

# Porn viewers prefer women's pleasure over violence: study

June 4 2018, by Eran Shor And Kimberly Seida

---



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Is mainstream pornography becoming more and more violent? And if so, what's driving the trend.

In our [newly published study](#) that examined a large representative sample of highly watched pornographic videos from a leading online streaming website, we found no evidence for the claim that [pornography](#) has become more violent over the last decade.

We also found no evidence for often-heard claims that [viewers](#) increasingly prefer aggressive content.

Pornography and sexually explicit materials have long been a matter of intense debate. Since the so-called [sex wars](#) of the 1970s, activists and academics have been embroiled in disputes concerning the production conditions, future directions and long-term consequences of pornography.

Opponents argue that porn [leads to sexual aggression and misogyny](#). Others have been more skeptical about the pornography-violence relationship. They argue that [pornography can be enjoyed by both men and women without necessarily causing harm](#) .

Since the rise of online porn along with social media, discussions about pornography have taken on a life of their own, largely unhinged from a credible or systematic evidence base.

## **Debates about aggression in porn**

Our interest in the topic of violence and [aggression](#) in pornography came out of reading and hearing claims both in the popular media and in academic circles that pornography is becoming "worse and worse."

Part of this argument has been the result of [scientifically dubious claims](#) about pornography being addictive and users needing to constantly "up the stakes" in order to be satisfied.

According to this logic, porn viewers —who are mostly men —become desensitized to "soft" pornography. This forces producers to increasingly generate videos that are more hard-core, creating a growing demand for and supply of violent and degrading acts against women in mainstream pornographic videos.

However, we found no evidence to support these claims, and most of the existing evidence for the idea that porn is more hard-core than before was anecdotal.

Studies on the presence of aggression in pornographic videos have produced wildly diverging estimates, ranging from about [two per cent](#) to [90 per cent](#) . Differences in the way porn is studied can cause this wide gap in results: Researchers who have looked at aggression in porn have looked at different forms of media and have used various methods to both study and choose their samples.

They have even used various definitions of aggression. Aggression can be strictly defined as a purposeful act resulting in harm in which the target of aggression [attempts to avoid the harm](#), or more broadly defined as a purposeful act that [results in harm to either the self or another](#) . The choice of definition can have an impact on what is considered aggression, creating the potential to either under- or over-estimate prevalence.

Previous studies have not examined systematically changes in depictions of aggression over time, nor the relationship between aggressive contents and the popularity of videos.

## **Testing the claims porn is more violent**

We set out to test the accepted wisdom of the "harder and harder" argument.

We also tested the assumption that viewers prefer increasingly hard-core pornography by analyzing 269 videos uploaded to PornHub over the past decade.

PornHub is [one of the world's top adult websites](#) and, according to Alexa Internet, the 36th most visited site on the Internet as of 2017, with more than 80 million daily visits. PornHub is a freely accessible video-sharing website similar to YouTube.

Most of the videos we analyzed were frequently watched, but we also analyzed a smaller random sample of less frequently watched videos so that we could compare the highly popular videos versus the less popular ones.

We tested two related claims: One, that aggressive content in videos is on the rise and two, that viewers prefer such content. We used both the number of views as well as the rankings ("based on likes") for videos containing aggression to help us assess popularity.

We used multiple definitions and measures of aggression (including visible, verbal, non-verbal and non-consensual aggression). Our results offered no support for either of these two claims. Viewers did not show a preference for violent content.

Visible aggression was present in slightly less than 40 per cent of the videos, non-consensual aggression appeared in about 12 per cent of the videos, and nearly 10 per cent of video titles clearly suggested aggression.

None of these showed an upward trend.

In fact, while in 2008, nearly 13 per cent of the average videos portrayed non-consensual aggression, by 2016, this figure had dropped to less than

three per cent. This decline in non-consensual aggression and a similar decline in aggressive [video](#) titles suggest that aggression has become less frequent in pornography over the last decade.

We also found that videos containing aggressive acts were both less likely to receive views and less likely to be ranked favourably by viewers, who preferred videos where women clearly demonstrated pleasure.

Whether the women are actually experiencing pleasure is another matter altogether, which our study cannot assess. Nevertheless, videos where women respond with pleasure are more likely to be watched and be "liked" (given a thumb's up by viewers).

These findings clearly challenge the assumption about the popularity of aggression, at least among those viewers who choose to share their preferences.

## **A shift away from aggression**

Our findings positively contribute to the conversation between scholars and activists [who write and speak about the pernicious effects](#) of aggression in pornography, such as its potential links to violence against women and an [increased acceptance of rape myths](#).

Indeed, it seems like the majority of mainstream viewers are gradually moving away from depictions of aggression and degradation, particularly non-consensual aggression.

This shift away from non-consensual aggression may signify lower demand and, depending on the responsiveness of producers to the preferences of most consumers, might result in reduced distribution of material featuring non-consensual aggression.

That said, surveys and interviews with porn viewers are needed to further explore preferences for aggression-free pornography.

Our research suggests that those making the "harder and harder" argument may be confusing supply (what a substantial portion of mainstream porn still looks like) and demand (what most viewers actually want to watch.)

**More information:** Eran Shor et al. "Harder and Harder"? Is Mainstream Pornography Becoming Increasingly Violent and Do Viewers Prefer Violent Content?, *The Journal of Sex Research* (2018). [DOI: 10.1080/00224499.2018.1451476](https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2018.1451476)

This article was originally published on [The Conversation](#). Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Porn viewers prefer women's pleasure over violence: study (2018, June 4) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-06-porn-viewers-women-pleasure-violence.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.