

## **Pornography, Violence, and the Politics of Pleasure: A Feminist Inquiry into Power, Psychology, and Women's Survival**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines pornography through a feminist lens to argue that mainstream pornographic representation functions as a cultural site where violence, pleasure, and power intersect in deeply gendered ways. Rather than treating pornography as private fantasy or individual choice, the study positions it as a social text that shapes sexual psychology, normalizes inequality, and disproportionately burdens women with the costs of male pleasure. By asking critical questions about consent, desire, and representation, the paper explores how pornography constructs male-centered pleasure while rendering female bodies as sites of availability, endurance, and risk. The analysis further highlights how women navigate survival within a pornified culture that blurs boundaries between desire and domination. The paper concludes that pornography is not merely about sex, but about whose pleasure is legitimized, whose pain is eroticized, and how gendered power is reproduced through visual culture.

**Keywords:** Pornography, Feminism, Violence, Pleasure, Gender, Sexual Politics

Pornography is so common today that most people barely stop to think about it. It is easily available, openly discussed, and often defended as a matter of personal choice. But a simple question needs to be asked: if pornography is only private entertainment, why does it follow such fixed patterns about men and women? Feminist thinking starts exactly from this discomfort. It reminds us that sex does not exist outside society. What we desire, how we imagine pleasure, and whose bodies are shown and used are all shaped by the world we live in. Pornography does not come from nowhere. It is produced inside a culture where men usually have more power and women are expected to adjust, please, and endure. When we look closely, pornography repeatedly shows men as the ones who act, decide, and control the

situation, while women are shown as bodies meant to receive, accept, or submit. Over time, this teaches something very important—not just about sex, but about power. It teaches who is supposed to enjoy and who is supposed to be available. Pleasure, then, is no longer equal. It becomes something that belongs more to men, while women's discomfort, pain, or silence is treated as normal or even attractive. This is why feminists argue that pornography is not just fantasy. It quietly trains the mind.

This paper looks at pornography as a social force rather than a personal habit. It asks simple but uncomfortable questions. Why does violence appear so often in sexual images? Why is women's pain ignored or sexualized? How does repeated exposure shape what men expect from sex and what women feel they must tolerate to survive relationships? By focusing on violence, psychology, and unequal pleasure, this study tries to understand how pornography affects real lives—especially the lives of women who must negotiate intimacy in a world where porn often sets the rules. The aim is not to moralize, but to make visible what is usually hidden: the cost women pay when desire is shaped by inequality.

Is violence in pornography only about visible force—hitting, choking, or physical domination? Feminist thinking asks us to slow down and look deeper. What if violence does not always announce itself loudly? What if it appears quietly, wrapped in desire and normalized through repetition? Much of pornography does not rely on obvious brutality. Instead, it repeatedly presents women's submission, discomfort, silence, and emotional absence as erotic. Over time, this creates a troubling message: that inequality itself is sexy. Why does this matter? Because when a woman's pain is shown as attractive, and her refusal is rewritten as part of pleasure, violence stops looking like violence. It becomes routine. It becomes expected. Pornography often teaches that women may say no, look uncomfortable, or appear humiliated—but that these signs are not limits. They are signals to continue. In this way, consent is blurred, and resistance becomes something to overcome rather than respect.

Does this mean pornography directly causes people to become violent? Feminist analysis does not make such a simple claim. Instead, it asks a more serious question: what happens when a culture repeatedly eroticizes power imbalance? Cultural repetition matters. What we see again and again shapes what we consider normal, acceptable, or exciting. When inequality is sexualized, harm becomes difficult to name. Women's discomfort is dismissed as fantasy, and men's entitlement to pleasure is reinforced. The danger, then, is not only in

extreme images, but in the everyday scripts pornography provides about sex itself. It teaches that desire can exist without care, that pleasure does not require mutuality, and that silence is consent. Feminism insists that this is not harmless. When violence becomes invisible, it does not disappear—it simply becomes harder to challenge.

Why does pleasure in pornography so often seem to belong to men? This is one of the first questions feminist thinking asks, and once it is asked, it becomes hard to ignore. Most mainstream pornography is made in a way that assumes male desire as the starting point and the endpoint. The camera lingers where men are expected to look, scenes move at a pace that matches male arousal, and sex is considered “complete” when male satisfaction is reached. Where does that leave women? Their pleasure, if shown, often looks rehearsed—louder, faster, exaggerated—as if it must be proven rather than felt. So what are women learning from this? They learn that sex is something they provide, not something they own. They learn to read men’s responses carefully, to adjust, to please, to stay desirable. And what are men learning? That their desire is central, normal, and unquestionable. Over time, this shapes expectations beyond pornography. Pleasure becomes unequal: one side expects fulfillment, the other learns endurance. Feminism does not argue that desire is wrong or that pleasure should be denied. It asks a simpler, deeper question: *can pleasure be called free if it is built on imbalance?* Until desire becomes mutual rather than hierarchical, pornography will continue to teach inequality—quietly, persistently, and powerfully.

What happens to women’s desire when sexuality is constantly shaped by someone else’s expectations? Feminist psychology suggests that many women do not experience desire as something that simply arises from within. Instead, they learn to look at their own bodies from the outside, as if they are being watched. Pleasure becomes less about feeling and more about performing. Am I attractive enough? Am I responding the right way? Am I too much, or not enough? These questions quietly replace the simpler one: *What do I actually want?* Why does this create alienation? Because women are caught in a contradiction. They are expected to be sexually available, yet not fully autonomous. They should be desirable, but not openly desiring. They should enjoy sex, but only in ways that make others comfortable. Living inside this tension produces anxiety. Over time, many women struggle to separate genuine desire from learned behavior. What feels like choice is often adaptation.

How does pornography deepen this confusion? As one of the most powerful sexual scripts today, pornography presents a very narrow version of female pleasure. Women on screen appear endlessly ready, emotionally unaffected, and satisfied by acts designed primarily for male pleasure. These images leave little room for hesitation, negotiation, or complexity. When real women do not feel this way—and many do not—they often assume the problem lies within themselves. Feminism asks an uncomfortable but necessary question: can desire remain authentic when it grows under inequality? When pleasure is shaped by fear, expectation, and surveillance, it becomes difficult to trust it. Feminist thought argues that true desire requires safety, mutuality, and freedom from pressure. Without these conditions, desire does not disappear—but it becomes distorted, fragile, and often disconnected from the self.

Pornography is often defended with a simple question: *If everyone consents, what's the problem?* Feminist thinking does not dismiss consent—it asks a deeper question: *What kind of consent are we talking about, and under what conditions is it given?* Consent is not just a yes or no spoken in a moment; it is shaped long before that moment arrives. Can choice exist inside unequal systems? Feminism argues that choice is never neutral when power is uneven. When some people have money, safety, and options, and others have economic insecurity, limited opportunities, or social pressure, their “choices” do not carry the same weight. A decision made under financial stress or lack of alternatives may look voluntary, but it is still constrained. This does not mean women are powerless—it means the system is powerful.

What happens when women's bodies become commodities? In such conditions, consent can become procedural rather than meaningful. If the rules are followed, if a contract is signed, if a camera records a yes, the system declares everything ethical. But feminism asks: *Was there safety? Was there real freedom to refuse? Were there genuine alternatives?* Without these, consent risks becoming a technical formality that masks deeper exploitation. Does this mean feminism opposes sexual expression? No. Feminism supports sexual autonomy—but autonomy requires more than permission. It requires equality, dignity, and the ability to walk away without punishment or loss. Ethical sexuality is not only about agreement; it is about power being shared rather than imposed. Feminist critique therefore insists on a difficult truth: consent can exist alongside exploitation when inequality is

normalized. To protect freedom, society must look beyond individual choices and examine the structures that shape them. Only then can consent become not just legal, but meaningful.

What happens to women when pornography moves from screens into everyday life? Feminist thinking suggests that pornography does not stay private—it leaks into how women are looked at, spoken to, and treated in public. The images do not disappear when the video ends; they shape expectations about women’s availability, silence, and boundaries. A woman walking down the street, sitting in an office, or speaking in a classroom is often read through a sexual lens she did not choose. How do women respond to this environment? Mostly through constant calculation. Women learn to measure risk almost unconsciously: *What should I wear? How will this be interpreted? Is it safe to say no? Should I laugh this off or resist?* This everyday vigilance is not paranoia—it is survival. Pornified culture teaches that women’s bodies are open to commentary, access, and entitlement, and women adapt by becoming alert, cautious, and self-monitoring.

Why is this labour rarely acknowledged? Because survival work is invisible. There is no language for the mental exhaustion of always being aware, always managing boundaries, always anticipating danger. Feminism insists that this hidden labour is a social cost, one paid almost entirely by women. A culture that eroticizes inequality transfers the burden of safety onto those least protected by it. What does this mean for freedom and dignity? In a pornified culture, safety becomes conditional. Dignity becomes negotiable. Refusal carries risk—of ridicule, aggression, or punishment. Feminist analysis exposes this imbalance and asks an uncomfortable question: *Can a society claim sexual freedom when half its population survives by constant self-defense?* The answer feminism offers is clear: a culture that normalizes unequal pleasure and entitlement cannot offer equal freedom. Until women are allowed to exist without managing threat, survival will continue to replace desire, and caution will stand in for choice.

Does feminism reject sexual pleasure? This is one of the most common misunderstandings. Feminism does not oppose pleasure; it asks a different question—*whose pleasure, and at what cost?* Feminist thought does not want less desire, but better desire. It imagines a sexuality where pleasure grows out of mutual respect, care, and equality, not control or fear. What would such pleasure look like? It would treat consent as something alive and ongoing, not a one-time permission. It would see bodies as thinking, feeling

subjects rather than objects meant for use. Pleasure would not belong to one side while the other performs or endures. Instead, it would be shared, responsive, and open to communication. Can pornography reflect this vision? Some feminist pornography tries to do so by showing reciprocity, emotion, and real female desire. But even these efforts exist within a culture already shaped by patriarchy, which makes true change difficult. Images alone cannot transform desire if social conditions remain unequal. So what is feminism really asking for? Not censorship, but transformation. A transformation of how desire is learned, how pleasure is represented, and how bodies are valued. Feminism argues that sexual freedom is meaningful only when no one has to trade safety for pleasure, or silence for acceptance. Until then, reimagining pleasure remains not just a possibility, but a necessity.

When viewed through a feminist lens, pornography emerges not as harmless entertainment, but as a cultural force that quietly teaches lessons about power, desire, and gender. It does not merely show sex; it shapes how pleasure is imagined and who is entitled to it. By repeatedly centering male satisfaction and framing women as endlessly available, mainstream pornography normalizes inequality and carries it into everyday relationships, workplaces, and public spaces. The cost of this imbalance is paid largely by women, who must navigate desire alongside fear, intimacy alongside risk, and visibility alongside vulnerability. Feminism does not seek to suppress sexuality or moralize pleasure; it seeks to return humanity to it. A sexual culture built on inequality, even when masked as fantasy or choice, cannot offer genuine freedom. Real sexual liberation depends not on limitless consumption, but on dignity, equality, safety, and mutual recognition. Until pleasure itself is released from domination, pornography cannot remain a private matter—it remains a deeply political and feminist concern.

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