Degrading pornography: A male perspective

Kerri F. Dunn

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DEGRADING PORNOGRAPHY: A MALE PERSPECTIVE

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Psychology

Kerri F. Dunn
June 1992
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Presented to the
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by
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ABSTRACT

Nine themes commonly found in non-violent, degrading pornography were evaluated to determine how degrading and arousing male college students found them. Fifty three students who ranged in age from 18 to 48 participated in the study. After filling out a demographic and attitudinal questionnaire, participants were asked to watch nine short film clips depicting the nine themes. They were then asked to rate each clip on a 14-point scale using 13 different adjectives which were combined to form degrading and arousal scales. As predicted, Men rated pornography in a similar order as women. However, men's ratings were lower regarding degradation and higher regarding arousal than women's. These findings provide strong support for a feminist interpretation of pornography. They also dispute the assertions of some researchers who claim that sexuality, when not displayed in the context of a relationship, is, in itself, degrading. Suggestions for future research in this area are made. For example, the relationship between constructs such as sexual arousal and degradation need to be explored.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I feel extremely fortunate to have had truly outstanding mentorship during my graduate years. Without the guidance, patience and friendship of my thesis chair, Dr. Gloria Cowan, completion of my Masters degree would have been considerably less fulfilling. For all you have done Gloria, I offer my most sincere gratitude and love, and look forward to a life-long friendship... Thank-you.

I'm also very fortunate to have a most wonderful and supportive partner, who sole-handedly took over the details of my life while I worked to complete this thesis. I love you and thank-you Phil.

Without the help of my cheering section, Sharon, Bill, Coll, Mom, Dad, Kris & Glo, Phil, Gloria and Korki, I'd sure have given up a long time ago; you cats are the greatest!!!

Finally, thanks to my committee members for the time and effort they put into reading my manuscript and providing feedback.
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INTRODUCTION

For the past two decades a major political, legal, moral, and scientific debate over pornography has occurred. Social science research in the area has been inconclusive, partially due to the difficulty in showing a causal link between pornography and harm, but also due to the political nature of the subject. To date, two government commissions have been appointed to investigate the effects of pornography on society. The first commission, formed in 1970, concluded that there was no evidence to indicate that sexually explicit material caused either delinquent or criminal behavior (Donnerstein, Linz & Penrod, 1987).

U.S. Attorney General's 1986 Commission On Pornography

In contrast to the 1970 commission, the second commission which was formed in 1985 and called the "Meese Commission", distinguished among four different types of pornography: a) sexually violent material, b) non-violent, but degrading material including degradation, subordination or humiliation c) non-violent and non-degrading material and d) nudity (U.S. Attorney
General's Commission on Pornography, 1986). The overall conclusion of the Meese Commission called for stricter enforcement of obscenity law and stronger regulation of pornography.

Sexually violent material was deemed "on the whole harmful to society" (U.S. Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, 1986, p. 329). The Commission found that nudity itself, lacking a forceful, coercive, violent or degrading context, was not "much cause for concern" (p.348-349). Although the Commission concluded that there was no persuasive evidence that non-violent and non-degrading pornography (category C) maintains a causal relationship to acts of violence, the members of the Commission were largely divided on whether this category of material led to other types of harm. Specifically, the issues of promiscuity, sexual privacy and morality were of concern. Members largely varied in their opinions regarding the harmfulness of sexuality outside of a committed relationship. Some members found it unequivocally wrong and immoral, and in this sense harmful. Other members viewed it to be personally wrong, but they considered it a matter of choice (U.S. Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, 1986).
The category of non-violent, degrading pornography was thought largely to represent pornography which is commercially available. The Commission pointed out the problem of the lack of a clear and adequate subdivision of non-violent pornography in the available research, noting that this oversight allows for the combination of materials into categories which may be substantially different in content. With respect to research which has distinguished non-violent pornography containing degradation from non-violent, non-degrading pornography, the Meese Commission found that effects "similar to, although not as extensive as that involved with violent pornography can be identified with respect to such degrading material" (p.330). Although the Commission did find this category of pornography to be harmful, this conclusion was made with reserved confidence due to the tentativeness of the evidence. The inconsistencies in research regarding non-violent, degrading pornography, have not yet been resolved. The inconsistencies are likely due to difficulty in defining this category. Consequently, the definition of degrading pornography constitutes the primary focus of this research.
The Effects of Violent and Non-violent Pornography

Research indicates that violence coupled with sexually explicit material has both behavioral and attitudinal effects on viewers (Byrne & Kelly, 1984; Donnerstein, 1984; Page, 1990; Penrod & Linz, 1984). Malamuth (1978), for example, assigned male subjects to groups which viewed either sexually aggressive, sexual but non-aggressive and neutral filmed material. Males who viewed the sexually aggressive material were significantly more likely to aggress against a female confederate than those who viewed either sexual but non-aggressive or neutral material. Other researchers (Donnerstein, 1984; Linz, Donnerstein & Penrod, 1984; Malamuth, 1981; Malamuth & Check, 1985, Malamuth, Haber & Feshbach, 1980; Malamuth, Heim & Feshbach, 1980) have found that exposure to sexually explicit material involving a rape scene, especially when the outcome was depicted positively, increased the likelihood of male subjects aggressing against female confederates. Individuals exposed to violent pornography are also more likely than those who viewed non-aggressive but sexual or neutral materials to ascribe to rape myths, accept violence against women in general, view rape as less victimizing, show
desensitization to sexual violence, and report an increased likelihood to commit rape. In these studies, however, non-violent, sexual materials were not differentiated according to level of degradation.

Other evidence suggests that it is not the pairing of sex with violence that has harmful effects, but rather it is the violence itself that is related to aggression toward women (Donnerstein, Berkowitz & Linz, 1986; Linz Donnerstein, & Penrod, 1984). According to some researchers, pornography that is not paired with violence does not increase male aggression toward women. Donnerstein and Hallam (1978), for example, found that after viewing non-violent sexually explicit material, male subjects were not more likely to show aggression against female confederates than they were to male confederates.

Similarly, Linz (1984), as cited in Linz, Donnerstein and Penrod (1984), found that exposure to non-violent sexually explicit films did not increase the subjects' callousness in their attitudes toward rape or trivialize the level of victimization of raped women. Malamuth and Ceniti (1986) reported findings supporting this. After being exposed to non-violent pornography for a period of four weeks, subjects were no more likely than the control group to report that
they would commit rape if they would not be caught.

Not all research has found that there are no effects of viewing non-violent, degrading pornography. Attitudinal effects have been found by some investigators. In examining the effects of prolonged consumption of pornography (defined as six consecutive weekly viewing sessions), Zillmann and Bryant (1982; 1984) found that subjects (both male and female) were more likely to trivialize rape trauma and show increased leniency in their attitudes towards rapists. Additionally, men were found to show an increased level of callousness after long-term exposure to non-violent, degrading pornography.

Further examination of attitudinal effects following prolonged exposure to this category of pornography (Zillmann & Bryant, 1986, 1988; Zillmann, 1989) indicated additional effects, including decreased acceptance of marital monogamy, increased dissatisfaction with appearance and sexual performance of partners, and increased insensitivity to victims of violence. Higher levels of psychoticism were also positively related to subjects reported likelihood to commit rape.

Check and Guloien (1989) found that exposure to
non-violent, dehumanizing pornography had pronounced effects on subjects reporting that they would be likely to engage in coercive sexual behavior. Subjects were placed into one of four groups in which they saw either a) violent pornography, b) non-violent, dehumanizing pornography c) non-violent, non-dehumanizing sexually explicit material or d) no sexually explicit material. Individuals in both the violent and non-violent but degrading groups reported a significantly higher likelihood to rape than those in the control group (violent=20.5%, non-violent, dehumanizing=20.4%, control=9.6%). Those in the erotica group did not differ from the control group on this measure (erotica = 15.7%, control = 9.6%).

Borchert (1991) also found that female subjects who had viewed non-violent degrading pornography assigned a more lenient sentence to rapists in a mock trial than those who had viewed both blatant and covert violence, but not sexually explicit or neutral films.

Further evidence for the negative effects of non-violent degrading pornography was presented by Stock (1991). Sexually explicit film clips were categorized as either violent, erotic, unequal (involving various levels of subordination) or available (involving a
promiscuous female). The unequal and available categories represented the category of degrading as categorized by Cowan (1990) and Zillmann (1989), respectively. Mood evaluations indicated that male and female respondents were significantly more depressed, hostile, and confused after viewing the unequal tapes than after viewing the available, violent, or erotic tapes. Additionally, women were evaluated as having experienced significantly more pain in the unequal films than the available, violent or erotic films. Overall measures of degrading material showed that subjects rated violent and unequal films significantly more degrading than the erotic or available films, but not different from each other.

In short, these results show a marked contrast to those studies finding violence alone to be the harmful element in pornography, with non-violent degradation having no negative effects. They additionally show differences among themes (i.e., unequal and availability) in material which is usually more broadly categorized as degrading, with inequality being associated with more negative effects than availability.
Definitions of Non-violent, Degrading Pornography

A possible explanation for the discrepancy in results regarding the effects of non-violent but degrading pornography may be related to differences in the theoretical and operational construction of the definitions employed by different researchers. Although the Meese Commission specified that Category B pornography was that which included scenes which depict persons, usually women, as "existing solely for the sexual satisfaction of others... in decidedly subordinate roles... or engaged in sexual practices that would to most people be considered humiliating" (U.S. Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, 1986, p.331), many investigators have ignored the distinct themes which comprise this definition (e.g., subordination, humiliation, etc.).

In many cases researchers have utilized sexually explicit stimuli generally, without differentiating between different types of non-violent, sexually explicit material (e.g., Donnerstein, 1980a; Donnerstein, Berkowitz & Linz 1986; Donnerstein & Hallam, 1978). Exactly what theme or themes constituted the term "degrading" in these instances was not specified.
Other researchers have used various labels to refer to this same category of non-violent, degrading pornography. Check (1985b), for example, has called material which is neither violent pornography nor erotica, but somewhere in between, degrading or dehumanizing pornography. He prefers the term dehumanizing due to the perjorativeness of the term degrading.

Zillmann (1989), on the other hand, calls this same material "common pornography". According to him, most main-stream pornography contains depictions that may be considered demeaning. The labels dehumanizing and degrading, he claims, suggests that most pornography does not contain elements of dehumanization or degradation, and, in this sense, these labels are not accurate. Zillmann's label "common pornography" encompasses all sexually explicit material which is not erotica and not violent. However, Zillmann's perspective on Category B pornography can become quite confusing. For example, although he claims that "common pornography" contains elements that are demeaning and dehumanizing, the theme he and others (Donnerstein, Linz and Penrod, 1987; Zillmann, 1989) view as the key problem in this category of pornography is female hypersexuality and
the depiction of women as sexually non-discriminating and insatiable. In essence, the focus in this case is on the female's sexual availability rather than any of the components which constituted the Meese Commission's definition.

Specifically, Zillmann (1989) claims that women are harmed by sexually explicit material which depicts them as "eager to accommodate the sexual desires of any man in the vicinity, and hypereuphoric about any kind of sexual stimulation" (p.135).

Further explaining this position, Zillmann (1989) notes that the harm found in category B (non-violent but degrading) pornography is the undermining of "traditional family values that favor marriage, family and children" (p. 140). Similar to those Meese Commission members who maintained a moral objection to explicit sex due to the decontextualization of the relationship, Zillmann argues from a traditional or conservative viewpoint, finding harm in the act of non-committal sex. His position is not one which emphasizes the sexual subordination of women as the main element of degradation.

This position on Category B pornography may be contrasted with a feminist definition of degrading pornography (Check & Guloien, 1989; Cowan, 1990).
Feminist writers have typically noted status inequality as the key feature of degrading pornographic material. The female's availability and insatiability have not been specified as a main component of degradation, the context within which sexual activity occurs, rather than displays of sex itself, form the elements of degradation.

Steinem (1979) differentiates between erotica and pornography along this dimension. She explains that according to the root words, "pornography means a description of either the purchase of sex, which implies an imbalance of power in itself, or sexual slavery" (p. 221). Conversely, erotica "contains the idea of love, positive choice, and the yearning for a particular person" (p. 222).

In *Take Back The Night*, Steinem further clarifies this distinction by pointing to the continuum on which pornographic material lies. She notes that some pornography contains clear violence such as torture and bondage. The nature of degradation in other pornographic material is more subtle, depicting, for example, an attitude of conqueror and victim, class and race inequality or a clear difference in the amount of clothing that the characters are wearing. These differences, reflect an underlying message of
vulnerability and inequality. Steinem argues that these subtle inequalities are additive in nature and that they are "used to reinforce power inequality or to create one, or to tell us that pain and humiliation (our's or someone else's) are the same as pleasure" (Steinem, 1980 p. 37).

An Alberta, Canada court ruling (apparently in response to Check's testimony) similarly distinguished between dehumanizing or degrading pornography and erotica (Check, in press). Justice Mel Shannon, who presided over the case, declared that both violent and non-violent, dehumanizing pornography were considered obscene because:

In dehumanizing or degrading pornography, people are often verbally abused or portrayed as having animal characteristics. Women, in particular, are deprived of unique human character or identity and are depicted as sexual playthings, hysterically and instantly responsive to male sexual demands. They worship male genitals and their own value depends on the quality of their genitals and breasts.

The ruling further contrasted degrading material with erotica, which was defined as "a positive and affectionate human sexual interaction between consenting and equal adults" (Check, in press).

After several appeals, this ruling was upheld by the Canadian Supreme Court. In Canada at present
sexually explicit material may be deemed obscene on the basis that it is degrading to women.

Other evaluations of degrading material have been assessed in terms of humanistic philosophy or ethics. For example, Hill (1987) has argued that material which is degrading involves displays of low moral status; however, this display is emphasized by the "perception of women, by themselves or by others, as being treated as something less than a person" (p. 41). Garry (1978) similarly argues that material which displays lack of respect for women by lying about their sexuality or portraying them as animals or exotic toys is degrading to women. Those who discuss degradation in terms of philosophy are not talking about the morality of sex, but rather the immorality of subordination. This argument is based on the notion that reducing someone to less than a person is unethical, as it deprives them of the highest order of being. These definitions seem to reflect the same elements that the Meese Commission was referring to when describing images of women existing solely for the satisfaction of others.

Other feminists have been more politically oriented in their definition, although their definitions seem to reflect the same themes as defined
by the Meese Commission as degrading. Longino (1980), for example, points out that the nature of pornography relies on the dehumanization and degradation of women based on their subordination. She further objects to degrading pornography due to its implied endorsement or recommendation of such behavior.

Dworkin and MacKinnon (1988), in their legal ordinance aimed at making pornography a civil offense, have noted that dominance and subordination of women are sexualized in pornography. Therefore, sexually explicit material which objectifies women, reduces them to body parts, presents them as play things, or depicts women as servile or submissive is degrading, and hence, discriminatory against women. Dworkin and MacKinnon's definition of degrading emphasizes the use of female body parts and genitalia as tools to sexualize subordination and male dominance. The themes pointed out by Dworkin and MacKinnon seem to capture the notion of degradation as delineated by the Meese Commission. This definition, however, is in direct contrast to Zillmann (1989) who views female promiscuity, (even when she is in control of her own body and clearly making a choice to be sexual) as degrading.

Recently, Cowan (1990) challenged Zillmann's
definition of degrading pornography on the grounds that it reflects a double standard for men and women since sexual insatiability and availability are not viewed as degrading to men. She emphasized that the context or theme surrounding the sexual act or the conditions under which sex occurs actually contain the message of degradation. According to Cowan, degrading pornography is that which portrays the subordination of women through the use of sexuality, rather than simply the display of or frequency of sexuality itself. According to this definition, the category of non-violent degrading pornography would manifest degradation in various contexts or themes.

Additionally, themes may be more or less degrading depending upon the level, or salience of subordination depicted. For example, scenes depicting verbal domination or the depersonalization (objectification) of women may be considered more degrading than the depiction of female promiscuity.

A content analysis of the prevalence of degrading images in x-rated pornography has confirmed that sex in a context of subordination is indeed frequent (Cowan, Lee, Levy & Snyder, 1988). In 54% of the sexually explicit scenes, dominance and sexual inequality were prominent themes, whereas only 37%
contained scenes of reciprocity (Cowan, Lee, Levy & Snyder, 1988). Regarding frequency of objectification, depictions of full-frame genitalia indicated that 26% were of females, 11.5% were male and 63% involved both. However, full screen exposure of genitalia were largely female (69%).

Status inequalities were also noted with relatively high frequency. Of the 124 men depicted 62% of the men were identified as professionals. When the professions of women were mentioned, they were traditional in nature, such as clerical workers, secretaries, students or housewives. Using the themes that emerged in the content analysis and based on the controversy surrounding the definitions of degrading pornography, Cowan (1991) examined women's evaluation of various categories of pornography to determine if there is a consensus as to what type of material the construct "degrading" actually reflects. The categories used differentiated explicit sex, sexual availability, status inequality and other forms of subordination. Feminist and non-feminist interpretations of degrading were the basis for theme construction. For example, the category of availability contained sexually explicit material which depicted the woman as hypersexual and available
to anyone who wanted her (as per Zillmann, 1989). The categories of objectification, dominance, penis worship, status inequality, submission, status reduction and unreciprocated sex were chosen by a feminist interpretation to represent the theme of subordination of women by men, as well as a clear status differential. The category of explicit sex contained no power differential and both individuals involved held equal status, although they were portrayed as strangers.

After completing a demographic questionnaire, subjects in the Cowan (1990) study were asked to rate each category of material on 14-point scales for a series of 13 adjectives which ranged from excitingness to degrading (adapted from Check & Guloien, 1989).

Consistent with feminist anti-pornography theory, and contrary to Zillmann's (1989) definition based on availability, Cowan (1990) found that categories rated most negatively (degrading, dehumanizing, disgusting, offensive, obscene and aggressive) were dominance, objectification and penis worship. These three categories were not rated significantly different from each other. They depicted the most vivid forms of subordination including inequality, reduction of women to body parts and depersonalization. Subjects rated
submission, inequality, status reduction, availability and unreciprocated sex less negatively, and not different from each other. Explicit sex was rated least negatively and significantly different from the other eight themes.

The female subjects rated explicit sex, submission and availability to be the three most exciting themes, although the mean ratings were only 5 on a 14 point scale. Status inequality, objectification, dominance, status reduction, penis worship and unreciprocated sex were found to be minimally exciting.

According to Cowan (1990), women distinguished between different types of pornography based on content which feminists have long labeled as degrading and dehumanizing. If a feminist based theoretical definition of pornography reflects the essence of what is degrading to women, then men should similarly rate categories which depict depersonalization, objectification and blatant inequality as most degrading to women.

The current study provided an extension of Cowan's (1990) study by examining men's ratings of degrading material and comparing them to women's. Stimuli and methodology were identical to those used
by Cowan. Based on Cowan's findings among women, college men were expected to rate the categories which most blatantly reflect subordination through lack of personhood, reduction to body parts and humiliation based on male dominance as most negative (penis-worship, dominance, objectification). Categories depicting inequality (inequality, status reduction, submission, unreciprocated sex and availability) were predicted to be rated less degrading. Finally, explicit sex was predicted to be rated least negatively.

Although one might speculate that because pornography is generally intended for male viewers, and, based on Zillmann's (1989) assertion that common pornography largely degrades and dehumanizes women, that for men, the more degrading pornography is to women, the more exciting they would find it. This may in fact be the case in the aggregate. However, when this relationship between degradation and arousal is examined among individual, (as calculated in a correlation), it seems that an inverse relationship should be found due to the opposing affects created by the two factors.

Findings of other studies have shown this to be case. For example, Cowan (1990) found that women
rated themes that they found highly degrading to be significantly less exciting. Stock (1991) similarly found that when male and female subjects were exposed to violent pornography, sexual scenes depicting female availability, non-violent, degrading and erotic materials, the themes that subjects rated to be most degrading to women were the themes they found least arousing. Based on this notion that offensive material should be less exciting to viewers, it was predicted that men would rate items which they found to be most degrading as less exciting. Therefore, significant negative correlations were expected between overall theme ratings of degrading and exciting, as well as in individual theme ratings.

Additionally, others have noted that men and women differ in their reactions to erotic stimuli (Money, 1973). Men have been noted to objectify women, whereas women seem to be less able to objectify men (Mosher & Abramson, 1977). Pornography, according to feminist theory is clearly male centered in its intent (Steinem, 1978). Stock (1991) provided evidence for this notion by finding that women who observed non-violent degrading pornography which depicted subordination and other inequalities were significantly more confused and anxious than were men.
Additionally men in this sample who viewed this same category of material rated it as significantly more exciting, stimulating and arousing than women.

Since pornography therefore seems to excite men and offend women, men in this study should have both a substantially lower overall rating of negativeness than the women in Cowan's (1990) study, as well as lower individual ratings by theme. Men were also expected to show a significantly higher level of arousal than the women in Cowan's study.
METHOD

Subjects

Fifty three college men who ranged in age from 17-48 were volunteers. Participants were recruited from undergraduate psychology classes, and in most cases course credit was provided as incentive. All volunteers were told that they would be viewing sexually explicit pornography. They were also informed that their responses would be completely anonymous and that they could discontinue their participation at any time. All of the participants were treated in accordance with Principle 9 of the "Ethical Principles of Psychologists" (American Psychological Association, 1987). See Appendix A for solicitation form and initial instructions.

The mean age of the participants was 23.61 (SD = 7.77). Fifty five percent of the participants were white, 13% were African American, 26% were Hispanic, 3% Asian and 2% categorized themselves as other. Forty four percent were single, and 98% were heterosexual. Based on the demographic questionnaire administered, 23% indicated that they identified themselves as fundamentalist Christians; the sample's
mean rating of religious importance was 3.45 on a six point scale, indicating that religion was "somewhat important". Ratings of political orientation indicated that almost 50% of the sample regarded themselves as "moderates". The other 50% was distributed with a slight skew toward conservatism. Regarding frequency of pornography consumption, the majority of participants indicated that they had viewed pornography "some" (M = 3.415 on a six point scale).

Materials

The two sets of videos used were those used by Cowan (1990). Each set consisted of nine individual clips representing a different theme. Table 1 contains a listing of each category and its definition.

Table 2 provides a listing of the X-rated commercial film used for each category.
Table 1

Category Definitions

1) Sexually Explicit Behavior: Sexually activity that is explicit and mutual without indicating an affectionate personal relationship between the two people.

2) Availability: Sexual activity showing that the female is available to anyone who wants her. She is non-discriminating.

3) Unreciprocated sex: sexual activity that is one sided. The woman is used to satisfy the man's needs. Her gratification is not important.

4) Status reduction: Sexual activity that incorporates the idea that a high status female can be reduced to a purely sexual being.

5) Status inequality: Sexual activity and the accompanying scenario that indicates inequality. The woman appears to have less power than the man, she may be younger, less educated, less intelligent, etc..

6) Submission: This category represents the rape myth. It is sexual activity that begins with the female's unwillingness to participate and ends with her loving it. In this category, "no" ultimately means "yes".
7) Penis Worship: Sexual activity that revolves around worship of the penis. The ejaculate is especially central to the female's satisfaction.

8) Dominance: Sexual activity and the related scenario that explicitly shows that the man is dominant. He may command her to do what he wishes or insult her without any regard for her desires.

9) Objectification: Sexual activity which treats the female as an object or plaything.
Table 2

Films used For Each Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Video Set A</th>
<th>Video Set B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicit Sex</td>
<td>I Ate Pie</td>
<td>I Ate Pie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status reduction</td>
<td>Animal Impulse</td>
<td>Talk Dirty To Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability</td>
<td>Barbara Broadcast</td>
<td>Animal Impulse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreciprocated</td>
<td>Teenage Runaway</td>
<td>Naughty Neighbors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penis Worship</td>
<td>Tracy, I Love You</td>
<td>Barbara Broadcast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominance</td>
<td>Vamp</td>
<td>Insatiable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Inequal</td>
<td>Debbie Does Dallas</td>
<td>Barbara Broadcast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission</td>
<td>Insatiable</td>
<td>Behind Green Door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectification</td>
<td>Nothing to hide</td>
<td>Vamp</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Measures

All materials were the same as those used by Cowan (1990). They included a background questionnaire obtaining information on demographics, religion and its importance, sexual orientation, political orientation, amount of prior viewing, and age of first viewing of pornography. See Appendix B for initial questionnaire. Additional measures regarding hostility towards women, sexual experience, sexual attitudes, and likelihood to rape were taken as well, however these measures constitute another study regarding pornography correlates and are therefore not presented in this thesis.

Subjects additionally completed a rating form for each theme depicted on the video. These rating forms contained a definition of each theme to ensure that the subjects knew what the category involved. They then indicated on a 14-point scale how sexually arousing, stimulating, boring, educational, realistic, obscene, offensive, aggressive, degrading to women, disgusting, dehumanizing, affectionate, and exciting they found each clip. Finally, they rated (on a seven point scale) how well the film clip illustrated the theme. All measures for both sets of films were
combined. See Appendix C for reaction forms.

Prior to the analysis, adjectives illustrating negative reactions and exciting reactions were combined for each individual theme. Adjectives were combined based on Cowan's (1990) factor analysis which determined two significant factors for the nine sets of themes. Six adjectives loaded highly on the factor of "degradingness". They included obscene, degrading to women, aggressive, dehumanizing, offensive and disgusting.

Three adjectives loaded on the "arousing" factor; they included sexually arousing, stimulating and exciting. The remaining adjectives which included affectionate, boring, educational and realistic were not retained since they did not load on either factor.

Additionally, ratings of overall degradingness and arousal were calculated including all nine themes. The individual adjectives which loaded on each factor were summed to provide two scales: degrading and arousing.

Procedure

Volunteers were recruited by five male experimenters in undergraduate psychology classes at a University in Southern California. They were told that the experiment involved viewing approximately one
hour of sexually explicit material, in addition to completing a questionnaire. They were informed that their participation and all responses would be anonymous.

Those who agreed to participate were given background questionnaire which contained an identification number and asked to schedule an appointment for the viewing session. Viewing sessions were held in private rooms; experimenters scheduled one to two sessions at a time and waited outside while the experiment ensued. When subjects arrived for their viewing session they were asked to place their questionnaire in a secured box; their video ratings were additionally placed in this box and later matched by identification number. This was to ensure anonymity. Each participant was then given a set of video response sheets, which corresponded to the order that they were to view the set of videos. The order for all sets of videos was randomized, as was the set of videos (A or B).

The experimenter then read the instructions, requesting that the subjects' responses reflect the theme as portrayed in each video, rather than their views on the category in general. They were informed
that they should regulate their own pace of both reviewing and responding. To do so, they simply needed to insert each video in the VCR, press play, and then stop when they were finished. Because each excerpt was on a separate tape, they would need to eject each tape when finished. Respondents were also asked to be sure that when they finished evaluating one clip they took enough time before the next to ensure that they responded only to the clip being viewed at the time. See Appendix D for Viewing Instructions.

The length of time varied from one, to one and one half hours. When subjects were finished, they were given a debriefing statement (see appendix E) which detailed the purpose of the experiment, briefly reviewed other work in the area, and assured participants that there were no right or wrong answers. They were additionally assured that there was a wide range of reactions to such material that should be expected and that what some consider repulsing, others may find exciting. Any questions the participants had were answered.
RESULTS

Mean ratings for how well participants felt that the film clips reflected the theme as defined ranged from 4.49 - 5.6; the overall mean was 5.16. These ratings were on a 7-point scale.

Degrad ingness Ratings

Table 3 lists the means and standard deviations of combined degradingness ratings (degrading, disgusting, offensive, obscene, dehumanizing and aggressive) for all nine themes.

A repeated-measures MANOVA of negative ratings was calculated and indicated a main effect for the nine themes, $F (8, 392) = 16.61$, $p < .001$. Further analysis, using Dunn's comparisons to control for Type I error, indicated differences between themes according to specific groupings. For example, Dominance ($M = 8.10$), objectification ($M = 7.32$), submission ($M = 6.98$), and penis worship ($M = 6.93$) were not significantly different from each other on the degradingness measure, $p's > .05$. Similarly, the inequalities, namely status reduction ($M = 5.87$), status inequality ($M = 5.85$), availability ($M = 5.45$)
and unreciprocated sex (M = 5.20), were not rated significantly different from one another, p's < .05, p< .05. The category of explicit sex was rated the least degrading (M = 3.97), and was found to be significantly less degrading than all other themes, T (8, 392) = 2.92, p<.05.

Although dominance and objectification were both rated significantly more degrading than all of the inequalities, p's<.05, submission and penis worship were not significantly more degrading than the two most degrading status inequalities, status reduction and status inequality, p's >.05. When compared to availability and unreciprocated sex, which were respectively the two least degrading inequalities, submission and penis worship were found to be significantly more degrading, T (393) = 4.07p<.05.

This indicates that although the themes did cluster together according to specific types of degradation (ie. subordination and inequality), they existed on a continuum from dominance to availability, with only explicit sex proving to be significantly different from all other themes.
Table 3

Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations for Degradingsness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominance</td>
<td>8.10</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectification</td>
<td>7.32</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penis Worship</td>
<td>6.93</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission</td>
<td>6.98</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Inequality</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status reduction</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>3.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreciprocated sex</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit sex</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>2.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Rating are on a 14-point scale

N=53
Arousal Ratings

Analysis of the ratings of arousal using repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance of the nine themes indicated a marginal effect for themes, $F (8, 408) = 1.92$, $p < .055$.

Table 4 presents the means and standard deviations of the exciting ratings by theme.

Comparisons of themes using Dunn's test to control for an inflated alpha, indicated that submission (the most arousing) differed from unreciprocated sex (the least arousing), $t (408) = 2.52$, $p < .05$. 
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicit Sex</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penis Worship</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectification</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>4.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominance</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>6.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Inequality</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status reduction</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreciprocated Sex</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Ratings are on a 14-point scale.

N=53
Correlations Between Degrading and Arousal Ratings

Correlations between degradingness and arousal scales were calculated for all categories. These intercorrelations are found in Table 5.

Ratings of arousal and degradingness were negatively related for four out of the nine themes. The strongest, negative relationship was found for penis worship ($r = -.40, p < .01$). Unreciprocated sex, status inequality, and availability were also found to be negatively related, $p$'s < .05. Dominance was the only theme to have a positive intercorrelation between participants ratings of degradingness and excitingness ($r = .32, p < .05$).
### Table 5

**Correlations between Degrading And Arousal Ratings**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominance</td>
<td>.32*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectification</td>
<td>-.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penis Worship</td>
<td>-.40**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission</td>
<td>-.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Inequality</td>
<td>-.28*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status reduction</td>
<td>-.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability</td>
<td>-.25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreciprocated Sex</td>
<td>-.31*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit Sex</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p< .05; ** p<.01
Sex Differences in Degrading Measures

Table 6 presents means and standard deviations of degrading ratings for Cowan's (1991) sample of female college students as well as those from the current sample of men.

For the purpose of this comparison, data were used from both samples. A multivariate analysis of variance was calculated for sex differences in degradation by themes. All nine themes were rated significantly more degrading by women than by men: dominance $F(1,109) = 6.63, p < .01$; objectification $F(1,109) = 25.53, p < .001$; penis worship $F(1,111) = 15.94, p < .001$; submission $F(1,109) = 4.52, p < .05$; inequality $F(1,109) = 10.94, p < .001$; status reduction $F(1,111) = 5.22, p < .02$; availability $F(1,111) = 8.06, p < .005$; unreciprocated sex $F(1,109) = 5.22, p < .02$; and explicit sex $F(1,111) = 4.17, p < .05$. 
Table 6

**Means and Standard Deviations of Degradiness\nRatings For Women and Men**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Women Mean</th>
<th>Women SD</th>
<th>Men Mean</th>
<th>Men SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominance</td>
<td>10.06</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>8.10</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectif.</td>
<td>10.42</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>7.32</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penis Worship</td>
<td>9.65</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>6.93</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission</td>
<td>8.55</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>6.98</td>
<td>3.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Ineq.</td>
<td>8.14</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Red.</td>
<td>7.44</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability</td>
<td>7.40</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>3.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreciprocated</td>
<td>6.82</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit Sex</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>2.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All ratings were on a 14-point scale, 14 indicated the most negative position. \( N = 57 \) women, \( N = 50 \) men.
Sex Differences in Arousal Measures

Mean ratings of arousal by theme for women in Cowan's (1991) and the current sample can be found in Table 7. An effect for sex on exciting ratings was found using analysis of variance. Men rated seven themes significantly more arousing than women: dominance $F(1,113) = 7.95, p < .01$; objectification $F(1,113) = 16.04, p < .001$; penis worship $F(1,109) = 20.50, p < .001$; status inequality $F(1,113) = 8.51, p < .01$; status reduction $F(1,109) = 8.50, p < .01$; unreciprocated sex $F(1,113) = 14.35, p < .001$; and availability $F(1,109) = 8.32, p < .01$. No sex differences occurred in arousal ratings of explicit sex and submission.
Table 7

Means and Standard Deviations of Arousal Ratings for Women and Men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Women Mean</th>
<th>Women SD</th>
<th>Men Mean</th>
<th>Men SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicit Sex</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penis Worship</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectification</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>4.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominance</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>6.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status inequality</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status Reduction</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreciprocation</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All ratings were on a 14 point scale, with 14 indicating the highest level of exciting. N = 61 women, N = 52 men.
DISCUSSION

Ratings of Degradedness

Males in the current study rated the themes which depicted the most salient subordination as the most degrading (dominance, objectification, submission and penis worship were grouped together). They rated the inequalities (status inequality, status reduction, unreciprocated sex and availability) as the second most degrading group of themes. Finally, explicit sex was rated least degrading. These findings are consistent with the first hypothesis which predicted that men would find the various themes degrading in a similar order as the women in Cowan's study.

These findings clarify three important points. First, they show that there is at least some consensus among both men and women as to what elements constitute pornographic material that is more or less degrading to women.

Secondly, both men and women differentiate simple explicit sex from sex which occurs in a context of inequality and subordination. This point indicates a need for caution when interpreting studies which are not specific in describing non-violent but degrading
pornographic stimuli. As noted previously, many of the studies which had conflicting findings regarding the effects of category B pornography, did not specify exactly what material was being used to comprise the category of degrading.

These findings also challenge accusations made by many liberals who have claimed that anti-pornography feminists have not shown a distinction between erotic material and pornography, and are therefore assuming the same position as conservatives who want all sexually explicit material banned. Clearly, men and women do not find all non-violent sexual activity to be equally offensive.

Third, contrary to the assertions of Zillmann (1989), the theme of availability, which depicts female hypersexuality and insatiability, was not viewed by either male or female subjects as reflecting the ultimate disrespect for women, and thereby embodying degradation of women. Availability was rated less degrading than all of the subordination themes, more degrading than status reduction and unreciprocated sex and equally as degrading as the other half of the themes, except sexual explicitness per se. This provides support for Cowan's (1990) argument that blatant displays of female sexuality
do not alone constitute degradation.

The male ratings of degradingness provide support for a feminist interpretation of non-violent degrading pornography. As noted previously, the context of sexually explicit behavior, rather than the simple display of sex itself, has been the focus of feminist concerns. Specifically, feminists who are more politically oriented (Dworkin & MacKinnon, 1988) seem to have pinpointed the most degrading elements (i.e., objectification of women, as well as the servile positions they are given in scenes). The definition outlined by the Meese Commission also emphasized depictions of humiliation, subordination, or the existence of someone solely for the sexual gratification of another when defining non-violent degrading pornography.

Male subjects in this study identified the themes of dominance and objectification, submission, and penis worship which clearly capture such subordination. Although penis worship has not been noted in most discourse among feminists, its male-centered intent, as well as the servile physical positioning of men and women in the clips, represents the servility and depersonalization of women, to which many feminists refer (Cowan, 1990; Dworkin &
MacKinnon, 1988; Longino, 1980; Steinem, 1980). Additionally, as noted by Cowan (1990), fellatio is not the central element of the penis worship theme, but rather the main focus is on the male's ejaculation onto the faces, stomach and buttocks of the women in these scenes. The women, in turn, are depicted as being in a state of euphoria during this time, and hence the notion of worship of the penis/semen is depicted.

The fact that both the themes which grouped together as subordination and the themes which grouped as inequalities showed overlap regarding differentiation seems to support Steinem's (1980) notion that degradation of women in pornography occurs on a continuum. Some instances of degradation are clearly discernible, with roles of dominator and subordinant readily apparent. Other instances, however, are more subtle, with perhaps economic, status, or age differentials less noticeable.

One unexpected finding was that men did not differentiate submission from the three other most degrading themes, whereas women did. Although this finding is contrary to the findings of Cowan (1990), the rating of submission with other forms of subordination is not surprising in light of the
theme's content. The submission clips for both videos depicted a typical rape myth scenario, with the female saying "no" to the male's sexual advances, but really meaning "yes". Ultimately she comes to desire him. When put in the context of men and women's relative ratings of other themes, this finding seems to indicate that men are able to identify a rape myth scenario more readily than women.

A possible explanation for the women rating submission significantly less degrading than the three most degrading themes was presented by Cowan (1990). She noted that the submission clips contained a large number of facial shots of the female experiencing pleasure. For women this may have been a refreshing humanization of female sexuality. Regarding the men's rating of submission, it may be that the social climate now seems to find people becoming more aware of rape and rape myths. In this sense, the male responses may be due to recent exposure to both a greater amount and more accurate information regarding what actually constitutes rape. It should be noted, however, that women rated submission more degrading than did men.
Ratings of Arousal

Men's ratings of arousal showed only marginal differentiation of themes, with a difference from highest to lowest of only 1.39. The most exciting theme (submission) was significantly different from the least exciting theme (status reduction). However, no other themes differed in their level of arousal.

The female subjects in Cowan's (1990) study differentiated much more clearly between themes. Interestingly, the women indicated that submission and equal sex were the two most exciting themes. They also found these themes to be significantly more exciting than all other themes. The male subjects in the current study similarly rated equal sex and submission among the more exciting themes. However, as can be noted in Table 4, several other themes, including those which were rated most degrading (e.g. penis worship, objectification and dominance) had remarkably similar means. That submission was rated among the most exciting themes is understandable according to Cowan's explanation regarding the display of female pleasure in this particular theme. However, in comparing the male arousal means with the degrading means, it is alarming to note that the themes rated
most degrading, with the exception of explicit sex, were also those rated most arousing, although this was not significantly so.

**Correlations of Degrading and Arousal Measure**

Correlations between degradingness and arousal ratings indicated that in only four of the nine themes did men indicate that the more degrading a theme was the less exciting they found it. This finding is not strong support for the predicted outcome which was that material which is highly offensive should be rated significantly less exciting. This may become clear when the purpose of pornography is examined. Given that most x-rated video tapes do contain some element of female subordination (Cowan et.al. 1988), it could be argued that men who enjoy pornography are those who also enjoy seeing women degraded.

It is interesting, however, that penis worship, the most clearly male centered theme yielded the strongest negative correlation of all themes. This seems to indicate that men who can see past the display of self-centered pleasure the men in the clip are depicted as experiencing, may be able to see that this pleasure is, in fact, asymmetrical. The male's pleasure occurs at the expense and degradation of the
female counterpart. Perhaps in understanding this imbalance, men who identified the theme as more degrading also saw the degradation being depicted.

This finding does not hold true for all themes, however. It is disquieting that only four themes were significantly negatively correlated on degrading and arousal measures. Further, a positive correlation was found for dominance, indicating that the more degrading men rated this theme, the more exciting they found it to be. Albeit frightening, the implications of this finding do support a feminist interpretation of the status of male and female sexuality. Many feminist writers have clearly noted that without the debasement, humiliation and degradation of women, pornography would simply not exist (Longino, 1980). According to Steinem (1980), in the absence of dominance and inequality, erotica would constitute the category of sexually explicit material.

Dworkin and MacKinnon (1988) similarly note that the domination, subordination, and objectification of women is called "sex" in pornography. In a sense, sex is a tool by which misogynistic propaganda is manifested and thereby espoused. It is this relationship between domination
and sexual arousal that has been used numerous times to explain the dynamics of rape (Brownmiller 1975).

Cowan's study with women indicated significant negative correlations for all nine themes. Women then, contrary to rape myths, are not excited by the notion of being degraded. The difference between the relationship of exciting and degrading material among men and women may be explained in terms of the status of the characters involved in each theme. In all themes representing both subordination and inequality, males held the position of power or status, and were the center of the sexual experience.

This finding is consistent with the Cowan, Levy, Lee and Snyder (1988) content analysis which indicated that in more instances males held positions of dominance or power. Similarly, the Meese Commission specified that in most cases, women were the targets of debasement, humiliation and degradation in non-violent but degrading pornography (U.S. Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, 1985). In terms of power, the different correlations for women and men are understandable, since in general, higher positions of power tend to be more desirable, and men tend to assume these higher status positions in this society.
Therefore, it may be difficult for men to have empathy for a degraded position in sexual relationships, since they do not generally experience them in day to day life.

**Sex Differences in Degrading and Exciting Measures**

Evaluations of sex differences in measures of degradingness supported the prediction that men would find all nine themes significantly less degrading than women. In terms of power differentials and the self-servingness of pornography for men, these results are not surprising. Research has also supported the notion that men are able to objectify women, whereas, the reverse does not seem to be true (Mosher & Abramson, 1977). Additionally, Cowan and Stahly (in press) have noted that college women view pornography more negatively and would have it controlled more than college men.

Evaluations of sex differences for ratings of arousal indicated that all themes except for explicit sex and submission were rated as more exciting to men than women. Two points should be addressed regarding this. First, although men did not vary greatly in their ratings of arousal (see Table 7), women's
ratings for equal sex and submission were significantly higher than all other themes. Additionally, these means were the only themes to approach the men's arousal level.

Secondly, that neither men nor women rated availability among the most degrading themes refutes the argument by Zillmann (1989) that female hypersexuality and promiscuity are the primary elements of degradation in non-violent degrading pornography. Perhaps the rating of availability with the inequality group for degradingness reflects the two conflicting messages displayed in the theme. For example, the women are depicted as non-discriminating, and eager to do anything to attain sexual satisfaction. In one of the clips, the makeup and dress of the women was such as to clearly represent the women as "whore". Without a doubt, this image would be offensive to many. On the other hand, the women in these scenes did have some level of control over their own sexuality. This control was manifested in behavior not normally expected of traditional females, but rather behavior traditionally seen as male. The ambiguity in these clips, for example the woman displaying both unacceptable female behavior,
yet quite acceptable male behavior, may be what brought about the somewhat "ambivalent" ratings of degrading on this measure. Future research should identify the role of female initiation on judgments about what is both degrading and arousing to women.

Conclusions

Although strong support for a feminist interpretation of pornography was found in both the current study and that of Cowan (1990), as with any study using college students as subjects, caution should be used when generalizing to other populations. Additionally, the use of commercial films for stimulus materials makes isolation of any one theme extremely difficult. Investigators should take care in isolating themes such as domination which often contain enough aggressive elements to borderline violence.

The fact that the current study described each theme to subjects prior to their viewing may have confounding implications. For example, subjects may have responded to the demand characteristics of the stimuli, rather than their personal interpretations of what the films constituted. Research in the future
should present the themes unconstrained by a provided
definition, investigate other themes in pornography as
well as include violent and erotic material in con-
trast to degrading pornography.

Although this study is somewhat limited as far
as interpretation, the implications for the findings
are enormous. The debate on the effects of non-
violent but degrading pornography has entered almost
every forum of society. Theoretical as well as
empirical debates still rage, with some investigators
claiming that unless paired with violence, pornography
is harmless (Donnerstein, Linz & Penrod 1987).

Others (Zillmann, 1982; Zillmann & Bryant, 1989) have
found strong attitudinal effects for what they term
"common pornography", however, the stimuli used for
these studies has been, for the most part, not
categorically specified in terms of theme content.

In contrast, Check (1989) has also found
attitudinal effects of degrading pornography, and in
this study erotica was separated from degrading
further distinguished pornographic material, and found
that themes commensurate to the current study's
subordination and status inequalities were rated more
degrading that material which depicted availability.
These conflicting results undoubtedly call for a more clear operational definition of what exactly the term degrading implies. Decisions about the legality of pornography are often based on social science research; however, if social scientists continue to taint stimuli with their own interpretation of what is degrading, conflicting evidence will continue to emerge in social science research.

An interesting fact is that in defining category B pornography, the Meese Commission came remarkably close to pinpointing the themes that both men and women find to be most degrading to women. However, without the empirical support of social scientists, legislation regarding this was not passed. Dworkin & MacKinnon's (1988) ordinance was aimed at creating such legislation; however, this bill was not passed because sufficient evidence was lacking, as well as the nations current obsession with First Amendment rights, protecting pornography as free speech (Dworkin & MacKinnon, 1988).

The American court systems' position on pornography differs vastly from the Canadian court system, which has found that the fact that some pornography degrades women constitutes harm, and that harm to women suffices as a counter to free
expression. Additionally, the Canadian court was able to differentiate between simply erotic stimuli and degrading material. The testimony of James Check lent credence to this distinction and enabled the court to separate constitutionally "obscene" material, which does limit freedom of expression, from erotic material which does not. Interestingly, the Meese Commission was also able to distinguish such categories, however, when faced with the problem of degrading pornography, the U.S.'s judicial system has yet to limit free speech as a protection to women from the potential harm of such material.

Future research which attempts to gain a consensus as to what constitutes degradation needs to continue if decisions about the effects of category B pornography are to be made. Until the term degrading pornography represents specific and discernible material, the results of studies on the effects of non-violent but degrading pornography will be called into question regarding both their validity and reliability.
APPENDIX A

Solicitation and Initial Instructions

Pornography Study: Male Volunteers Needed

The purpose of this study is to investigate men's reactions to various aspects of non-violent pornography. We are interested in discovering which aspects of pornography men find to be the most exciting, degrading, dehumanizing, boring, etc. Participants will be asked to view and evaluate sexually explicit videotapes and to complete an anonymous attitudinal questionnaire. All subjects will be ensured complete privacy while viewing the videotapes and names will not appear on any of the materials. Because the videotapes are very sexually explicit excerpts from pornographic films, please volunteer to participate only if you feel comfortable with the idea of viewing sexually explicit material. Also we want to forewarn you that you may find some of the scenes upsetting.

Participation will involve about 90 minutes of your time: you will be given a questionnaire to take home and complete at your convenience, and will be scheduled to return for an hour to privately view the
videotapes. At the end of this session, you will be provided with information about the background and importance of the study and will have the opportunity to discuss with the researchers any questions or concerns you may have. Group results of the study when it is completed will also be made available for interested participants.

We would greatly appreciate your involvement in this study. If you are interested in being a participant, please pick up a questionnaire and sign up for a viewing session. The questionnaires are located outside of Dr. Gloria Cowan's office, PS-112. It is important that you complete the questionnaire before attending the viewing session. The viewing session will be held in B-329 (on the third floor of the Biology Building). Please do not sign up for a session unless you are sure you will be able to attend at that time. Please remember to bring you completed questionnaire with you to the viewing session.
APPENDIX B

Questionnaire

I.D. ________ Age on last birthday_____

Marital status: single_____ married_____
                divorced/separated_____

Living with significant other: yes_____ no_____

Sexual orientation:  Heterosexual____  homosexual____
                    bisexual____

Ethnic background:  Black____  White____
                     Hispanic____
                    Asian____  other_____

Do you have children?  yes____  no_____

If yes, boy(s)____  girl(s)____

How often do you participate in religious activities?

1. Never____   4. About once a month____
2. At major holidays____  5. About once a week____
3. Several times a year____  6. More than once a week____

How important is religion in your life?

1. Not at all important____  4. Quite important____
2. Slightly important____  5. Very important____
3. Somewhat important____  6. Extremely important____

Do you consider yourself a fundamentalist or born-again Christian?  Yes____  no_____

Which of the following best describes your political orientation?

1. Far left____   4. Conservative____
2. Liberal____   5. Far right____
3. Moderate____   6. Other____
Would you call yourself a feminist?
1. Not at all ____  Pretty much____
2. Slightly_____  Definitely____
3. Somewhat_____

How often have you viewed pornography (x-rated material)?
1. Never______
2. Very little (once or twice)_____
3. Some (three to five times)_____
4. Quite a bit (ten to twenty times)_____
5. Often (more than twenty times)____

Age and circumstances of first viewing?

________________________________________________________

Have you seen an anti-pornography presentation, read any anti-pornography literature, or heard an anti-pornography lecture?

yes____ no _____

In general, which is more important to you?

Individual right and freedoms_______
Responsibility to the welfare of others_______

Rate the extent of your sexual experience:

1. No experience______ 4. Quite experienced____
2. Little experience_____ 5. Very experienced____
3. Some experience_______

For those with sexual experience, age of first genital sexual experience_____

Have you experienced: (check if yes)
Self-simulation to orgasm___________
Orgasm with someone of the same sex_______
Orgasm with someone of the other sex
Sexual intercourse (penile-vaginal penetration)
Receiving oral genital stimulation
Giving oral genital stimulation
Receiving anal stimulation
Giving anal stimulation

How many sexual partners have you had?

1. 0 5. More than 5 and less than 10
2. 1 6. More than 10 and less than 20
3. 2 7. More than I can count

Is sexuality an important or unimportant part of your life?

1. Very unimportant 4. Slightly important
2. Slightly unimportant 5. Somewhat important
3. Somewhat unimportant 6. Very important

I have been in a situation where I tried to get sexual intercourse with a woman when she didn't want to by threatening to use physical force (twisting her arm, holding her down, etc.).

True False

How likely would you be to commit rape if you could be assured that no one would know and in no way could you be punished?

Not at all somewhat somewhat likely likely
very likely unlikely likely likely

We would like to know if you have experienced any kind of sexual or other abuse in your life. Please check if you have been:

forced to have sex against your will
sexually abused as a child (under 18)
APPENDIX C: Reaction Forms

Sexually Explicit Behavior

Sexual activity that is explicit and mutual without indicating an affectionate personal relationship between the two people.

Please write the number in the space before each descriptive phrase which best represents your judgment about the selection you have seen. Use the following scale.

1--2--3--4--5--6--7--8--9--10--11--12--13--14
not at all  extremely

____ 1. Sexually arousing _____ 7. Offensive
____ 2. Stimulating _____ 8. Aggressive
____ 4. Educational _____ 10. Disgusting
____ 5. Realistic _____ 11. Dehumanizing
____ 6. Obscene _____ 12. Affectionate
____ 13. Exciting

How well do you think the selection you viewed illustrated the sexual explicitness category listed on the top of this page?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7
not at all  extremely well

Did the woman show sexual pleasure?____yes_____no

If yes, do you think the sexual pleasure was real or faked?
______ real ______ faked

Additional Comments:

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Status Reduction

Sexual activity that incorporates the idea that a high status female can be reduced to a purely sexual being.

Please write the number in the space before each descriptive phrase which best represents your judgment about the selection you have seen. Use the following scale.

1--2--3--4--5--6--7--8--9--10--11--12--13--14
not at all extremely

1. Sexually arousing 7. Offensive
2. Stimulating 8. Aggressive
4. Educational 10. Disgusting
5. Realistic 11. Dehumanizing
6. Obscene 12. Affectionate
13. Exciting

How well do you think the selection you viewed illustrated the sexual explicitness category listed on the top of this page?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not at all extremely well

Did the woman show sexual pleasure?____yes____no

If yes, do you think the sexual pleasure was real or faked?
________real____faked

Additional Comments:
Availability

Sexual activity showing that the female is available to anyone who wants her. She is nondiscriminating.

Please write the number in the space before each descriptive phrase which best represents your judgment about the selection you have seen. Use the following scale.

1--2--3--4--5--6--7--8--9--10--11--12--13--14
not at all                extremely

_____ 1. Sexually arousing            _____ 7. Offensive
_____ 2. Stimulating                _____ 8. Aggressive
_____ 4. Educational                _____10. Disgusting
_____ 5. Realistic                  _____11. Dehumanizing
          _____13. Exciting

How well do you think the selection you viewed illustrated the sexual explicitness category listed on the top of this page?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7
not at all                extremely well

Did the woman show sexual pleasure?____yes_____no

If yes, do you think the sexual pleasure was real or faked?
_______real_______faked

Additional Comments:
Semen/Penis Worship

Sexual activity that revolves around worship of the penis and the ejaculate (semen) is especially central to the female's pleasure.

Please write the number in the space before each descriptive phrase which best represents your judgment about the selection you have seen. Use the following scale.

1--2--3--4--5--6--7--8--9--10--11--12--13--14
not at all extremely

_____1. Sexually arousing _____ 7. Offensive
_____2. Stimulating 8. Aggressive
_____4. Educational 10. Disgusting
_____5. Realistic 11. Dehumanizing
_____6. Obscene 12. Affectionate
_____ 13. Exciting

How well do you think the selection you viewed illustrated the sexual explicitness category listed on the top of this page?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 not at all extremely well

Did the woman show sexual pleasure? ___yes___no

If yes, do you think the sexual pleasure was real or faked?  ____real____faked

Additional Comments:
Dominance

Sexual activity and the related scenario that explicitly shows that the man is dominant. He may command her to do what he wishes or insult her without any regard for her desires. She may be pictured as powerless.

Please write the number in the space before each descriptive phrase which best represents your judgment about the selection you have seen. Use the following scale.

1--2--3--4--5--6--7--8--9--10--11--12--13--14 not at all extremely

_____1. Sexually arousing _____ 7. Offensive
_____2. Stimulating _____ 8. Aggressive
_____4. Educational _____ 10. Disgusting
_____5. Realistic _____ 11. Dehumanizing

_____13. Exciting

How well do you think the selection you viewed illustrated the sexual explicitness category listed on the top of this page?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 not at all extremely well

Did the woman show sexual pleasure? _____yes_____no

If yes, do you think the sexual pleasure was real or faked?

_______real_______faked

Additional Comments:
Status Inequality

Sexual activity and the accompanying scenario that indicates inequality. The woman appears to have less power than the man; she may be younger, less educated, less intelligent, etc.

Please write the number in the space before each descriptive phrase which best represents your judgment about the selection you have seen. Use the following scale.

1--2--3--4--5--6--7--8--9--10--11--12--13--14
not at all  extremely

_____ 1. Sexually arousing  _____ 7. Offensive
_____ 2. Stimulating  _____ 8. Aggressive
_____ 4. Educational  _____ 10. Disgusting
_____ 5. Realistic  _____ 11. Dehumanizing
       _____ 13. Exciting

How well do you think the selection you viewed illustrated the sexual explicitness category listed on the top of this page?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not at all extremely well

Did the woman show sexual pleasure?_____yes_____no

If yes, do you think the sexual pleasure was real or faked?
   _______real______faked

Additional Comments:
Submission

Sexual activity that begins with the female's unwillingness to participate and end with her loving it. In this category, "no" ultimately means "yes".

Please write the number in the space before each descriptive phrase which best represents your judgment about the selection you have seen. Use the following scale.

1--2--3--4--5--6--7--8--9--10--11--12--13--14
not at all             extremely

_____ 1. Sexually arousing  _____ 7. Offensive
_____ 2. Stimulating       _____ 8. Aggressive
_____ 4. Educational       _____10. Disgusting
_____ 5. Realistic         _____11. Dehumanizing

_____13. Exciting

How well do you think the selection you viewed illustrated the sexual explicitness category listed on the top of this page?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7
not at all         extremely well

Did the woman show sexual pleasure?_____yes_____no

If yes, do you think the sexual pleasure was real or faked?

_______real_______faked

Additional Comments:
Objectification

Sexual activity which treats the female as an object or plaything. Dominance may be involved; however, the main idea is that the female body is a plaything or something to be used.

Please write the number in the space before each descriptive phrase which best represents your judgment about the selection you have seen. Use the following scale.

1--2--3--4--5--6--7--8--9--10--11--12--13--14
not at all extremely

_____1. Sexually arousing _____ 7. Offensive
_____2. Stimulating _____ 8. Aggressive
_____4. Educational _____ 10. Disgusting
_____5. Realistic _____ 11. Dehumanizing
_____13. Exciting

How well do you think the selection you viewed illustrated the sexual explicitness category listed on the top of this page?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
not at all extremely well

Did the woman show sexual pleasure? _____yes_____no

If yes, do you think the sexual pleasure was real or faked?______real______faked

Additional Comments:
Unreciprocated Sex

Sexual activity that is one-sided. The woman is used to satisfy the man's needs. Her gratification is not important.

Please write the number in the space before each descriptive phrase which best represents your judgment about the selection you have seen. Use the following scale.

1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10—11—12—13—14
not at all  extremely

____ 1. Sexually arousing ______ 7. Offensive
____ 2. Stimulating ________ 8. Aggressive
____ 4. Educational ________ 10. Disgusting
____ 5. Realistic ________ 11. Dehumanizing
____ 6. Obscene ________ 12. Affectionate

____ 13. Exciting

How well do you think the selection you viewed illustrated the sexual explicitness category listed on the top of this page?

1 ______ 2 ______ 3 ______ 4 ______ 5 ______ 6 ______ 7 extremely well
not at all

Did the woman show sexual pleasure? ______ yes ______ no

If yes, do you think the sexual pleasure was real or faked?
_______ real ______ faked

Additional Comments:
APPENDIX D

PORNOGRAPHY VIEWING SESSION: INSTRUCTIONS

In this session you will be viewing and evaluating excerpts from pornographic films. We chose these particular scenes because we thought they were good examples of certain themes commonly found in pornography. For each selection, you will be given a description of the theme which we feel is best illustrated by that scene. After viewing each scene, you will be asked to complete a reaction sheet. When completing the rating sheet, please describe your reaction to what you have viewed. In other words, please do not react to the concept of the stated theme, but rather to the theme as it is portrayed in the particular scene you have just watched. Some of the themes will overlap— that is, more than one theme may be present in a single selection— but please try to concentrate on the aspects of the scene which correspond to the stated theme. You may find that you do not agree that the stated theme is even depicted in the scene— you will be given an opportunity to communicate this on the reaction sheet.
There are no right or wrong answers on the reaction sheets. It is very important that you respond as you really feel. Please be as discriminating and specific in your ratings as you can. Keep in mind that we are interested in comparing your reactions to the different themes. We realize that after you have viewed several selections, you may begin to get a better feel for the range of your reactions. If you find that you want to change an answer on a previous reaction, feel free to do this. Also, we would like to encourage you to make as many additional comments as possible; we are very interested in any additional thoughts or reactions that you may want to share with us.

Each selection is on a separate videotape and is labeled by number. You will be given a list describing the order in which you should view the videotapes, and the reaction sheets will also be in that order. Please be careful to watch each videotape in the assigned order.

Remember that your participation is strictly voluntary. If you strongly feel unable to continue at any stage, please feel free to stop.

1. When you are ready to view the first selection,
insert the first videotape and press the "play" button on the videocassette recorder. When the scene is over, press the "stop" button and then eject the cassette.

2. Complete the reaction sheet for selection.

3. Give yourself enough time so you no longer responding to the previous scene. When you feel comfortable to continue, insert the next videotape.

4. Continue this sequence at your own pace. If at any time you have any questions, please contact the research assistant.
APPENDIX E

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

Dear Participant:

Thank you very much for your participation in this study. While we cannot provide you at this time with the information about the results of the study, we would like to give you some background information about the research so that you can have some appreciation for its importance. We would like you to know that your responses in this study are valuable in contributing to a better understanding of how women respond to pornography and in developing measures necessary for further research in this area.

The 1986 Commission on Pornography defined four categories of sexually explicit material: 1) sexually violent material, 2) non-violent but degrading materials, 3) non-violent and non-degrading material, and 4) nudity. Most of the research on pornography has focused on the first category—the fusion of sex and violence in x-rated movies. Although the fusion of sex and violence is important and clearly has effects on attitudes toward women, the impact of sexually explicit material which is not violent but which is
degrading to women has been relatively neglected. Current x-rated pornography contains images portraying subtle dominance and inequality far more frequently than explicit.

The few studies on degrading pornography have had mixed findings, with some studies finding a negative effect on attitudes toward women, and others not. This consistency in findings may be due, in part, to the difficulty and lack of consensus in defining the somewhat ambiguous term of degrading. Hopefully, by ascertaining what types of sexual depictions are considered to be degrading by women and men we can develop a set of sexually explicit excerpts which can be used by investigators wishing to study the effects of degrading pornography.

As you are probably now aware, viewing pornography can sometimes be an unpleasant experience. Many of the scenes which you viewed depicted lies about both men and women. Men are depicted as unaffectionate dominators with omnipotent sexual capabilities. Women are portrayed as enjoying the experience of being dominated, objectified, and abused in the service of male sexual desires. They are depicted as sexually promiscuous and indiscriminant.
which reinforces the misguided belief that some women will, and desire to, do anything to please any man sexually. Some of these scenes clearly supported the rape myth—this is, when a woman says "no", she really means "yes". It is important that you keep in mind that the men and women in these videotapes are just actors, being paid to do what they are told. In other words, the scenes on these videotapes are complete fantasy and do not realistically portray male or female sexuality. As you probably know, women do not enjoy being dehumanized, dominated, verbally abused, or raped. In the fantasy world of pornography, however, it becomes difficult to even recognize sexual abuse of women because pornography often show women enjoying and seeking out such abuse.

We want to be sure that you come away from this study knowing that there is nothing wrong with you if you are like the actors in these videotapes. Most people are not. On the other hand, do not be distressed if you did find these depictions at least mildly arousing because of the sexual explicitness of the scenes and the apparent enjoyment by the participants in the films. We do not want you to feel, therefore, that your responses were in any way
wrong or deviant.

We hope that this debriefing has been of some value to you. We are sorry if you were upset in any way by this experience and hope you gained an appreciation for the importance of studying the ways in which pornography can harm women. If you later have any questions please feel free to contact us. We greatly appreciate your generous contribution of time, energy, and honesty and hope that you found the experience interesting and educational.

PLEASE NOTE

Because of the nature of this research, it is important that other participants do not come to the experiment with specific expectations about the study as this might influence their responses. Therefore, we ask that you not discuss the research with anyone who might be in the study until after the data have been collected. Again, THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION.
REFERENCES


