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Pornography and Rape: A Causal Model

Diana E. H. Russell¹

In order for rape to occur, a man must not only be predisposed to rape, but his internal and social inhibitions against acting out rape desires must be undermined. My theory in a nutshell is that pornography (1) predisposes some men to want to rape women or intensifies the predisposition in other men already so predisposed; (2) undermines some men's internal inhibitions against acting out their rape desires; and (3) undermines some men's social inhibitions against the acting out. Some of the research substantiating this theory is presented and discussed, and suggestions are made for further research.

KEY WORDS: pornography; rape; violence; erotica; theory; cause.

INTRODUCTION

The Final Report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography has been ridiculed and attacked for concluding that pornography causes violence against women (1986). These attacks are being made by people who, for the most part, have no idea how to evaluate the research on this question. Indeed, I have received evidence that a Washington, D.C.-based public relations firm called Gray and Company was hired by the Media Coalition—a group that includes the American Booksellers Association, the Association of American Publishers, the Council of Periodical Distributors, the International Periodical Distributors Association, and the National Coalition of College Stores—to develop a strategy to encourage the public to dismiss as nonsense the Commission's conclusion that pornography causes harm to women (MacKinnon, personal communication, July 27, 1986).

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More specifically, Steve Johnson, the representative of Gray and Company, advised the Media Coalition that "a successful effort to relieve publishers, distributors and retailers from harrassment [sic] will involve communicating several broad themes with which most Americans agree. They include the following: (1) There is no factual or scientific basis for the exaggerated and unfounded allegations that sexually oriented content in contemporary media is in any way a cause of violent or criminal behavior" (June 5, 1986).

With more than twice the budget of the entire Pornography Commission at its disposal for the first year of its campaign alone, the Media Coalition appears to have successfully bought the public opinion that is permitted expression in the mass media of this nation.

Contrary to the stance of the Media Coalition, my reading of the research conducted on pornography in the past decade is that for the most part it strongly supports the causative link between pornography and violence against women. In this article I will present my theoretical model of the causative role of pornography, and I will describe some of the research that I believe substantiates this theory. But first I wish to point out that when addressing the question of whether or not pornography causes violence and sexual assault, many people fail to acknowledge that in many instances the actual *making* of pornography involves or even requires violence and sexual assault. Testimony by women and men involved in such activity provides examples of this (Public Hearings, 1983; Attorney General's Commission, 1986). For example, a man who said he had participated in over a hundred pornography movies testified at the Commission hearings in Los Angeles as follows: "I, myself, have been on a couple of sets where the young ladies have been forced to do even anal sex scenes with a guy which [sic] is rather large and I have seen them crying in pain" (1986, p. 773).

The following information was contained in a letter that was sent to the Commission on Pornography: "A mother and father in South Oklahoma City forced their four daughters, ages ten to seventeen, to engage in family sex while pornography pictures were being filmed" (1986, p. 780).

A witness testified at the Los Angeles hearings about "how women and young girls were tortured and suffered permanent physical injuries to answer publisher demands for photographs depicting sadomasochistic abuse. When the torturer/photographer inquired of the publisher as to the types of depictions that would sell, the torturer/photographer was instructed to get similar existing publications and use the depiction therein for instruction. The torturer/photographer followed the publisher's instructions, tortured women and girls accordingly, and then sold the photographs to the publisher. The photographs were included in magazines sold nationally in pornographic outlets" (1986, pp. 787-88).

Nor should it be assumed that violence occurs only in the making of violent pornography. For example, although many people would classify the movie *Deep Throat* as nonviolent pornography because it does not portray rape and violence, we now know from Linda Marchiano's two books (*Ordeal*, 1980, and *Out of Bondage*, 1986), as well as her testimony, that this film is in fact a documentary of her rape from beginning to end. Many people, including some of the best researchers on pornography in this country, ignore the violence of the pornographers (for example, see Malamuth and Donnerstein, 1984). More generally, MacKinnon points out the frequently forgotten fact that "before pornography became the pornographer's speech it was somebody's life" (1987, p. 179). Testimony presented at the hearings held on the anti-pornography civil rights ordinance in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1983 provides powerful evidence for the truth of this statement (Public Hearings, 1983).

MEN'S PROPENSITY TO RAPE AND TO SEXUALLY ABUSE CHILDREN

It is important to know the state of mind and proclivities of those to whom pornography is geared. Research indicates that in our current milieu 25 to 30% of the male college students studied at universities in the United States and Canada report that there is some likelihood that they would rape a woman if they could get away with it. [As recently as 1984 Malamuth reported that an average of about 35% of male students in several studies indicated some likelihood of raping a woman (1984, p. 22). However, he says this figure has decreased to 25 to 30% since then for reasons he does not know (personal communication, July 1986).] In the first of these studies conducted at the University of California at Los Angeles, the word *rape* was not used; instead, an account of rape was read to the male subjects, of whom 53% said there was some likelihood that they would behave in the same fashion as the man described in the story if they could be sure of getting away with it (Malamuth *et al.*, 1980). Without this assurance, only 17% said they might emulate the rapist's behavior. It is helpful to know exactly what behavior these students said they might enact.

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. (Malamuth *et al.*, 1980, p. 124).

In another study, 356 male students were asked: "If you could be assured that no one would know and that you could in no way be punished for engaging in the following acts, how likely, if at all, would you be to commit such acts?" (Briere *et al.*, 1981, p. 4). Among the sexual acts listed were the two of interest to these researchers: "forcing a female to do something she really didn't want to do" and "rape" (Briere *et al.*, 1981, p. 5). *Sixty percent of the sample indicated that under the right circumstances, there was some likelihood that they would rape, use force, or do both.*

In a study of high school males, 50% of those interviewed believed it acceptable "for a guy to hold a girl down and force her to have sexual intercourse in instances such as when 'she gets him sexually excited' or 'she says she's going to have sex with him and then changes her mind'" (Goodchilds and Zellman, 1984).

Some people dismiss the findings from these studies as "merely attitudinal." But this is not the case. Malamuth has found that male subjects' self-reported likelihood of raping is correlated with physiological measures of sexual arousal by rape depictions. Obviously, erections cannot be considered attitudes. More specifically, the male students who say they might rape a woman if they could get away with it are significantly more likely than other male students to be sexually aroused by portrayals of rape. Indeed, these men were more sexually aroused by depictions of rape than by mutually consenting depictions. And when asked if they would find committing a rape sexually arousing, they said yes (Donnerstein, 1983, p. 7). They were also more likely than the other male subjects to admit to having used actual physical force to obtain sex with a woman. These latter data were self-reported, but because they refer to actual behavior they too cannot be dismissed as merely attitudinal.

Looking at sexual arousal data alone (as measured by penile tumescence)—not its correlation with self-reported likelihood to rape—Malamuth reports that

1. About 10% of the population of male students are sexually aroused by "very extreme violence" with "a great deal of blood and gore" that "has very little of the sexual element" (1985, p. 95).
2. About 20 to 30% show substantial sexual arousal by depictions of rape in which the woman never shows signs of arousal, only abhorrence (1985, p. 95).
3. About 50 to 60% show some degree of sexual arousal by a rape depiction in which the victim is portrayed as becoming sexually aroused at the end (personal communication, August 18, 1986).

Given these findings, it is hardly surprising that after reviewing a whole series of related experiments, Neil Malamuth concluded that “the overall pattern of the data is . . . consistent with contentions that many men have a proclivity to rape” (1981b, p. 139).

With regard to men’s proclivity to abuse children sexually, Malamuth found that from 10 to 15% of male students reported some likelihood of sexually abusing a child if they could be assured of getting away with it (personal communication, July 1986). And Kevin Howells points out that there is considerable agreement among researchers that “adults sexually involved with children vary from technically pedophilic persons to those of a normal orientation” (1981, p. 77). Indeed, Howells maintains that “there is good reason to think . . . that such persons [pedophiles] form a minority in the total population of people who become sexually involved with children” (1981, p. 62).

Kurt Freund’s research demonstrates that “children have some arousal value even for normal males” (1981, p. 162). (By “normal” Freund and Howells mean nonpedophilic in these passages.) More specifically, Freund found that nonpedophilic heterosexual males “respond even to very young girls” and that boys similarly have some arousal value for nonpedophilic homosexual males (1981, p. 162). “These findings,” Howells concludes, “would seem to imply, as Freund suggests, that normal males show sufficient penile response to children to allow the possibility that children might become ‘surrogate’ partners when an adult partner is not available.” Furthermore, “Freund’s studies show that the female child elicits stronger reactions than the male child in normals and might be regarded as a more likely surrogate” (1981, p. 80).

The studies reviewed here suggest that at this time in the history of our culture, a substantial percentage of the male population has some desire or proclivity to rape women and to sexually abuse children. Feminists are among the optimists who believe that this proclivity is largely a consequence of social and cultural forces, not biological ones. And, of course, having a *desire* to behave in a certain way is not the same as actually *behaving* in that way, particularly in the case of antisocial behavior. Nevertheless, it is helpful to have this kind of baseline information on the desires and predispositions of males, who are, after all, the chief consumers of pornography.

What, then, is the content of the pornography men consume in this country?

THE DEFINITION AND CONTENT OF PORNOGRAPHY

Like many feminists, I consider it important to distinguish between pornography and erotica. Feminist philosopher Helen Longino’s definition of

pornography is the best one I have come across. It is *sexually explicit material that represents or describes degrading or abusive sexual behavior so as to endorse and/or recommend the behavior as described* (Longino, 1980, p. 44). By *erotica* I mean *sexual representations that are premised on equality* (Leidholdt and Russell, 1989).

Psychologists Charlene Senn and Lorraine Radtke have found this distinction significant and meaningful to the women subjects in their experimental research. After slides had been categorized as violent pornography, nonviolent pornography, or erotica, Senn and Radtke found that the violent and nonviolent pornographic images had a negative effect on the mood states of their women subjects, whereas the erotic images had a positive effect (1986, pp. 15 and 16). The violent images had a greater negative impact than the nonviolent pornographic images (these differences were significant at $p < 0.05$; p. 16). This shows that our conceptual distinction between pornography and erotica is both meaningful and operationalizable.

Don Smith did a content analysis of 428 "adults only" paperbacks published between 1968 and 1974. His sample was limited to books that were readily accessible to the general American public, excluding paperbacks that are usually available only in so-called adult bookstores (1976). He reported the following findings:

1. One-fifth of all the sex episodes involved completed rape (p. 5).
2. The number of rapes increased with each year's output of newly published books (p. 12).
3. Of the sex episodes, 6% involved incestuous rape (p. 10).
4. The focus in the rape scenes was almost always on the victim's fear and terror which became transformed by the rape into sexual passion. Over 97% of the rapes portrayed in these books resulted in orgasm for the victims. In three-quarters of these rapes, multiple orgasm occurred (p. 10).
5. Less than 3% of the rapists experienced any negative consequences, and many were rewarded (p. 11).

A few years later, Neil Malamuth and Barry Spinner undertook a content analysis to ascertain the amount of sexual violence in cartoons and pictorials in *Penthouse* and *Playboy* magazines from June 1973 through December 1977 (1980). They found that

1. By 1977, about 5% of the pictorials and 10% of the cartoons were rated as sexually violent.
2. Sexual violence in pictorials (but not in cartoons) increased significantly over the 5-year period, "both in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the total number of pictorials."
3. *Penthouse* contained over twice the percentage of sexually violent cartoons as *Playboy* (13 vs 6%).

In another study of 1760 covers of heterosexual magazines published between 1971 and 1980, Park Dietz and B. Evans reported that bondage and confinement themes were evident in 17% (1982).

Finally, in a more recent content analysis of videos in Vancouver, Canada, T. S. Palys found that 19% of all the scenes coded in a sample of 150 sexually oriented home videos involved aggression, and 13% involved sexual aggression (1986, pp. 26, 27). (A "scene" was defined as "a thematically uninterrupted sequence of activity in a given physical context" (1986, p. 25). Only scenes involving sex, aggression, or sexual aggression were coded.) Of all the sexually aggressive scenes in the "adult" videos, 46% involved bondage or confinement; 23%, slapping, hitting, spanking, or pulling hair; 22%, rape; 18%, sexual harassment; 4%, sadomasochism; and 3%, sexual mutilation. In comparison, 38% of all the sexually aggressive scenes in the triple-X videos involved bondage or confinement; 33%, slapping, hitting, spanking, or pulling hair; 31%, rape; 17%, sexual harassment; 14%, sadomasochism; and 3%, sexual mutilation (1986, p. 31).

While Palys's analysis focuses largely on the unexpected finding that "adult" videos "have a significantly greater absolute number of depictions of sexual aggression per movie than [have] triplex-X videos," the more relevant point here is that violence against women in both types of pornographic videos is quite common, and that rape is one of the more prevalent forms of sexual violence depicted. Moreover, I would expect a comparable content analysis of videos in the United States to reveal more rape and other sexual violence than was found in this Canadian study, since the Canadian government has played a more active role than the US government in trying to control pornography.

In addition, Palys reported that about 60% of the aggressors in the videos were portrayed in a positive fashion as good people with positive attributes. And in 73% of the codable cases they suffered no negative consequences for their aggressive behavior (1986, p. 32). Interestingly, Palys did not find an increase in the amount of sexual violence portrayed in these videos over time. However, as Palys points out, it wasn't clear whether this was because some proprietors had become sensitized to issues of sexual violence as a result of protests by Canadian women or wanted to avoid protests by selecting less violent fare in recent years (1986, p. 34).

In a comparison of the contents of sexual and nonsexual media violence, Neil Malamuth (1986) points out the following important differences between them:

1. The victim is usually female in pornography and male in nonsexual portrayals of violence on television (p. 5).
2. "Victims of nonsexual aggression are usually shown as outraged by their experience and intent on avoiding victimization. They, and at times the perpetrators of the aggression, suffer from the violence" (p. 6). In contrast, "when sexual violence is portrayed, there is frequently the suggestion that, despite initial resistance, the victim secretly desired the abusive treatment and eventually derived pleasure from it" (p. 6).

3. Unlike nonsexual violence, pornography is designed to arouse men sexually. Such arousal “might result in subliminal conditioning and cognitive changes in the consumer by associating physical pleasure with violence. Therefore, even sexual aggression depicted negatively may have harmful effects because of the sexual arousal induced by the explicitness of the depiction” (pp. 6-7).

In summary, we see that from 25 to 60% of male students admit to some likelihood of raping or forcing sex acts on a woman if they could get away with it. And we see that pornography has become increasingly violent over the years—at least in the nonvideo media—and that it presents an extremely distorted view of rape and sexuality.

A THEORY ABOUT THE CAUSATIVE ROLE OF PORNOGRAPHY

Sociologist David Finkelhor has developed a very useful multicausal theory to explain the occurrence of child sexual abuse (1984). According to Finkelhor’s model, in order for child sexual abuse to occur, four conditions have to be met. First, someone has to *want* to abuse a child sexually. Second, this person’s internal inhibitions against acting out this desire have to be undermined. Third, this person’s social inhibitions against acting out this desire (e.g., fear of being caught and punished) have to be undermined. Fourth, the would-be perpetrator has to undermine or overcome his or her chosen victim’s capacity to avoid or resist the sexual abuse.

According to my theory, these conditions also have to be met in order for rape, battery, and other forms of sexual assault of adult women to occur (Russell, 1984). Although my theory can be applied to other forms of sexual abuse and violence against women besides rape, this formulation of it will focus on rape because most of the research relevant to my theory has been on rape.

In *Sexual Exploitation* (1984) I suggest many factors that may predispose a large number of men in the United States to want to rape or assault women sexually. Some discussed in this book are (1) biological factors, (2) childhood experiences of sexual abuse, (3) male sex-role socialization, (4) exposure to mass media that encourage rape (e.g., woman-slashing films), and (5) exposure to pornography. Here I will discuss only the role of pornography.

Although women have been known to rape both men and women, and have even more often been known to sexually abuse children, males are by far the predominant perpetrators of sexual assault as well as the biggest consumers of pornography (see, for example, Finkelhor, 1984; Russell, 1984). Hence, my theory will focus on males.

A diagrammatic presentation of this theory appears in Fig. 1. As previously noted, in order for rape to occur, a man not only must be predisposed to rape, but his internal and social inhibitions against acting out his rape desires must be undermined. My theory, in a nutshell, is that pornography (1) predisposes some men to want to rape women or intensifies the predisposition in other men already so predisposed, (2) undermines some men's internal inhibitions against acting out their desire to rape, and (3) undermines some men's social inhibitions against acting out their desire to rape.

Most discussions about the causative role of pornography in rape focus on whether or not pornography can create a desire to rape in someone who previously had no such desire. If a person is not convinced that this is possible, he or she frequently concludes that the causative role of pornography has not been established. I disagree with this very restricted interpretation of what the term cause means. According to Webster's dictionary, *cause* refers to "anything producing an effect or result." Hence, *anything that transforms a desire to rape into rape behavior should be considered a cause of rape.*

To illustrate this point, it may be helpful to present a hypothetical example. Let us say that Mr. A had been aware of a desire to rape women for some time but had never done so because he considered rape to be cruel and immoral. Let us suppose Mr. A then goes to see a typical pornographic film in which women are depicted as getting turned on by being raped, and that Mr. A becomes sexually aroused by the rape scenes. Then let us suppose that the next time Mr. A is on a date, he feels a desire to rape the woman. He remembers the movie portrayal of women enjoying being raped. He reasons that if women secretly enjoy rape, it can't be cruel or immoral as he had previously thought. So he rapes his date. Is this a case of pornography causing rape?

If cause means "anything producing an effect or result," then the answer is yes. The belief that women like to be raped would have successfully undermined Mr. A's inhibitions against acting out his desire.

Since the research on men's proclivity to rape has already been presented, the evidence for the causal connection between pornography and rape on the right side of Fig. 1 will be discussed in the next section in the order listed. I will note when the research findings described apply to violent pornography and when to pornography that appears to the viewer to be non-violent.

Earlier, I noted that research indicates that from 25 to 60% of the male students tested say there is some likelihood that they would rape or force sex acts on a woman if they knew they could get away with it. High as these figures are, it is likely that self-assessed *likelihood* of raping or sexually assaulting women is more inhibited by moral compunctions than is self-reported *desire* to rape or sexually assault.

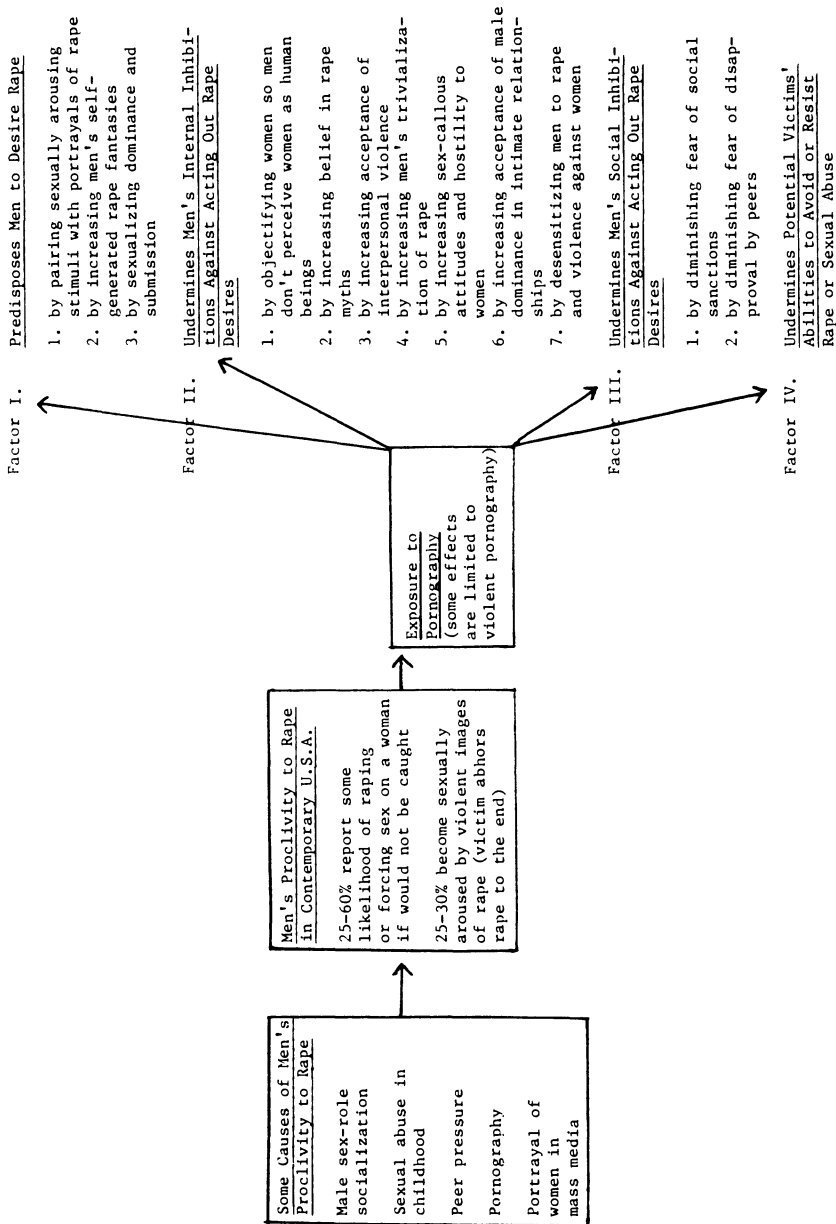


Fig. 1. Theoretical model of pornography as a cause of rape.

The Role of Pornography in Predisposing Some Men to Want to Rape

A simple application of the laws of social learning (e.g., classical conditioning, instrumental conditioning, and social modeling), about which there is now considerable consensus among psychologists, suggests that viewers of pornography can develop arousal responses to depictions of rape, murder, child sexual abuse, or other assaultive behavior. Researcher S. Rachman of the Institute of Psychiatry, Maudsley Hospital, London, has demonstrated that male subjects can learn to become sexually aroused by seeing a picture of a woman's boot after repeatedly seeing women's boots in association with sexually arousing slides of nude females (Russell, 1984, p. 131). This suggests that the laws of learning that operated in the acquisition of the boot fetish in this case can also teach men who were not previously aroused by depictions of rape to become so after repeatedly associating arousing portrayals of female nudity with rape.

Even for men who are not sexually excited during movie portrayals of rape, masturbation subsequent to the movie reinforces the association, contributing to what McGuire and his colleagues refer to as "masturbatory conditioning" (Cline 1974, p. 210). The pleasurable experience of orgasm—an expected and planned-for-activity in many pornography parlors—is an exceptionally potent reinforcer.

Further evidence that exposure to pornography can create in men a predisposition to rape where none existed before is provided by an experiment conducted by Malamuth. Malamuth classified 29 male students as sexually force-oriented or non-force-oriented on the basis of their responses to a questionnaire (1981a). These students were then randomly assigned to view either a rape version or a mutually consenting version of a slide-audio presentation. The presentation was based on a rape story and pictorials in a recent popular pornographic magazine.

The man in this story finds an attractive woman on a deserted road. When he approaches her, she faints with fear. In the rape version, the man ties her up and forcibly undresses her. The accompanying narrative is as follows:

You take her into the car. Though this experience is new to you, there is a temptation too powerful to resist. When she awakens, you tell her she had better do exactly as you say or she'll be sorry. With terrified eyes she agrees. She is undressed and she is willing to succumb to whatever you want. You kiss her and she returns the kiss.

Portrayal of the man and women in sexual acts follows; intercourse is implied rather than explicit.

In the mutually consenting version, there is no tying up or threats; instead, on her awakening in the car, the man tells the woman that "she is safe and that no one will do her any harm. She seems to like you and you begin

to kiss.” The rest of the story is identical to the rape version (Malamuth, 1981a, p. 38).

All subjects were then exposed to the same audio description of a rape read by a female. This rape involved threats with a knife, beatings, and physical restraint. The victim was portrayed as pleading, crying, screaming, and fighting against the rapist (Abel *et al.*, 1977, p. 898). Malamuth reports that measures of penile tumescence as well as self-reported arousal “indicated that relatively high levels of sexual arousal were generated by all the experimental stimuli” (1981a, p. 33).

After the 29 male students had been exposed to the rape audio tape, they were asked to try to reach as high a level of sexual arousal as possible by fantasizing about whatever they wanted but without any direct stimulation of the penis (1981a, p. 40). Self-reported sexual arousal during the fantasy period indicated that those students who had been exposed to the rape version of the first scenario shown created more violent sexual fantasies than those exposed to the mutually consenting version *irrespective of whether they had been classified as force-oriented or non-force-oriented* (1981a, p. 33).

Since the rape version of the scenario is typical of what is seen in many pornographic magazines, the results of this experiment suggest that these magazines are likely to generate rape fantasies even in previously non-force-oriented consumers. And, as Edna Einsiedel points out (1986, p. 60), “Current evidence suggests a high correlation between deviant fantasies and deviant behaviors. . . . Some treatment methods are also predicated on the link between fantasies and behavior by attempting to alter fantasy patterns in order to change the deviant behaviors.”

It is important to note that this first factor in my theoretical model assumes that pornography can induce a desire to rape women in men who had no such previous desire, and that it can increase or intensify the desire to rape in men who already had this desire. This assumption is supported by Malamuth’s experiment, since both the previously non-force-oriented male subjects and the force-oriented ones became aroused by self-generated rape fantasies after viewing violent pornography.

A rapist interviewed by Timothy Beneke (1982) provides a dramatic example of how pornography can generate rape fantasies in someone who didn’t have them before. This is how he put it:

I went to a porno bookstore, put a quarter in a slot, and saw this porn movie. It was just a guy coming up from behind a girl and attacking her and raping her. That’s when I started having rape fantasies. When I seen that movie, it was like somebody lit a fuse from my childhood on up. . . . I just went for it, went out and raped. (pp. 73-74)

People who are committed to the idea that pornography cannot predispose men to rape might respond to this kind of evidence by maintaining that this man must have had a predisposition to rape without being aware

of it. This may be true. But the experimental data cited earlier indicate that at least 60% of male students—not the most violent subpopulation in this culture—admit that there is some likelihood that they would rape or sexually assault a woman if they could be assured of getting away with it. This suggests that *most* men have at least some predisposition to rape women. We cannot know if the rapist quoted by Beneke became *more* predisposed or *developed* a predisposition. But if pornography can intensify the desire to rape in the 60% of the male population that already admits it, this is obviously an extremely serious state of affairs. Being totally preoccupied with whether or not pornography can predispose a man who was not previously disposed to rape a woman ignores this point. Furthermore, there is no good scientific reason to assume that people cannot develop new ideas or desires from the media. Would billions of dollars be spent on advertising or propaganda if it had no effect?

Because so many people resist the idea that a desire to rape may develop as a result of seeing pornography, let us focus for a moment on other behavior.

There is abundant testimonial evidence that at least some men decide they would like to try certain sex acts on women after seeing pornography portraying the same acts being performed on women. For example, one of the men who answered Shere Hite's question on pornography wrote, "It's great for me. *It gives me new ideas to try* and see, and it's always sexually exciting" (1981, p. 780). Of course, there's nothing wrong with getting new ideas to try, nor trying them out, as long as they aren't actions that subordinate or violate other human beings. Unfortunately, many of the behaviors modeled in pornography do.

The following three quotes of the respondents in a probability sample of 930 San Francisco women suggest that pornography may have played a role in the men's desires to be violent or to participate in bestiality (Russell, 1980).

Respondent 43: 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.

Respondent 44: 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.

Respondent 51: 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 it would be fun to mentally and physically torture a woman.

When someone engages in a particularly unusual act that they had previously encountered in pornography, it becomes even more plausible that the

decision to do so was inspired by the pornography. For example, one woman testified to the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography about the pornography-related death of her son.

My son, Troy Daniel Dunaway, was murdered on August 6, 1981, by the greed and avarice of the publishers of *Hustler* magazine. My son read the article "Orgasm of Death," set up the sexual experiment depicted therein, followed the explicit instructions of the article, and ended up dead. He would still be alive today were he not enticed and incited into this action by *Hustler* magazine's "How to Do" August 1981 article, an article which was found at his feet and which directly caused his death. (1986, p. 797).

When children do what they see in pornography, it is a little harder than in the case of adults to attribute their behavior entirely to their predispositions. The mother of two girls testified to the Commission on Pornography:

[My daughters] also had an experience with an eleven year old boy neighbor . . . Porno pictures that [he] had were shown to the girls and to the other children on the block. Later that day, [he] invited [my daughters] into his house to play video games, but then tried to imitate the sex acts in the photos with [my] eleven year old [daughter] as his partner; [my other daughter] witnessed the incident. (1986, p. 785).

Psychologist Jennings Bryant also testified to the Pornography Commission about a survey he had conducted involving 600 telephone interviews with males and females who were evenly divided into three age groups: students in junior high school, students in high school, and adults aged 19 to 39 years (1985, p. 133). Respondents were asked if "exposure to X-rated materials had made them want to try anything they saw" (1985, p. 140). Two thirds of the males reported "wanting to try some of the behavior depicted" (1985, p. 140). Bryant reports that the desire to imitate what is seen in pornography "progressively increases as age of respondents decreases" (1985, p. 140). Among the junior high school students, 72% of the males reported that "they wanted to try some sexual experiment or sexual behavior that they had seen in their initial exposure to X-rated material" (1985, p. 140).

In trying to ascertain if imitation had occurred, the respondents were asked: "Did you actually experiment with or try any of the behaviors depicted" within a few days of seeing the materials (1985, p. 140)? A quarter of the males answered that they had. A number of adults answered no but said that some years later they had. But only imitations within a few days of seeing the materials were counted (1985, p. 140). Male high school students were the most likely to report imitating what they had seen in pornography: 31% of them reported experimenting with the behaviors portrayed (1985, p. 141).

Unfortunately, no information is available on the behaviors that were imitated. How many rapes were there, for example? Imitating pornography is only cause for concern if the behavior imitated is violent or abusive, or if the behavior is not wanted by the recipient. Despite the unavailability of this information, this study is valuable in showing how common it is for males

to *want* to imitate what they see in pornography, and for revealing that many *do* imitate it within a few days of viewing it. Furthermore, given the degrading and violent content of much pornography, as well as the youthfulness and presumable influenceability of many of the viewers, how likely is it that these males only imitated or wished to imitate the nonsexist, nondegrading, and nonviolent sexual behavior?

Almost all the research on pornography to date has been conducted on men and women who were at least 18 years old. But as Malamuth points out, there is “a research basis for expecting that children would be more susceptible to the influences of mass media, including violent pornography if they are exposed to it,” than adults are (1985, p. 107). Bryant’s telephone interviews show that very large numbers of children now have access to both hard-core and soft-core materials. For example:

1. The average age at which male respondents saw their first issue of *Playboy* or a similar magazine was 11 years (1985, p. 135).
2. All of the high school age males surveyed reported having read or looked at *Playboy*, *Playgirl*, or some other soft-core magazine (1985, p. 134).
3. High school males reported having seen an average of 16.1 issues, and junior high males said they had seen an average of 2.5 issues.
4. In spite of being legally underage, junior high students reported having seen an average of 16.3 “unedited sexy R-rated films” (1985, p. 135). (Although R-rated movies are not usually considered pornographic, many of them meet my definition of pornography cited earlier.)
5. The average age of first exposure to sexually oriented R-rated films for all respondents was 12.5 years (1985, p. 135).
6. Nearly 70% of the junior high students surveyed reported that they had seen their first R-rated film before they were 13 (1985, p. 135).
7. The vast majority of all the respondents reported exposure to hard-core, X-rated, sexually explicit material (1985, p. 135). Furthermore, “a larger proportion of high school students had seen X-rated films than any other age group, including adults”: 84%, with the average age of first exposure being 16 years, 11 months (1985, p. 136).

Clearly, more research is needed on the effects of pornography on young male viewers, particularly in view of the fact that recent studies suggest that “over 50 percent of various categories of paraphilias [sex offenders] had developed their deviant arousal patterns prior to age 18” (Einsiedel, 1986, p. 53). Einsiedel further observes that “it is clear that the age-of-first-exposure variable and the nature of that exposure needs to be examined more carefully. There is also evidence that the longer the duration of the paraphilia, the more significant the association with use of pornography” (Einsiedel, 1986, p. 53).

The first two items listed under Factor I in my theoretical model (men becoming predisposed to rape women by the pairing of sexually arousing

stimuli with portrayals of rape, and men becoming more sexually aroused by self-generated rape fantasies after viewing pornography) both relate to the viewing of *violent* pornography. But if this model is correct, nonviolent pornography can also predispose men to want to act violently. Sexualizing dominance and submission is the third way in which pornography may predispose some men to want to rape women.

Like Canadian psychologists Senn and Radtke, James Check—also a Canadian psychologist—conducted an experiment in which he distinguished between degrading nonviolent pornography and erotica and compared their effects (Check and Guloien, in press). Check's experiment is rare not only for making this distinction but also for including nonstudents as subjects. Four hundred thirty-six Toronto residents and college students were exposed to one of three types of material over three viewing sessions, or to no material. These materials were constructed from existing commercially available videos and validated by measuring subjects' perceptions of them (Einsiedel, 1986, p. 92). Their contents were:

1. "Sexual violence—scenes of sexual intercourse which included a woman strapped to a table and being penetrated by a large plastic penis.
2. "Sexually explicit and degrading—scenes of sexual activity which included a man masturbating into a woman's face while sitting on top of her.
3. "Sexually explicit—sex activities leading up to intercourse between a man and woman" (Einsiedel, 1986, p. 92).

The viewing of both the nonviolent dehumanizing and the violent materials resulted in reports of significantly greater likelihood of rape and likelihood of engaging in coercive sex acts by male subjects than was the case for the control group. [However, "those exposed to the 'erotica' stimulus did not differ significantly from either the control or both pornography conditions" (Einsiedel, 1986, p. 93). But this is not the most salient comparison for the point being made here.] (Einsiedel, 1986, p. 93). In addition, both the nonviolent dehumanizing and the violent materials elicited stronger feelings of depression, hostility, and anxiety than the nonviolent nondehumanizing material. This finding relates to the broader issue of harm resulting from pornography, rather than to the specific issue of rape.

Although self-reported likelihood of raping is not a proper measure of a *desire* to rape, since it also indicates that the internal inhibitions against acting out rape desires have been undermined to some extent, it does offer some tentative support for this third element of Factor I, sexualizing dominance and submission. In addition, it makes theoretical sense that sexualizing dominance and submission would likely generalize to include eroticizing rape for some men. But further research is needed on this issue. And more researchers need to follow the lead of the Canadian researchers in going beyond the distinction between violent and nonviolent pornography and distinguishing also between nonviolent degrading pornography and erotica.

In summary, Malamuth has shown that men who didn't previously find rape sexually arousing generate such fantasies after being exposed to a typical example of violent pornography. Bryant found that many men and boys say they want to imitate sexual acts they have seen in pornography, and admit to having done so. And we have argued that the laws of social learning apply to pornography, just as they apply to other media. As Donnerstein testified at the hearings in Minneapolis, "If you assume that your child can learn from Sesame Street how to count one, two, three, four, five, believe me, they can learn how to pick up a gun" (Donnerstein, 1983, p. 11). Presumably, adults can learn equally well how to rape, beat, sexually abuse, and degrade women. However, as already stressed, learning how to do something is not the same as doing it.

I believe that pornography doesn't only contribute to the number of men who would like to rape and otherwise abuse women. If my theory is correct, it also plays a role in undermining their internal inhibitions against acting on these desires.

The Role of Pornography in Undermining Internal Inhibitions Against Acting Out the Desire to Rape

The first way in which pornography undermines some men's internal inhibitions against acting out their desires to rape women is by objectifying women. Feminists have been emphasizing the role of objectification in the occurrence of rape for years (e.g., Medea and Thompson, 1974; Russell, 1975). Some men in this culture literally do not see women as human beings but as body parts. They are tits, cunts, and asses. "It was difficult for me to admit that I was dealing with a human being when I was talking to a woman," one rapist reported, "because, if you read men's magazines, you hear about your stereo, your car, your chick" (Russell, 1975, pp. 249-50). After this rapist had hit his victim several times in the face, she stopped resisting and begged, "All right, just don't hurt me." "When she said that," he reported, "all of a sudden it came into my head, 'My God, this is a human being!' I came to my senses and saw that I was hurting this person." And another rapist said of his victim, "I wanted this beautiful fine thing and I got it" (Russell, 1975, p. 245).

Dehumanizing oppressed groups or enemy nations in times of war is an important mechanism for facilitating brutal behavior toward members of those groups. However, the dehumanization of women that occurs in pornography is often not recognized, because of its sexual guise and its pervasiveness. And it is important to note that the objectification of women is as common in nonviolent pornography as it is in violent pornography.

If men believe that women enjoy rape and find it sexually exciting, this belief likely undermines the inhibitions of some men who would like to rape women. Sociologists Diana Scully and Martha Burt have reported that rapists are particularly apt to believe rape myths (Scully, 1986; Burt, 1980). For example, Scully found that 65% of the rapists in her study believed that "women cause their own rape by the way they act and the clothes they wear"; and 69% agreed that "most men accused of rape are really innocent." However, as Scully points out, it isn't possible to know if their beliefs preceded their behavior or constitute an attempt to rationalize it. Hence, findings from the experimental data are more telling for our purposes than these interviews with rapists.

Since the myth that women enjoy rape is a widely held one, the argument that consumers of pornography realize that such portrayals are false is totally unconvincing (Russell, 1975; Brownmiller, 1975; Burt, 1980). Indeed, several studies have shown that portrayals of women enjoying rape and other kinds of sexual violence can lead to increased acceptance of rape myths in both men and women. For example, in an experiment conducted by Neil Malamuth and James Check, one group of college students saw a pornographic depiction in which a woman was portrayed as sexually aroused by sexual violence, and a second group was exposed to control materials. Subsequently, all subjects were shown a second rape portrayal. The students who had been exposed to the pornographic depiction of rape were significantly more likely than the students in the control group (1) to perceive the second rape victim as suffering less trauma, (2) to believe that she actually enjoyed it, (3) to believe that women in general enjoy rape and forced sexual acts (Check and Malamuth, 1985, p. 419).

Other examples of the rape myths that men are more apt to believe after viewing pornography in these studies are as follows: "A woman who goes to the home or the apartment of a man on their first date implies that she is willing to have sex;" "Any healthy woman can successfully resist a rapist if she really wants to;" "Many women have an unconscious wish to be raped, and may then unconsciously set up a situation in which they are likely to be attacked;" "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" (Briere *et al.*, 1985, p. 400). According to Donnerstein, "After only 10 minutes of exposure to aggressive pornography, particularly material in which women are shown being aggressed against, you find male subjects are much more willing to accept these particular myths" (1983, p. 6). These men are also more inclined to believe that 25% of the women they know would enjoy being raped (1983, p. 6).

The internal inhibitions against acting out the desire to rape can also be undermined if men consider male violence against women to be acceptable behavior. Studies have shown that viewing portrayals of sexual violence as having positive consequences increases male subjects' acceptance of violence

against women. Examples of some of these items include "Being roughed up is sexually stimulating to many women;" "Sometimes the only way a man can get a cold woman turned on is to use force;" "Many times a woman will pretend she doesn't want to have intercourse because she doesn't want to seem loose, but she's really hoping the man will force her" (Briere *et al.*, 1985, p. 401).

Malamuth and Check conducted a particularly interesting experiment because the movies shown were part of the regular campus film program. Students were randomly assigned to view either a feature-length film that portrayed violence against women as being justifiable and having positive consequences (*Swept Away* or *The Getaway*) or a film without sexual violence. The experiment showed that exposure to the sexually violent movies increased the male subjects' acceptance of interpersonal violence against women (1981). (This effect did not occur with the female subjects.) These effects were measured several days after the films had been seen.

Malamuth suggests several processes "by which media sexual violence might lead to attitudes that are more accepting of violence against women" (1986, p. 4). Some of these processes also probably facilitate the undermining of pornography consumers' internal inhibitions against acting out rape desires.

1. "Labeling sexual violence more as a sexual rather than a violent act."
2. "Adding to perceptions that sexual aggression is normative and culturally acceptable."
3. "Changing attributions of responsibility to place more blame on the victim."
4. "Elevating the positive value of sexual aggression by associating it with sexual pleasure and a sense of conquest."
5. "Reducing negative emotional reactions to sexually aggressive acts" (1986, p. 5).

According to Donnerstein, in most studies "subjects have been exposed to only a few minutes of pornographic material" (1985, p. 341). In contrast, Dolf Zillman and Jennings Bryant have studied the effects of what they refer to as "massive exposure" to pornography (1984). (In fact, it was not that massive: 4 hours and 48 minutes over a period of 6 weeks.) These researchers are also unusual in their focus on nonviolent pornography and in their use of a sample drawn from a nonstudent adult population.

Subjects in the massive exposure condition saw 36 nonviolent pornographic films, 6 per session per week; subjects in the intermediate condition saw 18 such movies, 3 per session per week. Subjects in the control group saw 36 nonpornographic movies. Various measures were taken after 1 week, 2 weeks, and 3 weeks of exposure. In the third week the subjects believed they were participating in an American Bar Association study in which they were asked to recommend the prison term they thought most fair in the case of a rape of a female hitchhiker.

Zillman and Bryant (1985) found that

1. “Heavy exposure to common nonviolent pornography trivialized rape as a criminal offense” (p. 117). Sexual aggression and abuse was perceived as causing less suffering for the victims in cases such as a male having sexual intercourse with a 12-year-old girl (p. 132).

2. “Males’ sexual callousness toward women was significantly enhanced” (p. 117). For example, there was an increased acceptance of statements such as “A woman doesn’t mean ‘no’ until she slaps you”; “A man should find them, fool them, fuck them, and forget them”; and “If they are old enough to bleed, they are old enough to butcher.” Judging by these items, it is hard to distinguish sexual callousness from a general hostility to women.

3. The acceptance of male dominance in intimate relationships was greatly increased (p. 121), and the notion that women are or ought to be equal in intimate relationships was more likely to be abandoned (p. 122). Support of the women’s liberation movement also sharply declined (p. 134).

4. An appetite for stronger material was fostered, presumably, Zillman suggests, “because familiar material becomes unexciting as a result of habituation” (p. 127). Hence, “consumers graduate from common to less common forms of pornography,” that is, to more violent and even more degrading materials (p. 127).

All the effects mentioned here—both separately and together—are likely to contribute to undermining some men’s inhibitions against acting out their desires to rape.

It may be remembered that Malamuth and his colleagues find that from 25 to 30% of male students admit that there is some likelihood that they would rape a woman if they could be assured of getting away with it. According to Donnerstein, after exposure to sexually violent images, particularly sexually violent images depicting women enjoying rape, up to 57% of male subjects indicate some likelihood that they would commit a rape if assured they would not be caught (1983, p. 7). This means that *as a result of one brief exposure to pornography, the number of men who are willing to consider rape as a plausible act for them to commit actually doubles.*

In an experiment specifically designed to study desensitization, Linz, Donnerstein, and Penrod showed 10 hours of R-rated or X-rated movies over a period of 5 days to male subjects (Donnerstein and Linz, 1985, p. 34A). Some students saw X-rated movies depicting sexual assault; others saw X-rated movies depicting only consenting sex; and a third group saw R-rated sexually violent movies—for example, *I Spit on Your Grave*, *Toolbox Murders*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Donnerstein describes *Toolbox Murders* as follows: There is an erotic bathtub scene in which a woman massages herself. A beautiful song is played. Then a psychotic killer enters with a nail gun. The music stops. He chases the woman around the room, then shoots her through the stomach with the nail gun. She falls across a chair. The song comes back on as he puts the nail gun to her forehead and blows her brains

out (1983). According to Donnerstein, many young males become sexually aroused by this movie (1983, p. 10).

R-rated films are made for audiences of 15 to 18 years old, but the subjects in this experiment were all at least 18 years old and had been pre-selected to make sure that they weren't psychotic, hostile, or anxious. As Donnerstein and Linz point out, "It has always been suggested by critics of media violence research that only those who are *already* predisposed toward violence are influenced by exposure to media violence. In this study, all those individuals have already been eliminated" (1985, p. 34F).

Donnerstein and Linz described the impact of the R-rated movies on their subjects as follows: "Initially, after the first day of viewing, the men rated themselves as significantly above the norm for depression, anxiety, and annoyance on a mood adjective checklist. After each subsequent day of viewing, these scores dropped until, on the fourth day of viewing, the males' levels of anxiety, depression, and annoyance were indistinguishable from baseline norms" (1985, p. 34F).

By the fifth day, the subjects rated the movies as less graphic and less gory and estimated fewer violent or offensive scenes than after the first day of viewing. They also rated the films as significantly less debasing and degrading to women, more humorous, and more enjoyable, and reported a greater willingness to see this type of film again (1985, p. 34F). However, their sexual arousal by this material did *not* decrease over this five-day period (1983, p. 10).

On the last day, the subjects went to a law school where they saw a documentary reenactment of a real rape trial. A control group of subjects who had never seen the films also participated in this part of the experiment. Subjects who had seen the R-rated movies (1) rated the rape victim as significantly more worthless, (2) rated her injury as significantly less severe, and (3) assigned greater blame to her for being raped. In contrast, these effects were not observed for the X-rated nonviolent films. (Why Donnerstein finds no effects for nonviolent pornographic movies while Zillman reports many significant effects is not known.) However, the results were much the same for the violent X-rated films, despite the fact that the R-rated material was "much more graphically violent" (Donnerstein, 1985, pp. 12-13). (In their written testimony to the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, Donnerstein and Linz failed to even mention the effects of the violent X-rated films (1985). And Donnerstein gave this topic only a cursory mention in his spoken testimony to the Commission. This is particularly odd since, by his definition, the R-rated movies don't constitute pornography and he was testifying to a commission that was evaluating pornography.)

In summary, I have presented a small fraction of the research evidence for eight different effects of pornography, all of which likely contribute to the undermining of some men's internal inhibitions against acting out rape

desires. It is not intended as a comprehensive list. Some of the research reviewed here has focused on violent pornography and some on nonviolent pornography.

The rapist interviewed by Timothy Beneke was cited earlier because of his claim that it was only after viewing a rape scene in a pornographic movie that he started having rape fantasies. This man's account also provides a dramatic example of how pornography may undermine a man's internal inhibitions against becoming a rapist. This is how he put it: "The movie was just like a big picture stand with words on it saying go out and do it, everybody's doin' it, even the movies" (1982, p. 74).

The Role of Pornography in Undermining Some Men's Social Inhibitions Against Acting Out Their Desire to Rape

A man may want to rape a woman *and* his internal inhibitions against rape may be undermined by his belief that women really like being raped or that they deserve it (i.e., by his belief in rape myths or his hostility to women). But he may still not act out his desire to rape because of his *social* inhibitions. Fear of being caught and convicted for the crime provides the most obvious example of a social inhibition. Here are two men's responses to Shere Hite's question on whether they had ever wanted to rape a woman:

I have often thought about it, fantasized about it. I might like it because of having a feeling of power over a woman. But I never actually wanted to through *fear of being caught and publicly ruined*. (Emphasis added)

I have never raped a woman, but have at times felt a desire to—for the struggle and final victory. I'm a person, though, who always thinks before he acts, and *the consequences wouldn't be worth it. Besides I don't want to be known as a pervert*. (Emphasis added. 1981, p. 715)

In one of his early experiments, Malamuth and his colleagues, Haber and Feshbach, reported that after reading the account of a violent stranger rape, 17% of their male student subjects admitted that there was some likelihood that they might behave in a similar fashion in the same circumstances (1980). However, 53% of the same male students said there was some likelihood that they might act as the rapist did *if they could be sure of getting away with it*. The difference between 17 and 53% reveals the significant role that can be played by social inhibitions against acting out rape desires. My hypothesis is that pornography also plays a role in undermining some men's social inhibitions against acting out their desire to rape.

In his content analysis of 150 pornographic home videos, Palys investigated "whether aggressive perpetrators ever received any negative consequences for their aggressive activity—if charges were laid, or the person felt personal trauma, or had some form of 'just deserts'" (1986, p. 32). The an-

swer was no in 73% of the cases in which a clear-cut answer was ascertainable. As previously mentioned, Don Smith found that fewer than 3% of the rapists portrayed in the 428 pornographic books he analyzed experienced any negative consequences as a result of their behavior (1976). Indeed, many of them were rewarded. The common portrayal in pornography of rape as easy to get away with likely contributes to the undermining of some men's social inhibitions against the acting out of rape desires.

Fear of disapproval by one's peers is another social inhibition that may be undermined by pornography. For example, Zillman found that "massive" exposure to nonviolent pornography produced overestimates by the subjects of uncommon sexual practices, such as anal intercourse, group sexual activities, sadomasochism, and bestiality (1985, p. 118). Rape is portrayed as a very common male practice in much violent pornography, and the actors themselves may serve as a kind of pseudo-peer group. Further research is needed to evaluate this possibility.

In general, I hypothesize the following effects of viewing violent pornography—particularly "massive" amounts: (1) Viewers' estimates of the percentage of other men who have raped women would likely increase, because rape would seem a more normal male activity; (2) viewers would likely consider rape a much easier crime to execute than before; (3) viewers would be less likely to believe that rape victims would report their rapes to the police; and (4) viewers would be more likely to anticipate that rapists would not be prosecuted or convicted in those cases that are reported. Since we already know that pornography results in men trivializing rape, I'd also anticipate consumers becoming less disapproving of others who rape; therefore, they would likely expect less disapproval from others if they decide to rape. I hope that future researchers will test these hypotheses.

The Role of Pornography in Undermining Potential Victims' Abilities to Avoid or Resist Rape

Once the first three conditions of my theoretical model have been met—a man not only wants to rape a woman but is willing to do so because his inhibitions, both internal and social, have been undermined—he may use pornography to try to weaken his victim's resistance or to get her to do what he wants her to do. Obviously, this step isn't necessary for rape to occur, and it is more likely to apply to rape by intimates than rape by strangers.

Most rape victims are not shown pornography in the course of being raped, although the testimony of some prostitutes reveals that this is quite a common experience for them when they are raped (Leidholdt and Russell, 1989). Pornography is more often used to try to *persuade* a woman or child to engage in certain acts, to legitimize the acts, and to undermine resistance, refusal, or disclosure. Here are some examples:

I was sexually abused by my foster father from the time I was seven until I was thirteen. He had stacks and stacks of *Playboys*. He would take me to his bedroom or his workshop, show me the pictures, and say, "This is what big girls do. If you want to be a big girl, you have to do this, but you can never tell anybody." Then I would have to pose like the woman in the pictures. I also remember being shown a *Playboy* cartoon of a man having sex with a child. (Attorney General's Commission, 1986, p. 783)

He encouraged me by showing me pornographic magazines which they keep in the bathroom and told me it was not wrong because they were doing it in the magazines and that made it O.K. He told me all fathers do it to their daughters and said even pastors do it to their daughters. The magazines were to help me learn more about sex. (Attorney General's Commission, 1986, p. 786)

And here is the statement of an adult woman about her husband.

Once we saw an X-rated film that showed anal intercourse. After that he insisted that I try anal intercourse. I agreed to do so, trying to be the available, willing creature that I thought I was supposed to be. I found the experience very painful, and I told him so. But he kept insisting that we try it again and again (Attorney General's Commission, 1986, p. 778).

Another woman described her husband's use of pornography as follows: He told me if I loved him I would do this. And that, as I could see from the things that he read me in the magazines initially, a lot of times women didn't like it. But if I tried it enough I would probably learn to like it. (Public Hearings, 1983, p. 44)

In summary: a significant amount of research supports my theory of the causative role of pornography in rape. However, much of the research undertaken to date does not fit within its framework. For example, Malamuth's self-reported likelihood-of-*raping* construct does not permit one to differentiate between a man's desire to rape and the undermining of his internal inhibitions against acting out this desire. Some of the findings from this research will be described in the next section. I hope that in future more research will be guided by the theoretical distinctions required by my model.

FURTHER EMPIRICAL FINDINGS ON THE CAUSATIVE ROLE OF PORNOGRAPHY IN RAPE

As Donnerstein points out, "One cannot, for obvious reasons, experimentally examine the relationship between pornography and *actual* sexual aggression" (1984, p. 53). However, Donnerstein has conducted a series of experiments on the effects of pornography on aggressive behavior in the laboratory. The delivery of a phony electric shock to a confederate of the experimenter constituted the measure of aggressive behavior. These experiments show that when male subjects are exposed to violent pornography in which a female is the victim, there is an increase in their aggression against females, but not against males (Donnerstein, 1984). Violent films that were nonpornographic (depicting, for example, a man hitting a woman) also in-

creased the levels of aggression in male subjects, but not to the same extent as violent pornographic films.

Levels of aggression were higher when subjects were first angered by the confederate. In fact, when the victim in the pornographic movie remained distressed throughout, only subjects who had been first angered by the confederate showed higher levels of aggression than those subjects who had not. However, when the victim was portrayed as becoming sexually aroused at the end of the movie, there was a marked increase in aggressive behavior for both the angered and the nonangered male subjects (Donnerstein, 1984). To explain these findings, Malamuth suggests that "positive victim reactions . . . may act to justify aggression and to reduce general inhibitions against aggression" (1984, p. 36). This interpretation is consistent with my model's emphasis on the important role pornographic depictions play in undermining men's inhibitions against acting out hostile behavior toward women.

Malamuth undertook an experiment to test whether men's attitudes and sexual arousal by depictions of rape could predict aggression in the laboratory. The attitudes of male subjects to, and sexual arousal by, rape were measured. A week later these subjects were angered by a female confederate of the experimenter. When the subjects were given an opportunity to behave aggressively toward her by administering an unpleasant noise as punishment for errors she made in an alleged extrasensory perception experiment, men who had higher levels of sexual arousal to rape and who had attitudes that condoned aggression "were more aggressive against the woman and wanted to hurt her to a greater extent" (1986, p. 16). On the basis of this experiment, as well as two others, Malamuth concluded that "attitudes condoning aggression against women related to objectively observable behavior—laboratory aggression against women" (1986, p. 16). And we have seen that there is now a great deal of evidence that exposure to pornography increases acceptance of attitudes that condone aggression, with or without intervening anger.

Both Donnerstein and Malamuth emphasize that their findings relate to violent and not to nonviolent pornography. For example, in contrast to the effects of aggressive pornography, Donnerstein concludes that "nonaggressive materials only affect aggression when inhibitions to aggress are quite low, or with long-term and massive exposure. With a single exposure and normal aggressing conditions, there is little evidence that nonviolent pornography has any negative effects" (1984, pp. 78-79). However, in the real world, inhibitions to aggress are often very low, and long-term and massive exposure to nonviolent material is also very common. Furthermore, there is a lot of evidence of harm aside from the impact on aggressive behavior (for example, see my earlier discussion of some of Zillman's findings).

Finally, given how saturated our whole culture is with pornographic images and how much exposure many of the male subjects being tested have

already had, the task of trying to design experiments that can show effects on the basis of one more exposure is challenging indeed. Because of this methodological problem, when no measurable effects result, it would be wrong to interpret the experiment as proving that there are no effects in general. We should therefore focus on the effects that *do* show up, rather than being equally impressed by the effects that don't.

Given the fact that even one brief exposure in an experimental situation increases subjects' acceptance of rape myths and interpersonal violence against women, and given the hypothesis that such increased acceptance would serve to lower viewers' inhibitions against acting out violent desires, one would expect pornography consumption to be related to rape rates. This is, indeed, what one ingenious study found.

Larry Baron and Murray Straus undertook a 50-state correlational analysis of rape rates and the circulation rates of eight pornographic magazines: *Chic, Club, Forum, Gallery, Genesis, Hustler, Oui, and Playboy* (1985). A highly significant correlation (+0.64) was found between rape rates and circulation rates. Baron and Straus attempted to ascertain what other factors might possibly explain this correlation. Their statistical analysis revealed that the proliferation of pornographic magazines and the level of urbanization explained more of the variance in rape rates than the other variables investigated (for example, social disorganization, economic inequality, unemployment, sexual inequality).

In another important study, Mary Koss conducted a large national survey of over 6000 college students from a probability sample of institutions of higher education. She found that college men who reported behavior that meets common legal definitions of rape were significantly more likely than college men who denied such behavior to be frequent readers of at least one of the following magazines: *Playboy, Penthouse, Chic, Club, Forum, Gallery, Genesis, Oui, or Hustler* (1986).

Several other studies have assessed the correlation between the degree of men's exposure to pornography and their attitudes supportive of violence against women. Malamuth reports that in three out of four of these studies "higher levels of reported exposure to sexually explicit media correlated with higher levels of attitudes supportive of violence against women" (1986, p. 8).

1. "In a sample of college men, Malamuth and Check (1985) found that higher readership of sexually explicit magazines was correlated with more beliefs that women enjoy forced sex.

2. "Similarly, Check (1984) found that the more exposure to pornography a diverse sample of Canadian men had, the higher their acceptance of rape myths, violence against women, and general sexual callousness.

3. "Briere, Corne, Rutz and Malamuth (1984) reported similar correlations in a sample of college males" (1986, p. 8).

While correlation doesn't prove causation, and it therefore cannot be concluded that it was the consumption of the pornography that was responsible for the men's higher acceptance of violence against women, these findings are certainly consistent with a theory that a causal connection exists. [In the one study that failed to find a statistically significant correlation, further analysis by Malamuth led to the observation that the subjects who reported obtaining more information about sexuality in their childhoods from pornography held attitudes significantly more supportive of violence against women than those subjects who had obtained such information from other sources. Malamuth commented that "it makes sense that those with other sources of sex information can more accurately assess the myths about women and sexuality portrayed in some pornography" (1986, p. 9).]

If the rape rates were very low in this country, or if they were found to have declined over the past few decades, these facts would likely be cited to support the view that pornography does not play a causative role in rape. Elsewhere I have reported the astonishingly high rape rate found in my probability sample survey in San Francisco and the even more dramatic increases in rape that have been occurring to the younger women (Russell, 1984). Unlike those of Straus and Baron, my statistics include mostly cases of rape and attempted rape that were never reported to the police. Once again, positive correlation doesn't prove causation, but it is highly suggestive.

Finally, it is significant that many sex offenders claim that viewing pornography affected their criminal behavior. Although these studies don't permit one to distinguish between the first three factors in my causal theory, they are relevant to the notion that a cause-and-effect relationship exists between pornography and sex offenses. For example, in a recent, still-to-be published study of 89 nonincarcerated sex offenders conducted by W. Marshall, "slightly more than one-third of the child molesters and rapists reported at least occasionally being incited to commit an offense by exposure to forced or consenting pornography" (Einsiedel, 1986, p. 62). Exactly a third of the rapists who reported being incited by pornography to commit an offense said their use of pornography in their preparation for committing the offense was deliberate, and 53% of the child molesters so reported (Einsiedel, 1986, p. 62). Although we do not know if pornography played a role in predisposing any of these sex offenders to desire rape or sex with children, these findings do indicate at least that pornography was used for arousal purposes. It may also have undermined the offenders' inhibitions against acting out their desires.

Gene Abel, Mary Mittelman, and Judith Becker evaluated the use of pornography by 256 perpetrators of sexual offenses who were undergoing assessment and treatment (Einsiedel, 1986, p. 62). Like Marshall's sample, these men were outpatients, not incarcerated offenders. This is important

because there is evidence that the data provided by incarcerated and nonincarcerated offenders differ (Einsiedel, 1986, p. 47). It is also likely that incarcerated offenders might be substantially less willing to be entirely frank about their antisocial histories than nonincarcerated offenders for fear that such information might be used against them.

Abel and his colleagues reported that 56% of the rapist and 42% of the child molesters “implicated pornography in the commission of their offenses” (Einsiedel, 1986, p. 62). Edna Einsiedel, in her review of the social science research for the Pornography Commission, concluded that these studies “are suggestive of the implication of pornography in the commission of sex crimes among *some* rapists and child molesters” (author’s emphasis, p. 63). [Einsiedel also pointed out, however, that Abel and his colleagues (1985) found no difference between those offenders who did use pornography and those who didn’t in the “frequency of sex crimes committed, number of victims, ability to control deviant urges, and degree of violence used during commission of the sex crime. The longer the duration of paraphiliac arousal, however, the greater the use of erotica.”]

In another study Michael Goldstein and Harold Kant found that incarcerated rapists had been exposed to hard-core pornography at an earlier age than the men presumed to be nonrapists. Specifically, 30% of the rapists in their sexual offender sample said that they had encountered hard-core pornographic photos in their preadolescence (i.e., before the age of 11) (1973, p. 55). This 30% figure compares with only 2% of the control group of subjects obtained by a random household sample that was matched with the offender group for age, race, religion, and educational level (1973, p. 50). Could it be that this early exposure of the offenders to hard-core pornography played a role in their becoming rapists? Further research should address this question.

CONCLUSION

I have amplified here for the first time a theory about how pornography—both violent and nonviolent forms of it—causes rape and other sexual assault. I have drawn on the findings of recent research to support this theory. Since most of this research pertains to rape rather than to child sexual abuse or nonsexual violence against women, my discussion has focused on rape. But I believe my theory applies to other forms of sexual and nonsexual abuse and violence.

In ending I want to note once more that I believe that the rich and varied data now available to us from all kinds of sources considered together strongly support this theory. A high percentage of nonincarcerated rapists and child molesters say that they have been incited by pornography to commit crimes;

preselected normal healthy male students say they are more likely to rape a woman after one exposure to violent pornography; large percentages of male junior high school students, high school students, and adults in a non-laboratory survey report imitating X-rated movies within a few days of exposure; hundreds of women have testified in public about how they have been victimized by pornography; 10% of a probability sample of 930 women in San Francisco and 25% of female subjects who participated in experiments on pornography in Canada reported having been upset by requests to enact pornography (Russell, 1980, and Senn and Radtke, 1986); and one of the most vulnerable groups in our society—prostitutes—reports abuse by pornography as almost an everyday event (Silbert and Pines, 1984). In addition, the laws of social learning must surely apply to pornography at least as much as to the mass media in general. Indeed, I—and others—have argued that sexual arousal and orgasm likely serve as unusually potent reinforcers of the messages conveyed by pornography. Finally, experimental research has shown that the viewing of violent pornography results in higher rates of aggression against women by male subjects.

Some people might wonder why I am more convinced than some of the major researchers on pornography that it plays a causative role in violent acts against women. Malamuth, for example, hypothesizes only “*indirect* causal influences of media sexual violence on antisocial behavior against women” (June 1986, p. 20). This is how he concluded his formal presentation to the Pornography Commission: “Clearly, the mass media is certainly not just a matter of fantasy, and it can affect responses relevant to aggression against women such as attitudes. Such attitudes, finally, may in combination with other factors affect actual behavior such as aggression against women” (1985, p. 86).

Donnerstein appears to be very inconsistent in what he says and writes about the causative role of pornography. For example, in his chapter for the book he coauthored with Malamuth, he ends the summary of his research by writing: “We have now seen that there is a direct causal relationship between exposure to aggressive pornography and violence against women” (1984, p. 78). One and a half pages later, in the second-to-last sentence of his conclusion to the chapter, he writes: “But more importantly, we need to be more certain as to what the causal factor is, if there is one, in the relationship between pornography and violence against women” (1984, p. 80). When a member of the Attorney General’s Pornography Commission quoted the first of these views, Donnerstein, according to the *New York Times*, accused him of having “engaged in a ‘bizarre’ leap of logic” (*New York Times*, June 4, 1986).

What might explain our different conclusions? One difference between myself and these researchers is that they are psychologists, whereas I am a sociologist. This is significant because in drawing conclusions from the

research about the causative effects of viewing violent pornography, it makes a great deal of difference whether one focuses on an individual or a group level of analysis. For example, on the individual level it is obvious that all viewers are not affected in the same way. It is easy to conclude from this that the effects of viewing pornography are mediated by other individual and/or social variables, and hence to argue that pornography has only indirect effects.

If, however, instead of trying to explain why Mr. X is affected by such viewing but Mr. Y is not, one focuses on whether the average aggression scores (or whatever is being measured) of those exposed to violent pornography are significantly higher than the aggression scores of those exposed to nonviolent, nonabusive material, then any consistent effects that are registered are not indirect at all. It is this common difference of focus between psychologists and sociologists that may explain why Malamuth concludes from his research that sexually violent media contribute only indirectly to antisocial behavior, while I conclude from his research that there are direct effects.

Whereas the individual level of analysis is the more relevant one for clinicians, the group level of analysis is more relevant for social policymakers. If researchers had insisted on being able to ascertain why Mr. X died from lung cancer after 20 years of smoking but Mr. Y did not, before being willing to warn the public that smoking causes lung cancer, there would have been a lot more deaths from lung cancer. Similarly, if we refused to see excessive alcohol consumption by drivers as a cause of accidents because not all drivers who are drunk have traffic accidents, there would be even more deaths than currently occur as a result of drunken drivers. Although it is important for researchers to continue to try to explain all the variables that might account for individual differences, we don't need to have all these answers before recognizing group effects.

Another factor that may help explain what seems to me an overly cautious stance by many researchers on this issue may be that they subscribe to the notion that scientists aren't supposed to take a stand. When Donnerstein was asked by a commissioner about his being interviewed for a feature in *Penthouse* magazine, including whether he had been paid for the interview and whether the pornography industry had ever tried to influence him, he replied, "I have never taken sides in this issue, and have tried to stay as objective as possible" (1985, p. 33). If he were doing research on racism rather than on aggression against women, and if he had found that media portrayals of Blacks seriously desensitize people to violence against Blacks, would he be so proud about not taking sides? If one is doing research on the holocaust, is one not supposed to take sides? Is one not supposed to take sides about the effects of poverty? Or nuclear war? Or rape?

I personally take sides on all these issues. I don't believe scientists should be expected to be morally indifferent to human suffering and abuse. Yes, we need to be very clear about which of our opinions are based on data and how good the data are, which are based on theory, and which are based on hunch. But once there is very strong evidence that harm is being caused—by pornography, for example—surely it is the duty, even of a scientist, to say so. And surely such a scientist should also feel able to say that he or she deplores the harm done. Now *this* really *is* freedom of speech!

One of the effects of viewing nonviolent pornography discovered by Zillman is that “the more extensive the exposure, the more accepting of pornography subjects became” (1984, p. 133). Although females expressed significantly less acceptance than males, this effect also applied to females. Pornography has expanded into an eight-billion-dollar-a-year industry, and I believe we are seeing on a massive scale some of the very effects so brilliantly and carefully documented in some of the experiments by Malamuth, Donnerstein, Zillman, and their colleagues. Donnerstein's description of the desensitization that occurred to his healthy preselected male students after five days of viewing women-slashing films may apply to ever-growing segments of our society.

The whole culture appears to have been affected by the very effects the research shows. The massive propaganda campaign is working; people now actually *see* differently. The stimuli keep having to be made more and more extreme for the violence to be recognized. As Zillman shows, “heavy consumption of common forms of pornography fosters an appetite for stronger materials” (1985, p. 127). What was considered hard-core in the past has become soft-core in the present. Where will this all end? Will we as a culture forever refuse to read the writing on the wall?

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