CHAPTER THIRTEEN

If anything, exposure to nonviolent pornography appears to reduce aggressive tendencies (Geen, 1998).

In contrast, exposure to violent pornography does produce negative consequences. It makes men more accepting of rape myths; increases negative attitudes toward women in general; and may, under certain conditions and for certain men, exacerbate violence toward women (Malamuth, Addison, & Koss, 2002; Malamuth & Check, 1981). An investigation by Donnerstein (1980) reveals these effects. In one condition of this study, male participants were cast in the role of teacher and were instructed to deliver shock to a woman (an experimental confederate) whenever she erred on a learning task. Before the learning task began, the participants viewed one of three films: (1) a neutral film with no sexual content; (2) an erotic, nonviolent film; and (3) an erotic, violent film. Figure 13.7 shows the amount of shock the men administered in each of the experimental conditions. As you can see, only the violent film that contained violence increased aggression, indicating that nonviolent pornography does not.

In an important follow-up investigation, Donnerstein and Berkowitz (1981) found that the association between violent pornography and aggression depends, in part, on how the violence is portrayed. In this study, male participants were either angered or not angered by their female partner before viewing one of four films: (1) a neutral film with no sexual content; (2) an erotic, nonviolent film; (3) an erotic, violent film that showed a woman enjoying forcible sex; and (4) a violent erotic film that showed a woman suffering great distress while being violently forced to have sex with a man.

Figure 13.8 shows the amount of shock the men later delivered during the punishment portion of the experiment. First, note again that nonviolent pornography did not increase aggression, even among men who had been angered. Second, notice that violent pornography did increase aggression, but this depended on whether the man

FIGURE 13.7

Pornography and Aggression

After viewing one of three films, male participants were given the chance to shock a female confederate in an (alleged) investigation of punishment and learning. Only a violent, erotic film increased aggression toward women, indicating that nonviolent pornography does not increase aggression.

Source: Donnerstein (1980).