



**WOMEN'S
SUPPORT
PROJECT**

**PORN – THE REALITY
BEHIND THE FANTASY**

The Women's Support Project sees pornography as a form of commercial sexual exploitation and part of the spectrum of violence against women.

Pornography is a multi million pound industry and produces 68 million search engine requests each day¹. It is now part of our popular culture, with images used in advertising, music videos and mainstream films and porn stars promoted as international celebrities. The porn industry produces more hardcore material that is both overtly cruel toward women and yet more widely accepted than ever. At the same time our culture denounces other forms of violence against women.

The dominant culture tries to justify pornography – saying that those who are anti-porn are somehow at fault, prudes, anti-sex, not “getting the message” or just “not with it”. This minimising of opposition acts as a silencing tactic and can deter people from becoming activists.

We have taken some commonly used arguments in favour of pornography and distinguished fact from fiction to support people taking action.

¹ Internet Filter Review, top ten reviews

People routinely assume that pornography is such a difficult and divisive issue because it's about sex. I think that's wrong. This culture struggles unsuccessfully with pornography because it is also about men's cruelty to women, and about the pleasure that men sometimes take in that cruelty. And that is much more difficult for everyone to face.

Robert Jensen, "A Cruel Edge"

Pornography is the undiluted essence of anti-female propoganda.

**Susan Brownmiller,
Against Our Will (1975)**

FICTION – IT'S JUST TWO PEOPLE HAVING SEX

We want a culture where people are sexually healthy and free of exploitation, coercion and violence. Pornography is a harmful product, produced to make profit. Viewing or making it is not a form of sexual expression or sexual liberation. The pornography industry distorts our conceptions of sex and sexuality and portrays women and girls as sexual objects, turning their bodies into commodities to be bought, sold and marketed in whatever form will make the most profit. The majority of mainstream pornography now contains extreme levels of violence, with almost all of this violence directed at women by men. This links violence with sexual arousal and can encourage men to think their arousal is mirrored in all women. Porn caters to and reflects this privilege back at men, creating and supporting a vicious circle. This narrow depiction of sexuality has now been normalised and is becoming more and more part of how the mainstream media depicts women.

FACT – One study examined 304 scenes from the most popular adult videos released in 2005 in the US. They found that 89.8% of the scenes included either verbal or physical aggression. 48% contained verbal aggression, mostly name-calling and insults, while 82.2% contained physical aggression. 94.4% of the aggressive acts were targeted at women.

(Robert Wosnitzer, Ana Bridges & Michelle Change (2008) *'Mapping the Pornographic Text: Content Analysis Research of Popular Pornography'*)

What's interesting about porn or strippers or any other kind of sex work is, you know, it's women whose job it is to impersonate lust or to fake arousal. The idea that you are going to get more in touch with your own authentic, personal, innate sexuality by imitating a woman who's job it is to imitate sexuality. I mean, you're getting pretty far removed from the real thing.

Ariel Levy – *The Price of Pleasure*
documentary

FICTION – IF YOU ARE ANTI-PORN THEN YOU ARE ANTI-SEX

We believe in sexual freedom for all people based on equality and consent. Pornography is not about sex – it is a medium that uses sexual activity to sell its products. Porn often portrays women-hating and violent misogynistic acts. Sex is about more than this disconnected narrow definition and understanding of sexuality. Sex can be about humanity, connection, tenderness, love and respect for the other. The prevalence of these images impacts on how society, and particularly young people, view women and sexual relationships. In a society where 1 in 4 women will experience violence and where there is a rape conviction rate of under 4%, the widespread availability of these images reinforces the attitudes that fuel this inequality.

FACT – In a study conducted by Malamuth, participants were exposed to less than five hours of pornography over a six-week period. This resulted in participants showing much more lenient attitudes towards rapists.

(Malamuth & Donnerstein, Pornography and Sexual Aggression, 1984)

One of the things about today's porn and the extreme market, the gonzo market, so many fans want to see so much more extreme stuff that I'm always trying to figure out ways to do something different. But it seems everybody wants to see a girl doing a d.p. now or a gang-bang... a lot of fans are becoming a lot more demanding about wanting to see the more extreme stuff.

Pornographer Jules Jordan as quoted by Robert Jensen in 'Getting Off' .

But if you're against pornography, are you against sex? That's like saying to me, if I'm critical of McDonalds, I'm against eating.
Gail Dines – The Price of Pleasure

FICTION – WHAT TURNS PEOPLE ON IS THEIR OWN BUSINESS

When pornography and pornified images are easily accessible and everywhere, it is no longer a private activity limited to the top shelf or a video at the back of a cupboard. It is part of mainstream media and advertising, it arrives in our email inboxes with or without our consent and our choice to NOT view this material is increasingly limited. Pornography impacts on everyone's lives, not just the consumers, and can influence our understanding of sex and our self-esteem. When pornography has broader impacts on our relationships and how we view our bodies and ourselves – then it cannot remain a purely personal matter just for consumers. Women are also hurt in the production of porn. When someone purchases or consumes porn they are supporting and fuelling a market for sexualised harm. Porn consumers cannot know the conditions and context in which all porn scenes and images are produced and there is no way of knowing if there was pressure, coercion or trickery involved.

We believe that censorship is not the answer but education, public forums and discussions with a human rights approach are more appropriate ways to challenge these misrepresentations.

FACT – Exposure to porn appears to increase the use of sexual coercion (Donnersmith Pornography: Its Effects on Violence Against Women 1984) and increases fantasies of rape (Malamuth, Rape Fantasies as a Function of Repeated Exposure to Sexual Violence, Archives of Sexual Behavior, 10 (1981): 33-47).

Telling someone who hates porn to “just not watch it” is rather like telling someone who worries about air pollution “just stop breathing”.

Oneangrygirl – feminist blogger

The truth is there is no fantasy in porn. It's all a lie. A closer look into the scenes of a porn star's life will show you a movie that the porn industry does not want you to see. Don't believe the lie anymore. Porn is nothing more than fake sex and lies on videotape. Trust me – I know.

Shelley Luben – former porn star

FICTION – WOMEN GET PAID AND CHOOSE TO BE IN PORN, THEY ARE NOT BEING EXPLOITED.

Yes, some people do choose to enter the porn industry and publicly endorse it, typically saying they do it because they love sex, because they feel good about their bodies, because it makes them feel powerful and liberated. It's important to remember that these women are "on the job", marketing for the industry. The average career span of a female performer is around a year having made just 4 or 5 films² and upward career progress in the industry is rarer for women than men. The empowerment for women involved is then questionable. Receiving payment is not a good indicator of whether someone is being exploited. "Glamourising" the industry and focusing on the lavish lifestyles of its members supports the myth of "easy money". Feminists recognise that women may choose to enter the industry but do not then choose the conditions under which they work. Women working in the porn industry have very few employment rights and they are often coerced into breaking their boundaries and taking part in more body punishing sex in order to produce more extreme images. Studies consistently show that high numbers of women in the porn industry have experienced sexual abuse as children or young adults, poverty, and homelessness and substance misuse. As in other areas of the sex industry, it is the people who buy, produce and control the porn industry who are making choices.

FACT – Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea infections among performers are 10X greater than that of 20-24 year olds. The risk and burden of sexually transmitted infections among porn performers are unacceptably high.
(Los Angeles Public Health Department)

² Fornander, Kjell (July 1992). "A Star is Porn". *Tokyo Journal*. Archived from the original on 2006-05-16.

To this day I still can't watch my own sex scenes.
Jenna Jameson, How to Make Love Like a Porn Star

Some girls are used in nine months or a year. An 18-year-old, sweet young thing, signs with an agency, makes five films in her first week. Five directors, five actors, five times five: she gets phone calls. A hundred movies in four months. She's not a fresh face any more. Her price slips and she stops getting phone calls. Then it's, 'Okay, will you do anal? Will you do gangbangs?' Then they're used up. They can't even get a phone call. The market forces of this industry use them up.
**Porn performer turned director
Jonathan Morgan**

FICTION – YOU CAN'T BAN PORN, THAT'S CENSORSHIP!

We favour education, awareness raising, public forums and discussions with a human rights approach as more appropriate ways to challenge these misrepresentations. No one has the right to exploit or sell women's bodies but many assume they have that privilege and entitlement. We believe in freedom of expression but this should not be at the cost of the human rights of women to be free from degrading and inhumane treatment. The notion of freedom of expression is exploited by pornographers as a way of justifying and profiting from violence against women.

FACT – The United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, specifically noted pornography in a report for the UN Human Rights Commission stating that it “glamorises the degradation and maltreatment of women and asserts their subordinate function as mere receptacles for male lust.”

(Radhika Coomaraswamy (1994) www1.umn.edu/humanrts/commission/thematic51/42.htm)

FICTION – PORN IS HARMLESS ENTERTAINMENT FOR ADULTS

Porn is exploitation, not entertainment. It is mainly accessed via the Internet which is an extremely easy and cheap way to distribute porn and as a result the content has become ever more extreme to compete with rapidly increasing demand. You can access extreme images depicting rape and violence in just two clicks from a search engine. This content is often free, anonymous and easily available but this does not mean it is harmless for those who are expected to endure more extreme sex, those who are aroused by it or for women and children in general. Age verification systems are not used and young people can access it both intentionally and inadvertently.

FACT – 42% of a nationally representative sample of 1,500 Internet users in the US aged 10 to 17 had been exposed to pornography in the last year, with two-thirds reporting only unwanted exposure. The research also found an increase in unwanted exposure from 26% between 1999 and 2000, to 34% in 2005. (Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2007: 247-257)

USEFUL SITES

www.stoppornculture.org/home.html
www.oneangrygirl.net/antiporn.html
www.nopornnorthampton.org/
www.againstpornography.org/
www.antipornographyactivist.blogspot.com/
www.object.org.uk/
www.talkintrash.com/playboy/PB.toc.html
www.throughtheflame.org/
www.genderberg.com/
www.aboutface.org/

CHALLENGING DEMAND

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