

# 10 points summarising the research on pornography and the pornography industry

**1. Sexual violence is now the rule rather than the exception in commercial pornography;** as far back as ten years ago around 90 % of the scenes in the most popular pornographic films in the U.S. contained physical aggression (Bridges et al. 2010, 1075–77). Verbal aggression also occurred in 48.7 % of all scenes, most frequently with degrading and dehumanizing name calling such as “bitch” and “slut” (ibid. 1077). In addition to aggression, 41 % of all scenes showed, for example, so-called ass-to-mouth – i.e. where a woman performs oral sex on a man immediately after he has penetrated her anally (ibid. 1074).

**2. Psychological experiments have shown that consumers become desensitized and seek out more extreme material,** (see Zillman & Bryant 1986), which might explain why acts of aggression and more extreme elements appear to have increased in the pornography in recent years. Even in the 1980s researchers were forced to cut together excerpts from a number of different films in order to conduct their experiments since it was impossible to find a full-length pornographic movie that did not contain dehumanisation, degradation or violence (Check & Guloien 1989, 163) – a fact which also illustrates the minimal demand for “alternative” gender-equal pornography.

**3. Consumption of both violent and non-violent pornography makes men among the normal population more sexually aggressive,** and also leads to attitudes that promote or trivialize violence against women (rape myths), as new research which has analysed almost 50 years of experimental and naturalistic quantitative studies on the link between consumption of pornography and men’s violence against women shows (for meta studies see for example Wright, Tokunaga, & Kraus 2016; Allen et al. 1995a; 1995b; Hald, Malamuth, & Yen 2010; for analytical literature reviews and large surveys see for example Malamuth, Addison, & Koss 2000; Foubert, Brosi, & Bannon 2011). This is confirmed by Unizon’s women’s shelters whose experience from their contacts with women who have been subjected to men’s violence shows that pornography acts as a catalyst and inspiration for men’s sexual aggressions and negative attitudes towards women.

**4. Psychologists have shown that consumers tend to categorise women as either promiscuous or asexual, “whores” or “Madonnas”,** and the commercial pornography reinforces such impressions of the promiscuity which then becomes a target for aggression and is also used to justify the

trivialisation of men's violence against women; these psychological processes explain why non-violent pornography gives rise to consumption effects similar to those of violent pornography (see Zillman & Weaver 1989, 109–21; Leonard and Taylor 1983). In simulated rape trials, people who have watched common non-violent pornography over a period of several weeks recommend prison sentences half as long as the control group (Zillman & Bryant 1982, 17 tbl.3; cf. Zillman & Weaver 1989, 115–21 & tbl.4.3, after short-term exposure).

**5 • Men who consume pornography have been reported to be more sexually violent and controlling than abusive men who have not been reported to consume pornography** in several surveys where women in women's shelters and in the care chain have been asked about this (Simmons, Lehmann, & Collier-Tenison 2008; Shope 2004; Cramer et al. 1998). Similar facts have long been presented by various practitioners (police, prosecutors, providers of treatment, women's shelters and others) who have given evidence in public hearings in the U.S. (see for example Massachusetts Hearing 1992; Att'n General 1986, 197–223; Indianapolis Hearing 1984; Minneapolis Hearing 1983).

**6 • Men who use more pornography are also statistically more inclined to purchase sex than other men** (see for example Monto & McRee 2005, 515, 520–23; Farley et al. 2011, 374). A number of more recent quantitative interview studies show that a majority of sex purchasers want prostituted persons to imitate pornography that they have seen and that other women refuse to take part in (see for example Farley et al. 2015, 13; 2011, 374; Durchslag & Goswami 2008, 12–13). A study in Cambodia which openly asked questions about this found that many sex purchasers force prostituted persons to accept gang rapes, anal sex or other "styles" that sex purchasers have seen in pornography (Farley et al. 2012, 26–31). Public investigations in both Sweden and the U.S. have previously reported, among other things, gang rapes which have been inspired by pornography consumption and pornography production (SOU 1995:15 pp. 96–97; Att'n General 1986, 204). There are some unreliable studies that attempt to draw conclusions about the effects of pornography based on aggregate statistics on the number of reported sexual crimes (for criticism, see Malamuth & Pitpitan 2007, 138–41; Kingston & Malamuth 2011). Reports, however, cannot be equated with prevalence. Reports are influenced by more variables than those which influence individuals, in particular over time when many changes are taking place in society. It would be no surprise if reported cases of sexual assault declined with the rise in the accessibility and consumption of pornography, since the more pornography that exist the more sexual assault will be normalised (cf. Waltman 2014, 129–38).

**7 • The knowledge gained over 30 years shows how pornography exploits social vulnerability to recruit participants.** It is no surprise that research and reports have previously shown how the population that is exploited to participate in pornography shares the same demographic characteristics as those who are exploited in prostitution in general: for example, harsh poverty, sexual abuse in childhood, experience of foster care and homelessness (e.g. Att'n General 1986, 242). A more recent study of women participants in pornographic productions which was compared with a demographically matched control group from California thus found that 21 % of the participants stated they had been put



into foster care by the authorities compared with 4% of the control group; 37 % of the participants said they had had “forced sex” before the age of 18 compared with 13% of the control group; and 24 % of the participants said their household received social security benefits compared with 12 % of the control group (Grudzen et al. 2011, 641–42).

**8. Pornography production appears to be at least as harmful as other forms of prostitution.** Actors who take part are frequently in prostitution; a study of 854 prostituted persons in nine countries where 2/3 demonstrated the same levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as Vietnam veterans and torture victims seeking care (Farley et al. 2003, 44–48, 56)<sup>1</sup> is a good example of this. No less than 49 % of the 854 had replied that they had been exploited in pornography, and these same people were diagnosed with “significantly more severe symptoms” of PTSD than the remaining 51 % (Farley 2007, 146, 422 n.298). Pornography thus reinforces the harmful effects of the prostitution – something which is also reflected in the many violent and degrading films (see above).

**9. Around two-thirds of young men in Sweden and similar countries are thought to watch pornography on a regular basis from several times a month to every day;** in contrast, over three-quarters of young women are thought not to watch pornography regularly at all, and those that do watch do so to a much lesser degree than men (see Waltman 2014, 33–36, research summary).

**10. A majority of Swedish women want to see a much stronger regulation of pornography,** in effect, zero tolerance, and half of the women in the U.S. want the same (see for example Røhdén, Nyman, & Edström 2012, 116; Lykke & Cohen 2015; cf. Johansson & Habul 2006, on young voters). Together with what we know about the harmful effects of pornography, the high prevalence of pornography consumption among young men implies that a new generation of men with stronger tendencies towards sexual aggression and attitudes which promote and trivialise men’s violence against women is created every day – a development that it is absolutely vital to counteract if we are to have a chance of creating an equal society.

**More information about the consequences of pornography for the exercising of sexual violence, its links to prostitution and an analysis of the political proposals can be found in the report**

*Pornography and Prostitution:* <http://unizon.se/aktuellt/porr-och-prostitution>.

Part two of the report was written by Dr. Max Waltman, whose PhD thesis is entitled *The Politics of Legal Challenges to Pornography: Canada, Sweden, and the United States* (Waltman 2014).

**Gail Dines documentary Pornland - how the porn industry has hijacked our sexuality** can be seen at: [www.unizon.se/pornland](http://www.unizon.se/pornland)



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## About Unizon

Unizon represents over 130 women's shelters, young women empowerment centres and other forms of support in Sweden which work for a gender equal society free from violence.

Our member organisations support, protect, prevent and advocate using their knowledge of violence, gender and power and the relationship between them.

With over 6800 members the Unizon member organisations are the biggest popular movement in Sweden for a gender equal society free from violence and for women and girls sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

The Unizon shelters had over 92 000 support contacts in 2017. The Unizon young women empowerment centres and youth empowerment centres are the biggest actor for support online in Sweden.

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