely to enjoy being victimized under the same circumstances described in the story, if they were assured no one would ever know. On the one hand, these questions are the exact equivalent of those asked of the male students in the study by Malamuth et al. On the other hand, I can well imagine what the reaction would be if Black people were asked if they'd like to be beaten up by white people if they were assured no one would know about it! Or imagine an average man's reaction to a question about whether he would enjoy another man forcefully sodomizing him. It is a reflection of how oppressed we are as women that such questions can still be asked and answered.

The answers? "Subjects revealed considerable fear of rape and a
clear belief that they personally would not enjoy being victimized” in the same or in different circumstances. Females as well as males, however, seemed to believe that over 25% of the female population would derive some pleasure from being victimized.”

How sad it is to learn that college women and men today are still not immune to this rape myth.

Another important finding reported by Feshbach and Malamuth is that after reading the rape story, “female subjects were most aroused when the rape victim was portrayed as experiencing an orgasm and no pain, males were most aroused when the victim experienced an orgasm and pain.” However, to simply report such findings without analyzing their meaning and implications seems irresponsible. For the same reason I am very critical of Nancy Friday's publication of women's masochistic fantasies in My Secret Garden. It is true that many women have masochistic fantasies and can be sexually aroused by pornography, even violent pornography, according to the study just cited. This does not make it harmless. It does not mean it is healthy. It does not mean that women's and men's responses to pornography are equatable. Nor does it mean that women like or want to be raped.

Rape and other masochistic female fantasies are a reflection of women's powerless role in society, the intense socialization they receive to accept that role, and their sexual repression.* To quote what I wrote in The Politics of Rape five years ago:

It cannot be overstressed that having voluntary fantasies of being raped, and wanting to be raped in actuality, are two entirely different things. First, people are in complete control of their fantasies, even if the fantasy involves a situation in which they are out of control. Second, a person is rarely likely to feel fear in a fantasy which she has constructed. But in a real rape or attempted rape situation, unlike the fantasy version, women are usually afraid and often terrified.

It is interesting to know that in some instances the sexual responses of males and females are similar. But this should not allow us to lose sight of the fact that outside of the laboratory, large numbers of males are not being raped, beaten up, or murdered by large numbers of females. Nor are masochistic women accosting unwilling men and

* In a study of women's fantasies during sexual intercourse, Barbara Hariton and Jerome Singer report that “older Catholic women, presumably reared in situations more focused on sexual repression and a traditional feminine role, relied somewhat more on submissive fantasies to enhance their sexual arousal.” See Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, Vol. 42, 1974, p. 321.
demanding to be raped. Violence is primarily a male problem in this and other patriarchal societies.* And even masochists who act out cannot, by definition, force their fantasies on an unwilling person. Masochists may be as sick as sadists, but they are not as dangerous to others!

In fairness to Neal Malamuth and his colleagues, I should clarify that they certainly are not suggesting that women want to be raped. They emphasize that there is not “a simple relationship between fantasies and sexual behavior,” 42 and that their research has been more focused on males. In another of their studies, twenty-nine male students were classified as sexually force-oriented or nonforce-oriented on the basis of their responses on a questionnaire.43 These students “were randomly assigned to be exposed to rape or mutually consenting versions of a slide show. All subjects were then exposed to the same audio description of a rape read by a female. They were later asked to create their own fantasies.” 44 Malamuth regarded the most significant finding to be that “those exposed to the rape version, irrespective of their sexual classification, created significantly more sexually violent fantasies than those exposed to the mutually-consenting version.” 45 He concluded that:

In keeping with the possibility that violent sexual fantasies may have undesirable effects is the consistent finding that sexual responsiveness to sexual violence is associated in college students with a callous attitude towards rape and rape victims and with a self reported possibility of raping.46

Gene Abel and his associates have undertaken interesting research on the sexual response of rapists and “nonrapists” (i.e., men not convicted of rape) to pornography. Their research seems at first glance to show a marked difference between men convicted of rape and those not convicted of rape. Abel et al. measured the erections of thirteen rapists and seven “nonrapists” during what they describe as “vivid, two-minute descriptions” of rape and nonrape sexual scenes.47 The vivid audiotape descriptions were presented in the following order: mutually enjoyable intercourse, rape, mutually enjoyable intercourse (a repeat of the earlier description), and rape (a repeat of the earlier description). The results: The average percentages of erection responses for the rapists were 60 percent, 69 percent, 65 percent, and 54 percent.

* There is a 9 to 1 ratio of male to female arrests for violent crimes in the United States. For a fuller discussion of the statistics and sources to substantiate the assertion that violence is primarily a male problem, see Diana E. H. Russell, “Fay Stender and the Politics of Murder,” Chrysalis, No. 9, 1979.
percent, respectively; and for the “nonrapists,” 62 percent, 17 percent, 60 percent, and 14 percent, respectively. While this does establish a considerable difference in the responses of the rapists and “nonrapists,” it is important to note that turn-ons of 17 percent and 14 percent to a story of rape on the part of the “nonrapists” is not insignificant, particularly as these same investigators consider that “excessive” sexual arousal to rape themes is a measure of the “proclivity to rape.” In addition, the rape incident described involved the use of a knife and slapping on the part of the rapist, and crying and screaming by the victim. Once again, one wonders if the amount of sexual arousal by the “nonrapists” would have increased had the story involved a woman with a “bad reputation” who was perceived as an exploitive tease. In addition, the research of D. Briddell et al. suggests that the responses of the “nonrapists” might have changed considerably had they believed they had drunk alcohol.

Briddell et al. designed an ingenious experiment to test the effects of alcohol and cognitive set on sexual arousal to the same audiotaped descriptions used by Abel et al. They found that alcohol did not significantly influence levels of sexual arousal. However, Subjects who believed they had consumed an alcoholic beverage evidenced significantly more arousal to the forcible rape recording and to the sadistic stimuli than subjects who believed that they had consumed a nonalcoholic beverage, regardless of the actual contents of the beverage.

Briddell et al. conclude that “these findings . . . suggest that normal heterosexual males who have been drinking (or believe they have been drinking) may exhibit sexual arousal patterns indistinguishable from those patterns reported for identified rapists.”

To recapitulate: It appears that a large percentage of the male population has a propensity to rape. Important inhibitors to the acting out of this propensity are, first of all, social controls—e.g., the possibility of being caught and apprehended. Social norms that define rape as unacceptable behavior constitute a second source of inhibition. When social norms do not so define rape—as during times of war, or in certain subcultures (for example, the Hell’s Angels), or where group rape is seen as an acceptable way to punish deviant women—one would anticipate a greater percentage of men willing to rape. The third and crucial factor is conscience. Some men clearly abhor the idea of rape because they see it as immoral and brutal behavior.
For consumers of the violent pornography so prevalent today, men's inhibitions against rape may be undermined on all three levels. In Bart and Jozsa's "Dirty Books, Dirty Films, and Dirty Data," the results of Don Smith's content analysis of 428 "adults only" paperbacks published between 1968 and 1974 are reported in some detail. The most relevant points are:

1. The amount of rape—one fifth of all the sex episodes involved completed rape; 52
2. The fact that the number of rapes increased with each year's output of newly published books; 53
3. That 6 percent of the episodes involved consisted of incestuous rape; 54
4. The focus on the victim's fear and terror, which became transformed by the rape into sexual passion (over 97 percent of the rapes resulted in orgasm for the victims, in three-quarters of these instances, multiple orgasm was experienced); 55
5. The fact that less than 3 percent of the rapists experience any negative consequences, and many are rewarded. 56

Furthermore, Neal Malamuth and Barry Spinner also report that "By 1977 an individual examining the two best-selling erotica magazines (sic) will have been exposed in about 10% of the cartoons and close to 5% of the pictorial stimuli to sexual violence." 57 Later they point out that "the information conveyed in much of the sexually violent materials is that women are basically masochistic and in need of male domination." 58

First, such pornography makes it seem that a lot of ordinary men commit rape, and that they often suffer no remorse but instead gain sexual, ego, and other gratifications. Hence, men may begin to believe that rape is not a breach of norms. Second, it can make rape appear easy to accomplish and easy to get away with—thus possibly affecting inhibitions due to fears of being caught. Third, and most important, it can inhibit the conscience. If a man can persuade himself that women really like being raped, that they don't really mean "no," then what reason is there for guilt?

In this context it is disturbing that even such important and sometimes sensitive research as that done by Neal Malamuth, Seymour Feshbach, and Yoram Jaffe is marred by such thinking. For example, these researchers refer to a depiction of rape that results in orgasm for the woman as a "benign rape." 59 They argue that "if a pleasurable outcome for the victim is a highly potent factor affecting subjects'
sexual arousal, then it would seem inappropriate to consider fantasy rape stories as necessarily reflecting hostile aggression..." This is a very frightening perspective for researchers to have. We must remember that prior to the "pleasurable outcome" the victim was violently attacked and terrified. Malamuth, Heim, and Feshbach describe the rape-story stimulus as follows:

The rape versions of the passage began with a description of the woman fighting the advances of the male and trying unsuccessfully to get free. Interspersed throughout the passage were depictions of her being "forcefully crushed," "terrified," "paralyzed," and "forced." Her reactions consisted of "screaming," "panic," "paralysis," and a "frenzy of tears." How can this be interpreted as a benign or a nonhostile fantasy? The effect of the orgasm at the end of the story is likely to free the rapist (or the person identifying with him) from guilt, to show how powerful he is and how animal-like women are underneath their "pure facades."

Another approach to the question of the effects of pornography is simply to point out that the imitative models that have been established after decades of research apply to pornography too. As Victor Cline writes with some exasperation, after citing several studies in which children and adults imitate "sexual" behaviors after watching another person perform such activities, "Are the laws of learning somehow repealed or inoperative here but not in the rest of life?"

In 1974 Cline, a psychologist, edited a book on pornography entitled *Where Do You Draw the Line?* He deserves to be commended for his strenuous and informed critique of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography. However, it is as difficult to sift through his biases to find a valid argument or a well-described piece of research as it is to read and evaluate the ten volumes of the commission reports. Whereas the commission's reasoning was that sex is good, sex and pornography are synonymous, therefore pornography is harmless, Cline's reasoning is that sex is bad, sex and pornography are synonymous, therefore pornography is bad. In addition, he is homophobic.

Aside from the application of imitative or observational learning to viewers of pornography, Cline points out that laws of learning referred to as "classical" and "instrumental conditioning" are also highly relevant. For example, he cites work by S. Rachman of the Institute of Psychiatry, Maudsley Hospital, London, who has dem-
onstrated repeatedly that sexual fetishism can be created in the laboratory, using sexually explicit pictures. Rachman exposed male subjects to colored photographic slides of nude females in sexually arousing positions along with a picture of female boots. Eventually, through simple conditioning, the male subjects were sexually aroused at merely seeing only the picture of the female boot.\textsuperscript{64}

The point is not that such a fetish is necessarily harmful. Ethical considerations constrain researchers from creating more socially harmful sexual behavior in the laboratory. However, a simple application of these same laws of conditioning suggests that when men are sexually aroused by watching pornographic movies or pictures which depict rape, they can come to associate rape with sexual arousal.

Even if men are not sexually excited during the movie, subsequent masturbation to movie images which have included rape reinforces the association, constituting what McGuire and his colleagues refer to as "masturbatory conditioning."\textsuperscript{65} The pleasurable experience of masturbation can thereby make the image as well as the act of rape more sexually exciting.

The movie \textit{A Clockwork Orange} dramatized the use of aversive conditioning by the association of electric shocks with pictures of rape. These techniques have been used more frequently to try to get homosexuals to become heterosexual than to change the behavior of rapists. After citing many such studies, Cline concludes that "this literature suggests that erotic materials have great potential power to assist in the shift of sexual orientation when used under certain prescribed conditions. The possibility of deliberate or accidental real-life conditionings in the reverse direction has to be given due consideration here."\textsuperscript{66} It seems obvious that if either erotica or pornography can be effectively used to elicit behavioral changes of any kind in a doctor's office, its potential to effect change in other circumstances is thereby also proven.

More recently, Hans Eysenck and D. K. B. Nias have made similar arguments in their book \textit{Sex, Violence and the Media}. After reviewing Rachman's research cited above, they suggest that "the theory of conditioning, combined with the evidence from the above studies, indicates that it might be possible to create a rapist or sadist in the laboratory by presenting scenes of rape or sadism immediately prior to normally arousing scenes."\textsuperscript{67}
After an extensive review of the literature on TV violence as well as pornography, Eysenck and Nias conclude that:

It seems clear to us that there are certain areas of sexual behavior which should be completely excluded from the list of permitted activities [for depiction on film]; sex involving children is one such area, rape and other forms of sexual violence, vividly and explicitly presented, are others. Sex involving animals would probably also come into this category. . . . Torture, bondage and sado-masochistic acts involving sex may also be mentioned here. Such films may perhaps be shown on psychiatric prescription to patients addicted to such perversions, but they are not safe for public showing.68

Another justification offered by Eysenck and Nias for their proposal of limited censorship is as follows:

Where the context is hostile to women, as most pornographic films are, we feel that such films should fall under the category of “incitement to violence towards minority groups”—even though women are not a minority group. Nevertheless such films do constitute a clear case of incitement to maltreat women, downgrade them to a lower status, regard them as mere sex objects, and elevate male machismo to a superior position in the scale of values. Evaluative conditioning, modeling, and desensitization all point to the same conclusion, namely that such presentations have effects on men’s attitudes which are detrimental to women; in fairness to more than one half of the population, such incitements should be proscribed.69

Marvin Wolfgang, a well-known sociologist and one of the authors of The Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, appears to have changed his assessment of pornography’s effects. Wolfgang has recently said that “the weight of the evidence (now) suggests that the portrayal of violence tends to encourage the use of physical aggression among people who are exposed to it.”70 At the rally following the march organized by Women Against Pornography in New York, October 20, 1979, Lynn Campbell called for a new government commission which would fund nonsexist research on the effects of pornography, and which could draw up workable proposals for dealing with this serious and growing problem.71 I believe that a new Feminist Commission would help to further substantiate
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and reaffirm Wolfgang’s totally revised assessment, and thereby help to support our campaign against pornography.*

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