

## #Notallporn: Why the “Good Parts” Don’t Matter

by Jonah Mix

On the front page of the most popular pornographic website on Earth, there are videos with titles that make me feel sick. Titles like Dumb Whore Loves to Fuck on Camera. Ghetto Asshole Fucked by White Cock. She Needs the Cash, He Needs the Pussy. It took a few keystrokes and exactly one click to see these. A few extra clicks and I could have seen 100,000 more. This is porn that exists, right now – and statistically, it’s what most men are watching. It is no exaggeration to say that the majority of men in America, and probably the world, derive emotional and physical satisfaction from material that would qualify as hate speech if directed against anyone other than women.

As men, we all see how violent the pornography industry is. If you claim you don’t, do this for me: Go the front page of a porn site and just read the titles. Block all the images if you can. Then ask yourself, is this how we talk about human beings? Is this how human beings talk about each other? And then remember that it isn’t just talk. It’s action. This is something that men do to women – real men hurting real women in the real world. I ask men to do this all the time, to look up these titles, and it’s made more than one cry. That shouldn’t be shocking; without the haze of arousal clouding your view, it’s hard to see the way we as men treat women and do anything except cry.

Sadly, not all men take to the challenge. A few are honest enough to say that they just don’t care. A few others will argue against all reason that Black Teen Punishment is not actually racist, misogynistic hate speech. But the majority will say something else. They’ll fall back on the classic defense: Well, absolutely these videos are horrible. I would never support this. But you know, not all porn is like that. You’re just focusing on the bad parts. And, of course, that’s technically true. There is pornography out there that does not descend to the depths of viciousness standard for the industry. There might even be videos out there that bill themselves as female-friendly, or even feminist. But to see why this is an incredibly poor line of reasoning with some terrifying implications, it’s time for a short philosophy break.

### **Utilitarian Calculus**

Do you know the famous Trolley Problem? You’ve got a train barreling towards a car stalled on the tracks. The car has five people inside who will certainly die if you don’t pull the lever and switch the train to a different track. Problem is, there’s one immobilized worker on that track. Do you pull the switch and cause the one man to die, or do nothing and let the whole family of five perish?

Philosophers have discussed the correct response to this scenario for decades. And no matter where exactly you fall in the debate, the point is that

this decision, like the vast majority of the decisions we make, involves doing what's called a utilitarian calculus. It's a fancy term, but the basic concept has been around since the dawn of time: When you're deciding what to do, you should generally weigh all possible results and see which leads to a better outcome. A pure utilitarian calculus on the trolley problem would side with flipping the switch, because the alternate situation – not doing so and watching a family of five get demolished by a train – would result in a greater net loss.

Although utilitarianism generally aligns with the common sense ethical framework most individuals have, very few people are what you would call pure utilitarians. Most of us, for example, wouldn't heap massive amounts of pain on an innocent man even if doing so would bring a slightly greater amount of pleasure into the world. We all have what Robert Nozick called side constraints – rules we tack onto our calculations. Examples might be general principles like Don't harm innocent people and Attend to the needs of the worse-off first or specific restrictions like Do not torture or Do not break promises. When we measure up all the possible results of a decision (or the decisions of others), we search for the course of action that leads to the most positive outcome for everyone involved within the limits we set for ourselves. Pretty simple stuff.

So when someone complains that anti-porn activists only focus on “the bad parts”, what they're really saying is that somewhere “good parts” exist, and that an ethical judgment about the value of the pornography industry cannot be made without considering those “good parts” and weighing them. In other words, they're setting up a basic utilitarian calculus – you take the bad, you take the good, you mix them together along with your side constraints, and see if the result is a positive or negative.

We generally consider rape, abuse, humiliation, racism, misogyny, and degradation to be among some of the worst things in the world, and these are all things the pornography industry is overflowing with. You would think that if we had any side constraints at all, they would be ones that exist to mark as off-limits things like sexualized cruelty and violence. Most human beings, if asked, would say they don't consider rape a reasonable cost for any action, even if you could imagine some bizarre scenario where it would result in a great benefit. But even tossing those side constraints out and resorting to a simple, no-nonsense straight calculus of pleasure and pain, you'd have to have something pretty damn good to make up for results that most normal humans instinctively see as universally unacceptable

When we throw it all in the balance ... which way does it tip?

And with that in mind, let's ask: What do pro-porn folks have to hang on the other side of the scale, balancing out this endless stream of brutality, abuse, humiliation, and hurt? The answer? Orgasms!

## **Orgasms Are Great!**

For all the nonsense pro-porn folks spout about sexual exploration and agency and all the assorted buzzwords that would make you think we're talking about something other than people fucking on camera, let's all admit that pornography is first and foremost an orgasm delivery mechanism. That's the purpose, from start to finish. Now, that doesn't mean that you couldn't conceivably pack in some other artistic proclamation or personal statement – but ask yourself, how much of a pornography industry would there be if men were all cosmically barred from masturbation while they watched? No matter how tastefully staged “good porn” might be, it would still be lucky to rack up more than about six hits online if men knew they wouldn't be ejaculating by the end of it.

And hey, don't get me wrong: Orgasms are great! It's not a particularly bold stand to come out as pro-orgasm; it is, however, generally frowned upon to say that any amount of orgasms can justify wide-scale sexual violence and woman-hating. And in the end, that's what these folks have to argue in order to salvage their commitment to porn. When you take someone on a tour through the endless parade of dead-eyed cruelty that is the modern pornography industry, and their first response is to criticize you for only focusing on the bad parts and ignoring the good parts, what they're really saying is simply, Yeah, that's true, but maybe her rape was worth it.

So I ask the pro-porn men a simple question: In your calculus, how many orgasms per rape? How many ejaculations per broken body? If one woman's humiliation can get ten men off, does that justify it? What about a hundred? A thousand? And if an industry cannot exist without a certain percentage of the women involved – even a small percentage, one in fifty, let's say – facing serious sexual violence, bodily harm, and emotional abuse, how much value can you possibly put on your cum so as to justify its continued existence?

And if you can't, then what defense is left? I know you might be thinking, “Well, we don't have to take the bad with the good. We can just get rid of all the bad until only the good is left.” But the real question is: Are you willing to postpone your consumption until that prophesied day when the pornography industry is cleansed of its rape, abuse, and woman-hating – when it's just “good porn”, as far as the eye can see? I don't think you are, because I don't think deep down any of us believe that day is going to come.

## **Does Violence Ever Cancel Out?**

I'll be honest: I don't think there is “good porn”. I know I've never seen it. Frankly, I'm not even sure what it would even look like if I did. It's not showing up on the Adult Video Network's bestsellers list and it's not showing up on the shelves of sex shops. It's not on the front page of any mainstream porn site and it's certainly not in our internet histories. Shockingly, the only thing harder to find than this rumored “good porn” are the men who really

want it; something tells me the men eagerly downloading Brutal Bangz aren't mourning their lack of a feminist alternative.

There has never been a sex industry that did not exist to glorify rape. From the bathhouses of ancient Greece to Hustler magazine, the history of commodified sex has been one uninterrupted chronicle of male domination. I am immensely skeptical about the idea that any pornography will suddenly shed that cruelty ten thousand years into the game. But I will say that if I am 99% sure good porn doesn't exist, I'm 100% sure there is no porn that can eradicate world hunger, bring peace to nations, and solve the continuing ecological crisis – and that's about all I can think of in my wildest imagination that could even come close to justifying the sexual violence needed in order to produce it. And you know what? It still wouldn't be justifiable, even then.

So the next time someone tells you you're just focusing on "the bad parts", ask them to show you the good parts. They've got to be pretty incredible, right? Ask them to show you the magical video that makes things even, the fabled .mp4 that cancels out Ghetto Asshole Fucked by White Cock. Can they do it? Can they look at the rape, the trauma, the unrepentant and proud celebration of woman-hating, and counter it with anything but a particularly good orgasm? And if not, then I think it's time we as men did a little utilitarian calculus on our own – one with a few seconds of pleasure on one side and our humanity on the other. I think it's pretty clear the way the scales will tip.