

## **The Real Problem with Pornography: It's Bad for Sex**

By Michael Castleman

Marie Silva and her husband, Jack, both act in pornographic videos. Marie has made a modest name for herself, appearing in two dozen productions, among them: *Sex Across America 5*, *Anal Addicts 2*, and *Nasty Nymphos 31*. She looks the part, with a shaved vulva and a pierced clitoral hood. But in real life, she's nothing like the women she portrays on screen: "I play strong characters, biker chicks, dominants, and wild women [who demand sex]. But in my personal life, I'm actually very shy, never a sexual initiator."

The stark contrast between the lives Marie and Jack live on and off camera extends to their lovemaking. They had to *learn* pornography-style sex, as they relate in *Marie and Jack: A Love Story*, a documentary about their relationship ([amazon.com](http://amazon.com)). "Sex on camera is very raw," Marie explains, "It's wild and crazy. It can be exciting. But it's not satisfying. It's not the same as our personal sex. Jack and I have a deep emotional connection. [For sex to feel satisfying], I need more than sucking and fucking. I need emotional fulfillment."

Pornographic sex is so different from the way Marie and Jack like to make love that at the start of their video careers, they had to schedule rehearsal sessions. "We needed to practice having sex [the way the directors wanted]," Jack explains, "so we could perform correctly on camera."

Directors wanted Marie to talk dirty. "I'd never done that before. I didn't know how. Jack coached me. He'd tell me, 'Say 'Fuck me!' Say it louder.'" Directors wanted Marie to use butt plugs and do anal intercourse scenes. She'd never done anything anal, but learned how for work. "She was doing anal on camera," Jack recalls, "before we ever tried it at home." Directors insisted that Marie and Jack dispense with tenderness, sensuality, and mutual massage, and play up raw, pounding, hardcore action. That felt bizarre, Marie explains, because their lovemaking with one another had always been "tender, playful, and intimate." And directors wanted them to have intercourse in positions that would challenge a contortionist.

As they became more involved with making porn, Marie and Jack found themselves slipping into porn-style sex at home. “We’d do a movie” Jack recalls, “then the next day, have personal sex. I’d find myself holding her leg up or doing some of the weird things you see in porn. Or she would say, ‘Harder!’ or ‘Oh, yeah!’ Then we’d stop and say, ‘Wait. We’re not machines. Let’s just make love.’”

Marie and Jack quickly learned to separate “work sex” from “personal sex.” At home, they rarely do anything anal, don’t talk dirty, and don’t use sex toys. They enjoy mutual, sensual, whole-body massage, tender caresses, with lots of eye contact. “If we were making love,” Jack says, “and all of a sudden, I pulled out and said, ‘Baby, I want to come all over your face,’ Marie would say, ‘Are you kidding? You can’t be serious.’”

### **Imitating Porn Ruins Sex and Causes Sex Problems**

Marie and Jack understand the difference between pornographic sex performed by actors who do what they’re told to fulfill men’s fantasies, and great sex enjoyed by real lovers who do what creates mutual pleasure for the two of them.

Unfortunately, millions of people who view pornography—particularly men, the target group for porn—don’t appreciate this crucial distinction.

The cultural debate over pornography’s place in society is usually couched in terms of free speech vs. censorship. Porn producers and their defenders wrap themselves in the First Amendment, and excoriate those who criticize X-rated media as Nazi prudes. Personally, I’m all for free speech and against censorship. I believe X-rated media that depicts adult sex should be freely available to adults. When I was a teen, I peeked at *Playboy* and thought it incredibly racy. *Playboy* seems so tame now, so innocent. When my two kids were teenagers, we never had an filters on our computers. They had instant free access to millions of sexually explicit images on the Internet—and I didn’t lose any sleep over their viewing them.

While I defend any adult’s right to buy and view porn, I firmly believe that the debate about pornography needs to be expanded beyond its relationship to the First Amendment. Porn has some legitimate uses in sex education and therapy (see sidebar), but ultimately, *pornography is bad for sex*. Those who use it as a guide to lovemaking are on a one-way trip to sex problems, relationship problems, and as Marie and Jack attest, unfulfilling lovemaking. Here’s why:

## **Everyone in Pornography Is Eager for Sex All The Time.**

This can help some people overcome guilt feelings about their sexual desire (see sidebar, The Sexual Benefits of Porn), but it makes many people, particularly men, feel distressed that everyone seems to be getting more than they are. “It’s amazing,” says Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, sex therapist Dennis Sugrue, Ph.D., “how some people don’t understand that pornography presents a fantasy world, a Neverland that’s very different from the world real people live in.”

## **Every Man in Pornography Is Hung like a Horse.**

Male porn actors are *selected for* extra-large penises. They *really are* bigger than the rest of us. Now, professional basketball players are much taller than the average man, but the typical guy doesn’t feel inadequate in comparison to them because he knows that most men are more or less his size. He has some perspective. That’s not the case with penises. Heterosexual men may see other men’s flaccid equipment from a distance in locker rooms. But other than their own, the *only* flaccid penises and erections the typical heterosexual man ever views up close hang between the legs of the guys in porn. Porn penises have become the standard by which men judge themselves, and that standard is seriously skewed toward King Kongs, or, as one porn actor was dubbed, King Dong. As a result, all the normal-sized men of the world are justified in believing that they have one of the smallest penises they’ve ever seen. No wonder men almost universally believe their penises are “too small.” Blame it on porn.

## **Every Man in Pornography Raises Instant Erections.**

By the time the men in porn drop their pants, they have full, firm erections. This is total fiction. In fact, the dirty little secret of pornography is that porn sex is so alienating, unarousing, and stress-provoking that before Viagra, most of the male actors had trouble getting it up. Even with Viagra, now *de rigueur* on porn sets, many of the male actors continue to suffer balky erections. Some—but by no means all—men in their teens and twenties can raise instant erections from fantasy or from a glance at an alluring woman or erotic image. But past age 40 or so, most men notice that this ability fades. At every age—especially for older men—erection requires relaxation, playful, sensual touch, and for partner sex, a decent relationship with a loving partner whom you find arousing. Unfortunately, inspired by pornography, many perfectly normal men think something is wrong with them because they’re not rock hard at the drop of a zipper. “Porn encourages men to have unrealistic expectations of their penises,” says Palo Alto, California, sex therapist Marty Klein, Ph.D. “Most men can’t raise instant erections or become

erect from simply looking. They need touch. Porn underemphasizes men's real need for direct stimulation.”

### **The Erections in Pornography Never Subside.**

Porn actors are rock-hard from the moment you see their penises until they ejaculate. For men under 40, this may be possible. But after 40, erections change. They no longer rise from fantasy alone. Penis-stroking—perhaps extended, vigorous fondling—becomes necessary. Erections after 40 are not as firm as they once were. And if an older man becomes distracted, his erection may subside right in the middle of sex, and require more direct caresses to firm up again—if it does. None of these problems ever happen in porn.

### **Every Man in Pornography Lasts Forever.**

They pump, and pump, and pump even more—often thanks to deft editing. No one in porn every suffers premature ejaculation. But back in the real world, this problem, coming too soon, frustrates one-third of men in all adult age groups. Good ejaculatory control requires leisurely, playful, whole-body sensuality. That's the *opposite* of the rushed, mechanical, genitally-preoccupied sex in porn. “Imitate pornography,” Sugrue explains, “and men, especially young men, are likely to ejaculate before they want to.”

### **Every Man in Pornography Ejaculates on Cue.**

No one in porn ever suffers ejaculatory difficulties. But in real life, this problem is fairly common. One reason why men have problems ejaculating is that they don't get the stimulation they need to express orgasm. For many men, that stimulation is *not* all genital. It involves whole-body sensuality. But the men in porn come every time with little or no sensuality. Because of pornography, many men infer that whole-body sensuality doesn't matter, that all they need to let lose a major load is sucking and fucking. Wrong.

### **The Women's Bodies Are Way Too Perfect.**

Until recently, porn actresses have always been women aged 18 to 29. Porn actresses in this age group are free of facial wrinkles, and have flat bellies, firm breasts, thighs, upper arms, and buttocks. However, since the arrival of Internet porn, women in other age groups also make porn. Women in their 30s are called “MILFs” (Mothers I'd Like to Fuck.) Women in their 40s are “mature.” And women over 50 are known as “grannies.”

Nonetheless, the vast majority of women in porn are still in their late teens or 20s. In addition, many have had plastic surgery: breast enlargement, tummy tucks, liposuction—you name it. “Many men don’t understand how most women compare themselves to porn actresses,” Louanne Weston, Ph.D., a sex therapist in Fair Oaks, California, explains. “The typical woman feels very distressed that her body is nowhere near as flawless as what she sees on screen. Her man is sitting there thinking, ‘I’d love a blowjob like that.’ Meanwhile she’s thinking, ‘I’m a tub of lard.’ Women are no longer judged only by their looks. But to a great extent, women are still judged and valued based on how their physical attributes, much more than men are. Very few women look like the women in porn. When women see the men in their lives enjoying *those women* they often feel hopelessly outclassed. They fear rejection, and it’s a deep and chilling fear, one few men appreciate.”

### **The Women in Pornography Are All Exhibitionists.**

Have perfect body, will flaunt it, especially when it’s in the script. The women in pornography routinely flash their breasts and genitals in scenes that look as though they’re in public, and strut around naked just about anywhere. Few real women are exhibitionists—according to one study, only 1 to 2 percent. Because of their insecurities about their bodies, many women feel reluctant to reveal themselves even to the men they love. Meanwhile, men who view porn often expect their lovers to prance around in the buff and can’t understand why they insist on wearing robes until a moment before they slip into bed and pull the covers over themselves.

### **Pornography-Style Sex Is About 95 Percent Genital.**

After a kiss or two, and a few swipes at the woman’s breasts and perhaps a bit of cunnilingus, it’s all fellatio and intercourse. Of course, the genitals are important in lovemaking, and oral sex can feel wonderful. But the genitals often don’t work right without leisurely, playful, whole-body sensuality—gentle touch all over. Pornographic sex is totally preoccupied with the genitals. Men who imitate it are on their way to rapid, involuntary ejaculation, erectile dysfunction, and ejaculatory difficulties—and to sexually unsatisfied women. “Pornography ignores sensuality,” Sugrue says. “It’s hard to have satisfying sex without sensuality. That’s a big reason why porn-style sex isn’t satisfying. That’s also a big reason why so many women have problems with it.”

## **Pornographic Sex Is Impersonal.**

Because porn is all-genital, nothing but sucking and fucking, it also depicts sex without relationships. There is never any flirting in porn, no dating, no courtship, no conversations or shared interests, no laughter, no seduction—nothing but hardcore action. Boy meets girl. They make eye contact. Her top comes off, her skirt comes up, and she's on her knees with her mouth open. Many women find this incomprehensible—and offensive. Revolting against the sterility of pornography, former porn actress Candia Royale launched Femme Productions, a leading producer of X-rated videos with women's sensibilities. Compared with mainstream porn, Royale's videos develop storylines, characters, and relationships. It's still porn, but it's different (see sidebar, Does Porn Arouse Women?). Of course, Femme Productions accounts for only a tiny fraction of pornography's output. The vast majority of X-rated media depict impersonal sex, which, many women feel demeans them.

## **Every Woman In Porn Can't Wait for Genital Sex.**

Compared with men, women usually need considerably more time to warm up before they feel comfortable with genital sexuality. They need intimate conversation and extended loveplay that includes kissing, hugging, mutual whole-body massage, and playful, creative sensuality. Porn totally ignores this very real need. Instead, it encourages men to plunge into intercourse long before women feel receptive. When surveys ask women what they dislike about the way men make love, they consistently reply that men rush into intercourse too quickly. Blame it on porn. Porn sex leaves many women cold—and turned-off women aren't much fun in bed.

## **The Women in Porn Almost Never Experience Orgasm.**

This is actually the X-rated media's only realistic element. After the man comes, known in the industry as the "money shot," the sex is over. The women scream and moan in the throes of supposed passion, but virtually never do they actually have orgasms. One reason is that the vast majority of porn is produced by men for men. The culture of porn has little interest in women's sexual satisfaction. In addition, given the rushed, mechanical, nonsensual nature of porn sex, under those circumstances, it's a rare woman who *could* come, even if she wanted to. No wonder so many men are in the dark about women's orgasms. They never see them in porn, and have no idea that porn-style sex leaves many women so turned off and unfulfilled that they can't possibly express orgasm. "Lots of women look at porn," Weston says, "and think: When I do it, I never get as excited as those women."

Therefore, there must be something wrong with me.” Of course, nothing is wrong with them. What’s wrong—completely wrong—is the portrayal of women’s sexuality in porn.

### **Pornography Ignores The Unique Individuality of Sexual Expression.**

Porn sex is cookbook sex. Take two people. Get them naked. She sucks. He licks. Then they fuck in any number of acrobatic positions. Some people may enjoy making love this way, but most people prefer more variety, more creativity. Porn never shows lovers massaging each other’s shoulders, or running fingers through each other’s hair, or tracing fingers on the backs of knees, or sucking each other’s fingers or ear lobes. All of these little moves can add zing to lovemaking. Pornography rarely shows eye contact, never zooms in to catch one lover whispering, “I love you.” Nor does pornography ever show lovers asking each other, “Is this okay?” “How’s this? Too light? Just right? Too intense?” Or “What can I do for you?” Porn never presents lovemaking as a sensual quest, a journey to explore what lovers find sensually arousing and fulfilling. In porn, one script fits all. “Porn sex is very narrow,” Klein says. “That’s why, after a while, it gets boring. Great sex doesn’t become boring.”

### **Pornographic Sex Rarely Involves Sexual Lubricants, At Least Not On-Camera.**

The actors and actresses in porn use lubricant by the gallon. But viewers never see it on screen. Just as the men in porn produce instant erections, the women appear to be perpetually wet between the thighs. In fact, even with loving, playful, extended whole-body sensuality, many perfectly normal women don’t produce much vaginal lubrication. To enjoy intercourse comfortably, many women *need* a commercial sex lubricant. You’d never know this from watching pornography. As a result, many men push too quickly into poorly lubricated vaginas, and then blame it on the woman: “She’s too tight.” Meanwhile, many women suffer pain on intercourse, which ruins sex for them.

### **In Pornography, Oral Sex Is Universal.**

Every woman sucks, and every man licks. This significantly overstates the popularity of oral sex in America’s bedrooms. According to the best current sex research—studies at the University of Chicago and the University of California in the 1990s—only about 25 to 50 percent of lovers routinely engage in oral sex. For porn viewers who receive less oral than they’d like, the ubiquity of oral sex in porn

creates the impression that everyone in the world is getting head every time—except them.

### **Oral Sex In Pornography Is Too Intense.**

The men in porn plunge into cunnilingus like parched dogs presented with bowls of water. Pornographic fellatio is not much different. The women are often quite rough on the penises they suck. Many people prefer gentler oral caresses. In fact, for many women, the clitoris is so sensitive that direct tonguing, no matter how gentle, feels uncomfortable. Some women prefer men to lick the clitoris very gently, or to lick around it, but not directly on it. Others enjoy a tongue directly on the clitoris—but only after considerable licking around it. You’d never know this from watching porn. “Oral sex in pornography is like slapstick in theater,” Weston says. “overdone for effect. Enjoyable sex is gentler.”

### **Anal Sex In Pornography Is Totally Unrealistic.**

Not all porn includes anal play, but any video with “anal” in the title typically focuses on just one type of anal sex, penis-in-anus intercourse—with a vengeance. In fact, among real lovers, this is the *least* popular form of anal play. Most anal sex involves sphincter massage or gentle fingering. In addition, porn actors rarely take the time to use lubricant. The inserter never asks the recipient, “Is this okay?” And the inserter pushes in too deeply too quickly, and then pumps in and out much too vigorously. No wonder so many people complain that anal sex hurts. Imitate porn and it’s bound to. “The presentation of anal sex in porn is ridiculous,” Klein says. “It’s totally unrealistic how much everyone enjoys it. And on camera, it’s totally unlubricated. The actors lube up off-camera, but viewers never see it. All the audience sees is huge erections plunging into little rosebuds.” To make matters worse, some anal sex in porn is so unsanitary that it’s medically hazardous. “I’ve seen videos where the guy’s erection goes right from the woman’s anus into her vagina or mouth,” Sugrue recalls. “No one should ever do that.”

### **Pornography Ignores Contraception.**

Viewers may infer that they can, too. This is a big mistake for two reasons. First, unprotected sex risks unwanted pregnancy. Second, sex without birth control often makes one lover—or both—feel anxious, producing stress that reduces the pleasure of lovemaking and contributes to sex problems.



## **Pornography Ignores Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs).**

Except for a brief period in the early 1980s when the pornography industry panicked about AIDS, very few people in porn use condoms, and STIs are never mentioned. “Pornography is one big fantasy of sexual abundance with no responsibility,” Sugrue says.

## **Pornography Is Extremely Internally Consistent.**

Motion pictures were invented in 1890. By 1891, pornography was being produced. Recently, some of the first pornographic movies ever filmed have been released on video. The actors’ clothing and hairstyles are antique, but the sex in century-old porn looks remarkably like the sex in porn today. Porn sex is The Big Lie told over and over and over again. Because all porn depicts the same sexual style, viewers infer that rushed, mechanical, nonsensual, genitally preoccupied porn sex is the way lovemaking should be.

## **Finally, Pornography Has Become the Single Most Influential Sex Educator in The Country.**

A generation ago, widely available sex media consisted of softcore *Playboy*, somewhat raunchier *Penthouse*, and a dozen other girlie magazines. Pornography was confined to seedy theaters and sex shops tucked away on the wrong side of the tracks, accessible only to a small fraction of adults. Today, that era feels quaint. These days, home pages of more than 100 million pornographic Web sites are easily available in every home with an Internet connection. You don’t even have to look for them. Junk email for everything from “Horny Housewives” to “Teenage Anal Gangbangs” fill in-boxes. Access requires a credit card, but what you can see for free could make Hugh Hefner’s hair curl. Meanwhile, the sheer volume of Internet porn persuades many viewers that porn sex is the way sex should be. While there are some legitimate uses for pornography in sex education and therapy, on balance, pornography is bad—*very bad*—for sex. Pornography is like the chase scenes in action movies—exciting and fun to watch, but definitely not the way to drive.

## **The “Pornogrification” of America**

Elected officials in Provo, Utah, like to boast that the town is one of the most conservative communities in the United States. So no one was too surprised at the dawn of the new millennium, when a petition circulated to indict a local video store owner on obscenity charges because he rented X-rated DVDs. More than

4,000 Provo residents signed the petition, and the local prosecutor filed charges, figuring on an easy victory. He developed his case based on the landmark 1973 U.S. Supreme Court rule that defined obscenity as anything sexual that was offensive “to the average person, applying contemporary community standards.” In a town as conservative as Provo, the prosecutor was confident the jury would view the video store’s material as offensive to Provo’s community standards, and convict the owner.

But as Fate would have it, according to a report in the *New York Times*, the defense attorney’s office was across the street from the Provo Marriott Hotel. The lawyer had stayed in Marriotts elsewhere and recalled that the hotel’s in-room TV system offered pay-per-view sex films. He wondered if such entertainment was available at the Provo Marriott. He subpoenaed the hotel’s records, and discovered that every year, 3,000 guests paid to view sex films there. Intrigued, the defense lawyer obtained the records of the cable and satellite TV companies that served Provo. These businesses distributed 20,000 X-rated movies annually to subscribers in Provo, dwarfing the 4,000 videos the indicted store owner rented each year. With a little more digging, the defense lawyer determined that Provo consumed more X-rated media than many more liberal communities of the same size. Why, he asked in court, should his client face criminal charges as a porn peddler when the same material was freely available—in fact, *more available*—all over town? He reminded the jury of the standard specified by the U.S. Supreme Court, that to be obscene, X-media had to be offensive “to the average person, applying contemporary community standards.” Clearly, Provo had embraced porn in a big way, so clearly, the video store did not violate community standards. It took only a few minutes for the jury to acquit the defendant.

When the Supreme Court developed its obscenity test in 1973, prosecutors hailed it as a major tool for ridding the country of an “epidemic” of smut. At the time, the porn industry was estimated to gross \$10 million a year. Pornography was not widely available, and jurors could be counted upon to say they were offended by it—even if they had a stack of X-rated magazines hidden in their dressers.

Then, in 1975, the videocassette recorder first appeared. Today more than 75 percent of American homes have one (or a DVD player). By the beginning of the 21st century, U.S. X-rated video rentals and downloads totaled 711 million annually, almost 3 per capita. Video stores currently gross more than \$4 billion a year from pornographic rentals, which account for about one-third of total video rental revenue. Cable TV has also proliferated. One of its selling points has been that, unlike broadcast television, cable—and satellite—networks are not sexually

censored. Showtime grossed \$54 million from sex films in 1993. By 1999, the figure had increased almost seven-fold to \$367 million.

Then, in the mid-1990s, the Internet roared into prominence. From day one, sex has always been one of the biggest interest areas on the World Wide Web. According to Web tracking services, some 21 million Americans visit sex-oriented Web sites each month.

With video rentals, cable and satellite TV and the Internet, porn has boomed. Compared with 1973, according to the *New York Times*, it has grown by a factor of 1,000. Today porn is a \$10 *billion* a year industry. Americans now spend more on porn than they do on all other movies, more than they spend on all theater and dance, more than they spend on professional football, basketball, and baseball tickets—*combined*. “Porn is no longer a sideshow to mainstream culture,” notes *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich. “It *is* the mainstream.”

The pornogrification of America has put X-rated media literally in bed with some of the nation's largest corporations. General Motors is now a bigger porn merchant than *Hustler* publisher Larry Flynt. GM owns the DirecTV satellite TV service, which earns \$200 million a year from pay-per-view sex films. EchoStar, the nation's #2, satellite TV provider, grosses more money than *Playboy*. It's owned by media mogul Rupert Murdoch. And AT&T, the nation's largest communications company, offers a hardcore sex channel call the Hot Network on its broadband cable service. Twenty percent of AT&T customers subscribe to it. AT&T also owns a company that sends sex movies into more than 1 million hotel rooms around the U.S. Hotels have become major centers for sex media because solo business travelers, overwhelmingly men, enjoy masturbating to it. Forty percent of U.S. hotel rooms—some .5 million—are equipped to provide pay-per-view sex movies. A major provider of in-hotel-room movies is LodgeNet, of Sioux Falls, SD. The company's annual gross from X-rated media is \$180 million a year.

But don't look for any T&A in the annual reports of AT&T, GM, or Murdoch's News Corporation. The companies' connections to pornography are either ignored, or mentioned only in vaguest euphemisms.

The pornogrification of America has not gone unopposed. When AT&T announced its Hot Network, several religious groups, who happened to be major shareholders, denounced it. The same thing happened when Marriott Corp., which is owned by several prominent Mormons (though not affiliated in any way with the Mormon Church), began offering in-room sex films. But profit won out over the

protests. For mainstream Hollywood movies, the producer splits revenue 50-50 with the exhibitor. For pornography, the exhibitor keeps 80 percent.

Sex conservatives still denounce pornography and political candidates who accept contributions from *Playboy* executives. But America's "community standards" have clearly changed. If anything, the future promises more porn that's even easier to obtain. The day is not far off when streaming video on the Internet means that theater-quality porn is just a click away. And as porn becomes increasingly mainstream, Americans will see ever more porn-style sex—and run even greater risk of developing the sex problems it causes.

Recently, a University of Michigan researcher searched the Internet for sex education sites aimed at teenagers. She found three dozen devoted to abstinence, and two dozen that provided information about contraception. Meanwhile, a Google search of the term "porn" turned up 700 million sites. By sheer volume, porn has become the nation's leading sex educator—only it teaches the wrong way to make love.

### **“The Real Thing”**

Marie Silva and her husband, Jack, continue to make porn films, but their personal sex life is the antithesis of what they do on camera. “At home, we don't put on a show,” Marie explains. “And it's certainly not work. Our personal sex is fun. There's a wonderful playfulness to it. Jack has a tender, sensual mouth. [When he gives me cunnilingus,] he makes me feel so good. We have intercourse in maybe three positions, usually ending with spooning [on their sides, her back against his chest]. He's inside me, but I don't come from just intercourse, so he also massages my clitoris by hand. Our personal sex is very intimate, very tender and playful. [After having porn sex at work], it's so nice to come home and enjoy the real thing.”

### **The Sexual Benefits of Porn**

Some sex educators and therapists use sexually explicit media in their work. “I've used it from time to time,” Weston explains. “I don't use mainstream porn that much. But I've recommended Candida Royale's videos. They show plenty of sex, but they have better developed story lines than what's typical in mainstream porn, and there's more chemistry between the actors (see sidebar, Does Porn Arouse Women?). I've also recommended books of erotic art or photography.”

Experts note these benefits from pornography:

- It helps people get past any guilt they feel about their sexual desire. “Porn depicts a world of sexual abundance,” explains Advisory Board member Marty Klein, Ph.D. “That’s a big reason why people enjoy it. It’s a fantasy, of course, but there’s something compelling about a world where no one makes anyone else feel badly simply because they have sexual desires and act on them.”
- Pornography gives people permission to be sexual. “It shows people wanting sex and enjoying it,” says San Francisco sex therapist Linda Alperstein, L.C.S.W. “For those who feel sexually repressed, that can feel liberating: ‘Oh, so other people aren’t ashamed of wanting this. They actually do this. Maybe I’m not a pervert for wanting it. Maybe I can have sex, too.’”
- Pornography gives people permission to be more passionate in bed. “Seeing passionate sex,” Sugrue says, “can free people to let themselves go more than they might otherwise.”
- Pornography helps allay guilt feelings about masturbation. Both the men and women in porn fondle themselves frequently, and no one gets upset. On the contrary, porn depicts a world where masturbation is completely accepted. “I’ve worked with preorgasmic women who learned how to masturbate by watching porn,” Weston says.
- Pornography can provide a pleasant libido boost before sex. “The research is quite clear,” Sugrue explains. “After viewing porn, people are more likely to have sex.” However, sexually explicit visual media tend to be more arousing for men than women (see sidebar, Does Porn Arouse Women?).
- Pornography is an aid to erotic fantasy. Sex fantasies get fatigued after a while and lose their power to arouse. Porn offers new fantasies.
- Pornography can help free lovers who feel stuck in sexual ruts. Porn is stuck in a rut itself, but the range of sexual moves it depicts may be broader than what some lovers are used to. In such cases, it can suggest new sexual possibilities.
- Pornography can help lovers ask for sexual variations, notably oral sex. “A picture is worth 1,000 words,” Weston explains. “Some people can’t say,

‘Hey, I’d like oral sex. Would you do that for me?’ But when they see it in a video they can say, ‘That looks like fun. Want to?’”

- Pornography provides some instruction in sexual positions and oral sex. The positions are too acrobatic, and the oral is often too rough. Nonetheless, porn teaches basic positions and oral sex skills.

## **Does Porn Arouse Women?**

Women’s feelings about pornography depend on the kind of X-rated material they view. Researchers at the University of Connecticut showed 395 college students (200 men, 195 women) one of six X-rated videos—three standard male-oriented programs, and three produced by Candida Royalle, a former pornography actress who left porn in the mid-1980s to produce erotic videos from a woman’s point of view through her company, Femme Productions. Most men said they found both mainstream porn and Femme videos equally arousing. However, the women clearly preferred the Femme programs. Compared with women who watched traditional pornography, those who viewed the Femme videos reported considerably more enjoyment—and more intercourse afterward.

In a similar study at the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands, researchers evaluated 47 women undergraduates’ reactions to mainstream pornography and Femme videos. But this study delved deeper, as it were, into the participants’ sexuality. In addition to filling out a survey, the women were also fitted with tampon-like devices that measured blood flow into their vaginal walls, an indication of sexual arousal. In the survey arm of the study, the women greatly preferred the Femme programs, calling them much more enjoyable and arousing. Unexpectedly, however, both types of X-videos elicited similar vaginal reactions, demonstrating that women’s feelings of sexual arousal are more subjective than objective.

Candida Royalle has produced seven feature-length videos. Many of those in her casts also work in mainstream porn. Femme videos are clearly inspired by mainstream pornography, but relationships are more developed, the sex is more sensual, and the women appear more real. To obtain Femme videos, visit [www.candidaroyalle.com](http://www.candidaroyalle.com).

Royalle is not the only producer of X-rated videos that are woman-oriented. Other videos likely to appeal to women are offered by Good Vibrations, the woman-oriented sex shop in San Francisco. The Good Vibrations catalog includes nifty

icons to inform shoppers of videos that are woman-centered, have interesting plots, and depict relationship chemistry between lovers (see Resources).

In addition, many instructional sex videos are artfully produced and erotic. I particularly recommend two:

*Ancient Secrets of the Kama Sutra: The Classic Art of Lovemaking.* Produced with the help of Los Angeles sexologist Patti Britton, Ph.D., this 60-minute, lavishly erotic tour de force is a sensual, pulse-quickening take on the ancient Indian *Kama Sutra*'s eight stages of lovemaking: preparation (bathing), massage, ambiance (candlelight, music, etc.), seduction (undressing), kissing, lingual love (oral sex), intercourse (many positions), and union (spiritual merging during afterglow). Each of the eight stages is enthusiastically acted out by attractive, sexy lovers who clearly enjoy themselves. Unlike most mainstream porn and many instructional sex videos, *Ancient Secrets of the Kama Sutra* is beautiful to watch, a unique work of video art that combines education and entertainment in a loving, arousing package. To obtain it, visit [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

*Erotic Massage Book and Video.* A central message of this book is that great sex requires sensuality, notably whole-body massage. Every square inch of the body is a sensual playground and whole-body massage makes genital sexuality feel all the more erotic and fulfilling. This book and video are a wonderful introduction to sensual massage—everything from a basic back rub to advanced genital fondling. The two-tape video follows the illustrated book. Together they teach lovers to communicate through the language of touch. Use the *Erotic Massage Book and Video* during a romantic weekend getaway, or any time you want to make an afternoon or evening of sensual togetherness. To obtain it, visit [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).  
—Michael Castleman

### **If the Idea of Kiddie Porn Turns You On....**

Great sex involves mutual consent. Because of the inherent developmental and power differences between adults and kids, children, especially those who have not reached puberty, cannot consent to sex as adults can. Therefore, kiddie porn is inherently abusive. While many sexuality authorities would defend the right to fantasize about sex with children, *sharing or spending money* on media that depict child sex or adult-child sex supports an industry based on child abuse. If you find yourself seeking out kiddie porn, get professional counseling from a mental health professional or sex therapist. To find a sex therapist near you, visit [aasect.org](http://aasect.org), the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists, or [sstarnet.org](http://sstarnet.org), the Society for Sex Therapy and Research.

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