

Pornography and Porn Culture

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Porn, or pornography, is defined as sexually explicit imagery such as pictures and videos for adult entertainment. They are created to stimulate sexual excitement and arouse viewers.

Where Is Porn Accessed?

Porn is commonly accessed online, where anyone with an internet-connecting device has access to hundreds of thousands of sexually explicit videos. This can be direct through porn websites such as Pornhub, or through social media such as Twitter and TikTok. Although most social media platforms have banned users from uploading pornographic imagery, it remains an ongoing issue which social media giants are trying to tackle. Many users of social media platforms are under 18, despite UK law stating that under 18's cannot legally watch porn.

What Are Different Types Of Porn?

Modern day porn is aimed at a huge variety of people, as such, there are many different types of porn freely available to attracts as many viewers as possible. Many of these are considered particularly unethical due to harmful stereotyping. Examples of porn types are:

- ❖ Gay/lesbian
- ❖ Interracial
- ❖ BDSM
- ❖ Incest
- ❖ MILF
- ❖ Popular with Women
- ❖ Hentai /Cartoon
- ❖ Black /Ebony
- ❖ Teen
- ❖ Teacher/ Student
- ❖ Pain

Who Watches Porn?

In 2019, Pornhub had approximately 115 million visits a day) and BitDefender (2016) found:

- ❖ Children under 10 accounted for 22% of all porn viewers under 18
- ❖ 1 in 10 visitors to porn websites each day are under 10 years old

A common myth is that women don't watch porn, however a Marie Claire survey of 3000 women in 2015, found that 1 in 3 women watch porn at least once a week.

Pornography, Sexual Violence and Sexual Offences

In a piece of research with male undergraduates (Garcia, 1984) participants reported that around 50-60% of the pornography they had seen showed physical violence towards the woman. With the expansion of the internet, social media and mobile technology, the modern figure of violence in pornography is now reported to be around 90-97% (Long, 2012; Dines, 2011).

A keyword search was conducted on the 30th of August 2018 of PornHub.com; keywords searched included 'crying', 'hurt' and 'pain', to explore how accessible free porn videos were that contained women who were in clear physical pain and might normalise sex with women who are crying in pain. The results from the brief keyword search resulted in 1129 videos of women 'crying' in pain during sex acts, 983 videos of women being described as 'hurt' during sex acts and 2364 videos of women described as 'in pain' and 'in extreme pain' during sex acts. All words featured in the titles of the videos. It is important to note that this was a brief search of only one free porn website conducted at one moment in time, but that there was clearly a very large collection of videos depicting women who were crying from physical pain during sex, therefore sexualising and normalising painful and abusive sex.

Pornography conveys compelling messages about what sex is, how it should be performed, how a woman or girl should respond to sex or sexual advances and what men and boys should expect and want from sex. In a study conducted by NSPCC in 2013, young people of 15 years old were found to be imitating or requesting sex acts that they had seen in porn. Indeed, many pornographic materials watched by adults and children exploited the 'rape loophole'. The 'rape loophole' was a method in which film makers were legally allowed to depict rape and sexual assault in their films up until 2013 when Rape Crisis England and Wales put pressure on the government to make it illegal.

In a study by Rape Crisis (2013) as part of their campaign, it was found that of the top ten Google search results for the search term 'free porn', half of the websites hosted free 'rape pornography'. Their study also found that on the top 50 UK porn websites, 78% advertise content simulating rape of girls under 18 years old under keywords such as 'schoolgirl rape' and 'young teen rape'.

Further to this, PornHub.com reported that one of their most common search terms in 2017 was 'stepdaughter porn' and 'stepsister porn'. This not only sent messages to established and potential perpetrators that incest, child abuse, rape and forced sex is acceptable, exciting and enjoyed by women but also sent strong messages to women and girls, who may feel obliged or pressured to perform a sexual act that they have seen in pornography.

These issues could be central to prevention strategies. For example, if women and girls are consistently framed as sexual objects in widely consumed media and pornographic materials, then abuse, sexual assaults, rapes and harassment may be perceived as 'the norm' for the way women and girls will be treated in society, in their relationships and in sexual intercourse.

Relevantly, the niche, dangerous practice of 'breath play' has been normalised by pornography, with websites and publications like Teen Vogue offering 'breath play' tips. Breath play is strangulation. Dr Catherine White, Director of St Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre, explained that one in five sexual assault victims is strangled by their partner. The use of "rough sex" defences in court has become so common that We Can't Consent To This was set up to document deaths and campaign for change. The issue has become so prevalent, Harriet Harman MP said:

Men are now, literally, getting away with murder by using the “rough sex” defence

Differing Viewpoints of Pornography

In modern day society, there are generally 4 main different viewpoints of porn, which come from different sections of society and often come from and are associated with wider belief systems.

1. Pornography Is Sinful

For example, ‘porn is sinful’ comes from some religious viewpoints. This is due to it being strongly linked to masturbation, which isn’t allowed in many Abrahamic religions due to the belief that sexual contact should only be for procreation. Other religious viewpoints around porn and masturbation believe that you should practice self-control, or that it is detrimental to spiritual practice.

2. Pornography Is Empowering

The view that porn is ‘empowering’ comes from a sex-positive and liberal feminist argument. Many argue that porn actors and actresses enjoy doing their job and have the power to make money from this; something women throughout history and in the patriarchy have struggled and seldom done. It is also argued that porn allows sexual autonomy over one’s body and sexual desire, something that women have been reprimanded for as a result of the patriarchal system and values. They argue women should have complete freedom to enjoy sex and pleasure without being shamed for it.

3. Pornography Is Exploitative

A counter argument however is that porn is ‘exploitative’. This is a viewpoint that’s generated from a mixture of groups in society such as parts of the political left-wing, and radical and second wave feminists. This is due to the number of women in porn who have been forced into the industry, sustain many physical injuries, and the degradation and violence against women that is now featured in 97% of all online porn in the modern day.

Many politically left-wing people understand this, in theoretical terms, as an unsafe and exploitative work environment where not only are the workers (porn actresses) usually not paid much (the producers, websites etc. receive disproportionately more of the income generated), but it is also unsafe and unable to legally protect workers due to the nature of the environment, rape, physical injury, the impact on actors and actresses mental health. This is due to the content that is being created in which viewers want to see. With such high rates of violent porn being accessed every day, this is where porn websites and companies make their profit.

4. Pornography Is An Individual and Private Choice

Finally, and perhaps one of the most common beliefs around porn is that it should be up to the individual to access the sexual imagery he/she wishes in a private sphere.

Impacts of Porn on Individuals

- ❖ Porn can negatively impact ability to become aroused in real-life intimate situations
- ❖ Around one third of men aged 18-40 who seek help from their GP about impotence have pornography induced erectile dysfunction

- ❖ Porn is known to be addictive; Approximately 31% of men and 14% of women who consume pornography admit to struggling with addiction. Typically, those suffering with addiction withdraw from partnered sex as they become more and more dependent on pornography
- ❖ Young men who watch violent porn (where the female actor is directed to show pleasure) are more likely to believe women and girls lie about rape
- ❖ Girls exposed to porn at a young age are more likely to accept rape myths
- ❖ People who use porn regularly struggle to reach orgasm during masturbation without porn
- ❖ Many people feel pressure to perform things that porn depicts even if they don't enjoy it

Research findings from Corne et al. (1992) found that women and girls who were exposed to pornography from an early age were more likely to accept common rape myths and even experience sexual fantasies where they were raped. Layden (2010) found that young women who watched pornography depicting rape and sexual violence would recommend a prison sentence half the length of young women who had not watched the material.

In a study conducted in Japan in 1994, Ohbuchi and colleagues found that young men who watched porn depicting rape and forced sexual acts where the actresses are directed to show pleasure are significantly more likely to believe that high percentages of rape cases are invented by women and girls in society. The same study also reported that the young men who had watched this type of pornography were significantly more likely to believe that women and girls enjoy being raped.

Bates (2018) reported that when interviewed, schoolboys had said that they thought it was normal for girls to cry during sex and foreplay, which Bates attributed to the prevalence of porn now containing women and girls crying in pain (Long, 2012). It is arguable that exposure to porn of any kind that repeatedly presents women and girls as subordinate, insatiable and 'enjoying' forced sex acts will desensitise and distort a person's perception of healthy consensual sex.

Societal and Cultural Impacts of Porn

Pornography is now deemed one of the most consumed form of media in the world (Taylor, 2020). The global culture that this has created has impacts that are both societal-wide norms and cultures, as well as individuals. As pornography and porn culture is often based upon both sexualisation and objectification of women, there is evidence to show links between all three and victim blaming. Pornography is linked to victim blaming because it provides validation of the hyper-sexualisation and objectification of women and girls (Katyachild et al., 1985) and the trivialisation, minimisation and glorification of rape and sexual assault (Layden, 2010).

It has been argued that the porn industry is normalising rape and sexual assault, with 78% of the top 50 UK porn websites advertise videos that simulate the rape and sexual assault of girls under 18. A meta-analysis was conducted by Paolucci et al. (2000) to explore the impact that watching pornography has on committing sexual violence and accepting rape myths that blame women for their rape and sexual assaults. The meta-analysis of 46 studies between 1962-1995 with over 12,000 participants showed that there was a 22% increase in men committing sexual violence and a 31% increase in the acceptance of rape myths by men (Paolucci et al., 2000) and that rape myth acceptance has been repeatedly positively correlated to all forms of porn (violent or non-violent) due to the degradation and dehumanisation of women contained within the materials (Van Maren, 2014; Long, 2012; Dines, 2011).

Porn Culture

Porn culture or 'pornification' is defined as 'the prevalence or normalisation of sexual themes and explicit sexual imagery in popular or mainstream culture'. Examples of this can be seen in advertisements, music videos, drama, fashion and even fast food.

On prime-time television shows in the 90s, Cope-Farrar and Kunkel (2011) found:

- ❖ Sexual imagery or sex-related talk occurred 8-10 times per hour
- ❖ 1 in 4 conversations between lead characters were about sex

Porn Culture, Sexualisation and Objectification

Sexualisation is to make something sexual in character or quality. Objectification is the action of degrading someone to the status of a mere object. Both sexualisation and objectification are witnessed in the mainstream media and part of porn culture. Therefore, it is relevant to consider the way the media portray women, sex and sexual violence.

Eval and Finnerty (2009) found:

- ❖ 16% of all sexual intercourse depicted on TV involved teenagers or young adults.
- ❖ Attractive female characters were more likely to be victims of sexual crimes in television shows than male characters.
- ❖ Whilst HBO included the most shows with sexual intercourse, few differences across channels were observed in the presentation of sexual intercourse. Television shows and advertisements were largely presenting sex and relationships in the same way: women and girls are frequent victims of sexual assault, whereas men are rarely victims of sexual assaults or rapes; sex is framed as positive and casual, but negative depictions of sex are presented as having very serious and long-lasting consequences for the female victims.

In recent television, internationally popular 'Game of Thrones' was scrutinised for the staggering number of rapes of women and girls in the episodes across all series, with 50 rapes in the TV series and over 200 rapes in the original book series. When questioned about this by The New York Times in 2014, author George R.R. Martin argued that sexual violence was a common part of history and war and that he was reflecting an everyday occurrence. However, critics called the significant amount of sexual violence against women and girls gratuitous, unacceptable and disgusting (The New York Times, 2014).

Films also criticised include *Gone Girl* (2014) and *Red Sparrow* (2018), which were criticised for sensationalising the rape of women and for perpetuating the rape myth that women lie about rape and domestic violence for revenge or attention. In May 2019, newspapers reported that audiences had walked out of screenings of *The Nightingale* (2019) due to the inclusion of three violent rape scenes of the female character within 20 minutes. Reviews described the film as 'vacuum-packed with a non-stop supply of rapes, deaths and beatings' (The Independent, 2019).

Porn Culture and Ethnicity

It has also been argued that the media depiction of gender roles of women and girls often intersect with the depiction of ethnicity and race, which causes further problems for women of colour who are not only subject to the misogyny of sexualisation and objectification, but also the racism related to their ethnicity or cultures.

997) found:

- ❖ The sexual exploitation of African American women and girls in slavery has led to media stereotypes of Black women as sexual aggressors and sexual savages (Thomas et al., 2004)
- ❖ Asian women and girls were generally portrayed in the media as sexually submissive, childlike, and exotic (Root, 1995)
- ❖ Women and girls of all ethnicities and cultures that belonged to lower social classes were portrayed as gross, overly sexed, untamed, crude, and deserving of sexual exploitation and aggression (Pharr, 1988; Smith, 2008).

Whilst this may result in seemingly benign popular adverts containing, for example, African women dressed like carnal, sexual animals in a jungle or chained naked in a metal cage, the reality is that women of colour are depicted as non-human animals, savages or submissive slaves. In 2009, famous Black actress and model Amber Rose was depicted as an animal in a cage for a photoshoot for Complex Magazine. Naomi Campbell and Grace Jones are among other famous Black women who have been repeatedly depicted as savages or animals in fashion and advertisement. The media reinforces the powerful historic white, misogynistic power over 'exotic' women and girls of colour who are hyper-sexualised objects of sex to be used or tamed by the dominant class: white, privileged men.

Film Director and Photographer, Jean Paul Goude is behind many famous images of Black women. His book called 'Jungle Fever' (1982) and much of his most influential work depicts Black women as sexual savages, usually naked in cages, in jungles and animalistic poses. In the book, he speaks candidly about Black women he dated and married, comparing their body parts and characters to animals and savages.

The Impacts of Porn and Porn Culture

Impacts of Porn Culture on Individuals

Arguably, one of the most devastating effects of buying into the representation by the mass media of women as sexual objects is that women can learn that their self-worth lies within sex and remaining constantly sexually available to men and boys (Garcia, 1999; APA, 2007b). This can lead to women and girls judging and blaming themselves using common rape myths for why they were raped or not even realise that their sexual encounter was non-consensual, forced or exploitative (Ullman, 2011; Eaton, 2019).

Fairchild and Rudman (2008) have shown that young women who were subjected to sexual harassment and objectification in the street by unknown men had a variety of coping mechanisms but those young women who responded to sexual harassment passively or by blaming themselves were much more likely to self-objectify.

As a result of porn culture and society becoming ever more sexualised, the age at which young girls are beginning to self-sexualise is reducing.

Societal and Cultural Impacts of Porn Culture

The media play a key role in communicating information, cultural norms, attitudes and approaches not only to sexual violence as a topic, but also to the prevention of sexual violence. Porn culture and the positioning of women as sexual objects has been shown to reduce concern for women who are subjected to sexual offences; they are dehumanised, dehumanised and therefore perceived as less worthy of moral concern. If the concern is reduced, the prevention strategies may be misguided or

even blame women and girls for being subjected to sexual violence. Porn culture also promotes racist stereotypes of Black and Asian people and fetishizes young and underage girls.

Loughnan et al. (2013) found that participants presented with a case study of an objectified, sexualised woman who had been raped were less likely to feel moral concern for her and she was more likely to be held responsible than women who were not objectified or over-sexualised.

Long (2012) argues that all these media representations of women and girls reduce women to an object for sex, holes to be filled or a body to be used. This has direct links to the victim blaming of women and girls who have been subjected to rape or sexual assault because it reinforces the notion that they are insatiable sex objects for men and boys to conquer and use. This systemic desensitisation of the sexual purpose of women means that rape is often seen as an act of sex, not as an act of violence. It perpetuates rape myths such as 'women who are forced to have sex, enjoy it really' (Payne, Lonsway and Fitzgerald, 1999) which features as an item in the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale.

For more information about pornography, porn culture or victim blaming, please visit www.victimfocus.org.uk or contact Jessica on jessica@victimfocus.org.uk