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WHAT I DIDN'T GET TO SAY ON TV  
ABOUT PORNOGRAPHY, MASCULINITY, AND  
REPRESENTATION

JUDITH KEGAN GARDINER\*

In April 1993, shortly after the University of Chicago Law School conference on pornography and hate speech,<sup>1</sup> I was a panelist on Jerry Springer's television talk show.<sup>2</sup> The topic of the show was whether pornography causes rape. The first speaker, a Christian youth pastor, divulged that he was driven to attempt rape after viewing pornography. He also confessed to having been sexually abused as a child. Next, a debate between a male anti-censorship lawyer and a male anti-pornography lawyer ensued. The former invoked free speech to justify his position, while the latter claimed that sex-crime rates drop when "porn houses" are closed. A middle-aged woman then detailed the unpleasant ways in which her boyfriend hurt her. He imitated the sadistic pornography to which he was addicted, she explained, to the point of threatening her life. As a Women's Studies professor, I was the last speaker on the show. I recounted a discussion I once had with a local video store manager in which he had explained to me how the videos on his shelves were divided into three categories: (1) action movies, which he defined as containing violence; (2) horror movies, which meant "some girl takes off her shirt and then gets killed"; and (3) catch-all movies—including porn—which he judged to be less violent than the rest. The host's show-ending monologue reminded the audience that Americans prize free speech and that pornography doesn't rape people, other people do. Reason thus concluded an hour in which most of the camera's and audience's attention was fixed on lurid stories of sexualized violence by men against women.

The format of the show encouraged soundbites and colorful examples instead of analysis. It presented two camps and allowed them to trade

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1. More than 700 people attended the conference, entitled *Speech, Equality, and Pornography: Feminist Legal Perspectives on Pornography and Hate Propaganda*. See Mark Wukas, *Violence Linked: Activists Seek Tighter Restrictions on Porn*, CHI. TRIB., Mar. 21, 1993, at 1, 11. Among those attending the conference were University of Michigan law professor Catharine MacKinnon, feminist writer Andrea Dworkin, and Leanne Katz, executive director of the National Coalition Against Censorship. See *id.* Despite the wide diversity within the feminist community, Katz stated that feminists with opposing views (such as herself) were not asked to speak at the conference. See *id.*

2. *The Jerry Springer Show: Pornography Ruined My Life* (NBC television broadcast, Apr. 9, 1993).

barbs and talk past one another. Like many participants in the University of Chicago conference, the anti-pornography panelists on the Springer program pointed to sexual violence and the ways in which it demeans women. Representing a National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) viewpoint, I spoke on behalf of free speech and women's rights to sexual imagination and experimentation, stressing the ways that censorship harms women. But I left the studio frustrated by the program's confrontational format and with a feeling that some important aspects of the debate were not being addressed by either side. Why, I wondered, has pornography become such a focus of controversy now? Pornography has been around for millennia, and I, like many other second-wave feminists,<sup>3</sup> always thought it was a trivial issue, tangential to the economic inequality and physical damage that women face. Yet many people with whom I have spoken before and after this television program, including the audience who attended it, seem to find pornography important and emotionally engrossing, and I have been trying to figure out why. The following thoughts are speculative, but they do reframe the pornography issue as a place where contemporary crises regarding masculinity and the media converge. I suggest that pornography both solves and exacerbates these crises.

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3. Second-wave feminism is a term used to identify the contemporary women's movement, which began in the 1960s. See LISA TUTTLE, *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FEMINISM* 287-88 (1986). The term *second wave* was coined by Marsha Weinman Lear in reference "to the formation of women's liberation groups in America, Britain and Germany." See MAGGIE HUMM, *THE DICTIONARY OF FEMINIST THEORY* 198 (1990). In its early states, the second-wave movement was "dangerously close to becoming a 'one-issue' movement," focusing efforts almost exclusively on passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. See RITA J. SIMON & GLORIA DANZIGER, *WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN AMERICA: THEIR SUCCESSES, DISAPPOINTMENTS, AND ASPIRATIONS* 4-5 (1991). Since 1970, however, second-wave feminism has moved

from minimizing differences between men and women to celebrating a woman-centered perspective. Second wave feminism is currently committed to radically extending egalitarianism based on a sophisticated understanding of the oppressiveness of imposed gender divisions. Second wave feminism is a radical transformation project and aims to create a feminized world.

HUMM, *supra*, at 198. Although the birth of this contemporary movement was a process, the formation of the National Organization for Women (NOW), in 1966, has been cited as the origin of the movement. See STEVEN M. BUECHLER, *WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES: WOMAN SUFFRAGE, EQUAL RIGHTS, AND BEYOND* 30 (1990). Some commentators classify second-wave feminism as the third women's movement, asserting that the second movement occurred during the first two decades of the twentieth century, a time when women pressed for better working conditions and protective labor legislation, and that the first movement started in the 1830s, and culminated in 1920, with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, giving women the right to vote. See SIMON & DANZIGER, *supra*, at 4.

My first thoughts about why some feminists have seized on pornography as a significant point of attack against patriarchy were ungenerous. Among anti-pornography leaders are some prominent lawyers.<sup>4</sup> As barbers always think one needs a haircut, lawyers always propose passing legislation in order to solve social problems. Furthermore, along with many other NCAC members, I suspected that any attack on pornography had nervousness about female sexuality and sex outside of marriage as its base. I also wondered whether anti-pornography feminists chose to attack pornography because such a campaign did not implicate the attackers. I assumed that most of these feminists, like myself, never watched pornography for their own pleasure; therefore, abolishing it would be completely painless for them. They would not have to change their behavior or attitudes at all, as only other people's habits would be subject to prohibition. Moreover, the attack on pornography presents itself as a heroic cause aimed at saving passive, pure women in distress.<sup>5</sup> In this scenario, men are the oppressors against whom women need defense. Questions about social institutions are not necessary to this discussion, which thus has a reassuring air of clarity.

I also speculated about why pornography should be singled out from the sexual objectification and glamorized violence against women endemic to advertising and other mainstream media. Pornography may be big business, but it is still business on the fringe of a capitalist economy. Attacking the whole network of images and constructions of women as objects in our culture is a daunting task that may be perceived as politically extremist, but an anti-pornography campaign attacks a manageable issue in order to show that *all* women are victimized by demeaning images that may inspire violence. Anti-pornography feminism, therefore, may appeal to some women because of its universalism and the resulting absence of difficult questions about which particular women are harmed by and which benefit from specific images or practices.

Recently, commercial pornography has become more popular and more accessible in the United States, particularly in the form of videotape rentals. Thus, pornography plays a larger role in public consciousness than

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4. Catharine MacKinnon is a prominent example. MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin drafted an ordinance in the early 1980s that attempted to regulate pornography. The ordinance was adopted in Indianapolis, but was later declared unconstitutional by a United States District Court. *See American Booksellers Ass'n v. Hudnut*, 598 F. Supp. 1316, 1341-42 (S.D. Ind. 1984), *aff'd*, 771 F.2d 323 (7th Cir. 1985), *aff'd mem.*, 475 U.S. 1001 (1986). *See also* Wukas, *supra* note 1, at 1.

5. *See, e.g.,* Catherine Itzin, *Pornography and the Social Construction of Sexual Inequality*, in *PORNOGRAPHY: WOMEN, VIOLENCE AND CIVIL LIBERTIES* 57, 65 (Catherine Itzin ed., 1992) (arguing that the pornography industry "exploits the poorest and most vulnerable women, whose opportunities to earn a living are . . . limited by sexism and sex discrimination").

it previously did,<sup>6</sup> and attitudes toward it perhaps are more polarized than before the sexual revolution of the 1960s. As a teacher of literature, I am trained to find the significance of words and images as examples of societal attitudes. For more than twenty years, I have been a materialist feminist,<sup>7</sup> dedicated to working toward a society that is more equitable and fulfilling for both men and women. I thought that understanding the pornography debates might help me develop insight into the meanings of masculinity and the uses of representation in our culture. I watched some pornographic movies out of a sense of a feminist duty to understand these debates, occasionally fast-forwarding through them and generally finding myself both bored and embarrassed by the experience. From this, I wonder whether feeling self-righteous because one does not get "turned on" by pornography—or guilty because one does—plays into the strong emotions that the subject evokes. These are broad and complicated matters, and I will attempt only to sketch some lines of connection between pornography, masculinity, and the media. I claim that pornography is an arena within which other social contests are taking place and that the anti-pornography debates illuminate current anxieties about economic polarization, gender confusion, new conceptions of personal identity, insecurity about heterosexual relationships, and homophobia.

Current concern about masculinity makes pornography especially significant in our culture. Although sexism and male-supremacist thinking permeate history, misogyny varies cross-culturally and over time. Similar developments have occurred regarding definitions of masculinity and femininity, which are the behavior and attributes that societies consider appropriate for men and women, respectively. I speculate that attributes of masculinity that seemed coherent in early twentieth-century America have been eroded and separated by a variety of current societal forces. Recently, many men's antagonisms toward women seem to have become sexualized, and many men's sexual desires for women seem to have become antagonistic in particular, historically specific ways. I think that pornography dramatizes the resulting sexualized misogyny and thus becomes one bulwark of socially recognized masculinity in our society. It

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6. See Helen E. Longino, *Pornography, Oppression, and Freedom: A Closer Look*, in TAKE BACK THE NIGHT 40-42 (Laura Lederer ed., 1980) (noting that the sexual revolution of the 1960s both freed sexual behavior from society's disapproval and created fertile ground for growth in the pornography business).

7. Feminist materialism attempts to "identify the material interests which are satisfied by the systematic oppression of women, and to point out the benefits men derive from it, as a necessary first step towards a feminist revolution." TUTTLE, *supra* note 3, at 199. For further discussion of materialist feminism, see generally DONNA LANDRY & GERALD MACLEAN, *MATERIALIST FEMINISMS* (1993).

is, therefore, an important indicator of the kind of sexism prevalent now, but I think it is the misogyny that we need to attack, not the sexually explicit material itself.

Masculinity in our culture has been defined by power, money, strength, skill, and sexuality. In the nuclear family, masculinity has been defined in terms of the role of father as breadwinner.<sup>8</sup> Masculinity has been defined personally in terms of strength, skill, and physical prowess,<sup>9</sup> and masculinity has been equated with male heterosexuality and attractiveness to women.<sup>10</sup> All of these traditional attributes of masculinity have come under pressure and change in recent years.<sup>11</sup>

A "real man" used to be a breadwinner who supported his family. But female entrance into the workforce has made working for wages more available to both sexes now, so that receiving a paycheck no longer defines a man. An economic downturn can also blur traditional definitions. When the economy sours, well-intentioned and hard-working men may be out of jobs or unable to earn wages that would support a family. Some of the more traditionally "masculine" sorts of work, like the skilled trades, have suffered in the last few decades.<sup>12</sup> As a result, more men may now be in service jobs previously thought of as "women's" work. Meanwhile, American occupational and class structures have grown more polarized, with the media glamorizing only the top jobs. A frustrating gap now exists between visions of the richly rewarded and powerful careers that men feel ought to be available if they work hard or are lucky, and the actual work they do. That is, the definitions of success may have risen so that bringing home a living wage may not prove a source of pride and manliness, even

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8. See E. ANTHONY ROTUNDO, *AMERICAN MANHOOD*, 132-33 (1993) (discussing the historical division of labor in marriage and the idea, and masculine ideal, of man as economic supporter of the home); see also SUSAN FALUDI, *BACKLASH: THE UNDECLARED WAR AGAINST AMERICAN WOMEN* 65 (1991) (reporting that surveys reveal that masculinity continues to be defined by how well a man is able to provide economically for his family).

9. See ROTUNDO, *supra* note 8, at 265-66 (discussing the concept of masculinity that began to develop in turn-of-the-century America in which "vigor and assertiveness separated true men from the rest").

10. See *id.* at 278 (discussing the historical development of the view that the homosexual man is "insufficiently manly"); see also Peter Baker, *Maintaining Male Power: Why Heterosexual Men Use Pornography*, in *PORNOGRAPHY: WOMEN, VIOLENCE AND CIVIL LIBERTIES*, *supra* note 5, at 135 (describing how men are under increasing pressure "to look good, to be aware of style and fashion").

11. See ROTUNDO, *supra* note 8, at 6 (summarizing current criticisms of "the prevailing forms of manhood").

12. See, e.g., *Skilled Help Wanted*, *FORTUNE*, Aug. 18, 1986, at 6, 8 (indicating that the national unemployment rate for construction workers in 1986 was 12%).

to those men who are able to do it. And not all who are able are willing. Today many men do not provide support to their children or mandated financial aid to their ex-wives,<sup>13</sup> and an increasing number of families find themselves impoverished and atomized as the divorce-rate climbs.<sup>14</sup>

Another traditional attribute of masculinity has been that a "manly man" protected women and children; he protected the weak from a position of strength. Many people feel feminism has attacked "chivalry" of this sort, and broader conservative forces in our society have eroded the notion that looking out for others who are socially disadvantaged is a special sign of masculine power. The disadvantaged, including women as well as people of color and the poor, are frequently portrayed either as predators not deserving of protection—subversive malefactors who must be fought against, especially by white middle-class men—or as whining ingrates who claim special treatment at the same time that they refuse to abide by society's rules.<sup>15</sup>

Older definitions of masculinity included "toughness" and a man's ability to compete and win against other men in difficult or dangerous situations.<sup>16</sup> This meaning still adheres in athletics and is part of the successful marketing of athletic celebrities as super heroes, such as basketball star Charles Barkley. Traditional American masculinity involves being forceful and physical and not too cerebral, idealizing a working-class image rather than a white-collar one.<sup>17</sup> But this forceful ideal slides into masculinity as aggression. According to one recent study, men associate male aggression with control and success, whereas women

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13. See Jeanie R. Kasindorf, *The Ex-husband Who Wouldn't Move Out*, REDBOOK, Nov. 1993, at 134, 135 (reporting that in 1990 only 51% of women received the full amount of court-ordered child support payments and that, following a divorce, the woman's standard of living decreased by 73% even though the man's increased by 42%).

14. See FRANCINE D. BLAU & MARIANNE A. FERBER, *THE ECONOMICS OF WOMEN, MEN, AND WORK* 265-66 (2d ed. 1992) (stating that nearly one-half of all American marriages end in divorce); see also DAVID T. ELLWOOD, *POOR SUPPORT* 83 (1988) (stating that 50% of the children in one-parent households will experience poverty as compared to only 15% in two-parent families).

15. See David Gates, *White Male Paranoia*, NEWSWEEK, Mar. 29, 1993, at 48, 48 (commenting on the movie *Falling Down*, in which an out-of-work white male goes berserk and attacks minorities).

16. See ROTUNDO, *supra* note 8, at 225-27 (stating that, at the close of the nineteenth century, "manhood" was equated with a sense of struggle and strife, and of violence and force).

17. See *id.*

connect aggression in themselves with lack of control and failure.<sup>18</sup> Social ambivalence about male violence as a necessary part of masculine behavior leads to hypocrisy. Some popular movie heroes, for example, say they do not want to be violent but are forced to annihilate their opponents in order to protect children or save the planet.

Masculinity is also used to imply attractiveness to women. As feminism has raised women's expectations about egalitarian relationships, many men seem unsure about what women find attractive in men. For many, it may seem insuperably difficult to be the kind of man that women want. Surely, many men feel that the brunt of insecurity and confusion in sexual relationships falls on them, and to some degree they are sexistly nostalgic for a romanticized past in which women supposedly adapted to whatever men wanted.

The rise of the gay-liberation movement, I suspect, has also confused many men and made their sense of automatic entitlement to masculinity more precarious for two reasons. First, traditional American views merged gender attributes with object choice. That is, a "real man" was tough, looked hyper-male, and sexually sought and was desired by women. As more and more apparently masculine-looking actors and athletes are revealed to be homosexual,<sup>19</sup> I think homophobia and masculine insecurity have become conflated for many heterosexual men, who try to prove that they are "real men" by vigorously asserting that they are not gay, and also that gay men must be effeminate sissies.<sup>20</sup> Second, a hallmark of traditional American masculinity has been the male bonding of men among men.<sup>21</sup> Male bonding in armies, fraternities, athletic teams, unions, taverns, and board rooms reinforced entitlement to

18. See ANNE CAMPBELL, *MEN, WOMEN, AND AGGRESSION* 40-69 (1993) (studying the way in which men and women cope with aggression by examining a sample of eight women and five men and concluding that women equate aggression with a loss of control while men see it as a way to exert control); see also Anne Campbell & Steven Muncer, *Models of Anger and Aggression in the Social Talk of Women and Men*, 17 J. THEORY SOC. BEHAV. 489, 506-09 (1987) (concluding that in expressing aggression, women feel self-condemnation while men feel power).

19. See, e.g., E.M. Swift, *Dangerous Games*, SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, Nov. 18, 1991, at 40, 40-41 (reporting that approximately 10% of male professional athletes are homosexual); see generally MICHELANGELO SIGNORILE, *QUEER IN AMERICA: SEX, THE MEDIA AND THE CLOSETS OF POWER* (1993) (discussing the media's portrayal of homosexuality and "outing" closet homosexuals who are well-known, including actors and politicians).

20. See ROTUNDO, *supra* note 8, at 278-79 (describing heterosexual men's need to distinguish themselves from gay men).

21. See *id.* at 62-67 (tracing the historical development of all-male organizations that proliferated in the nineteenth century).



masculinity. Here, too, the gay-liberation movement has cast the specter of homosexuality across such bonding in the minds of homophobic men.

I suggest, therefore, that for many heterosexual men, especially young men still insecure about their sexual identities and poor men without the power of wealth to bolster them, the easiest road to a feeling of satisfying masculinity in contemporary U.S. society is a misogyny that is sexualized. This misogyny allows a man to feel in command of women, different from and superior to them, and yet still desired by them. This is, of course, the formula of much straight pornography. It is also close to Catharine MacKinnon's definition of sexuality in a patriarchal society, which can be summarized as "what turns men on"—eroticized domination—and it is closely tied to the self-styled radical-feminist antagonism toward pornography.<sup>22</sup> Rather than seeing eroticized domination as a universal constant of patriarchal societies, however, I see factors specific to our current times and culture that may make pornography now especially available and attractive to many men and confusing to many women.

Heterosexual male pornography watchers have a way of bonding with other men, who often watch pornography together in order to prove that they desire women and to protect themselves against the charge of homosexual interest in one another. Jointly, they affirm that their sexual objects are female, and, in turn, that they are not gay, even if their close bonds are with other men. In one particularly clear example, a rapper calls his friend's girlfriend a slut, says she is ugly with exaggerated and colorful epithets, and pleads with the friend to give up the woman and return to the companionship of his male buddies: "Don't put a hoe before a homie," pleads the song's refrain.<sup>23</sup> This example purports to be a part of African-American street culture; however, I heard the song on a university radio station. I suspect that the crossover popularity of such lyrics springs from their appeal to young white men who can enjoy their misogyny without feeling responsible for the socially objectionable sentiments that they can attribute to other men. Another example would be MTV's white cartoon teenagers Beavis and Butthead, who are dumb, awkward, and sexist. Presumably they amuse the boys who watch them, boys who share their attitudes and can still feel easily superior to them.

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22. See CATHARINE A. MACKINNON, *Desire and Power*, in FEMINISM UNMODIFIED 46, 53 (1987) (stating that "sexuality arises in relations under male dominance . . . the content I want to claim for sexuality is the gaze that constructs women as objects for male pleasure"); see also ROSEMARIE TONG, FEMINIST THOUGHT 112-16 (1989) (describing radical feminists' anti-pornography platform as based upon violent pornography-induced rampages of men and group defamation of women, as well as inequality between the sexes).

23. KING TEE, *A Hoe B-4 Tha Homie*, on THA TRIFLIN' ALBUM (Capitol Records 1993).

Beavis and Butthead are totally bonded to one another; call any man who is not mean, tattooed, and leather-jacketed a "wuss"; disparage women; and congratulate themselves on getting simultaneous erections when watching women on music videos, whether or not the women are portrayed in conventionally sexy poses.

Sexualizing misogyny, I am claiming, can make it heterosexual and masculine in our culture. Just hating women, without desiring them, might make a man seem homosexual. Just desiring women, without hating them, might make a man seem like a "wuss." Under Freudian theory, sexualizing misogyny also makes it Oedipally safer; that is, it is still possible to idealize mom while desiring other women who are explicitly devalued.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, many young men today do not have fathers, or even father figures, present in their everyday lives,<sup>25</sup> so that their Oedipal anxieties are heightened; devaluing sexual women separates them from forbidden feelings about an idealized mother. A young man may also be covertly angry at his mother because she is working and not spending as much time with him as he would like, because she is single and still dangerously sexual, or because, in the absence of a father, she is the one who punishes and restricts his behavior. This Oedipal separation widens the gap between a boy's romantic and sexual feelings such that tenderness may be considered mushy, old-fashioned, feminine, or gay, rather than a positive emotion, and only to be used for manipulating women into sex. In contrast, pornography celebrates sex without love as well as sex without dependence.

Pornography is apparently becoming more accessible to a mass audience.<sup>26</sup> However, whether it is in fact becoming more popular in terms of people's tastes is yet to be determined. The social function pornography serves, especially for its straight male users, is that it fulfills needs that young men have to affirm heterosexual identity while hiding their fears about trying to relate to actual women, to separate lust from frightening feelings of tenderness and dependency, and to express sexualized anger at women, including anger that women have become more independent and more sexually assertive. However, many women,

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24. See SIGMUND FREUD, *A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men* (*Contributions to the Psychology of Love I*), in 11 THE STANDARD EDITION OF THE COMPLETE PSYCHOLOGICAL WORKS OF SIGMUND FREUD 163, 168-72 (James Strachey trans., 2d ed. 1964); see also JESSICA BENJAMIN, *THE BONDS OF LOVE* 3-5 (1988).

25. See BLAU & FERBER, *supra* note 14, at 285-86 (stating that the proportion of female-headed families in the United States increased from 9% in 1950, to 17% in 1989).

26. See Beth Charles, *The Pornography Explosion*, LADIES HOME J., Oct. 1985, at 104, 104 (citing estimates of eight to ten billion dollars spent on sexually explicit material in adult magazines, pornographic films, video cassettes, phone sex, cable television, and computers).

including some feminists, respond to contemporary problems about families and relationships by trying to hold onto men, make them "nicer" and more responsible.<sup>27</sup> Men who use pornography may be doing the reverse, denying their dependence on real women by fulfilling their sexual needs and their feelings of heterosexual mastery by masturbating to and fantasizing about pornographic images of women.

The social problem here is not sex, but men's misogyny, homophobia, and violence.<sup>28</sup> Thus, traditional sexist pornography, not just of the sadistic kind, fulfills many needs for the homophobic, heterosexual male viewer. It also relates to what may be deemed a crisis of representation. The branch of literary criticism called "reader response theory"<sup>29</sup> asks what effect does watching or reading a representation have on the reader or viewer, and is also central to film theory, as well as to marketing, advertising, and contemporary politics. The anti-pornography feminists agree with conservatives and with traditional humanists that reading and film viewing are important and influential events. Anti-pornography feminists insist that "speech acts! acts speak!" and they adduce examples of performative speech, like a jury saying, "Guilty" or a bride's, "I do."<sup>30</sup> Contemporary culture emphasizes representation over action, substitutes representations for actions, and blurs the lines between representation and other forms of action. All of these factors influence the pornography controversy and such formulations as "pornography is the theory, rape is the practice."<sup>31</sup>

Do people believe what they see in the media? Do they imitate what they see represented, whether they believe it or not? Do they buy what they see? Political and commercial advertising assume the answers to these

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27. See ROBIN NORWOOD, *WOMEN WHO LOVE TOO MUCH* 40 (1985) (discussing relationships in which women believe that their love can free men from behaviors that are cruel, violent, or indifferent).

28. In addition, the issue of non-sexualized violence is a complex matter not addressed here.

29. See Arthur A. Berger, *The Myth of Mass Culture*, *SOCIETY*, July-Aug. 1993, at 23 (explaining that reader response theory "suggests that individuals, as they watch a film or a play or read a book, help to create the work so to speak"); see also Alessandra Lippucci, *Surprised by Fish*, 63 U. COLO. L. REV. 1, 2 n.6 (1992) (explaining that "interpretation of a text is a function of the reader's experience" according to reader response theory).

30. *Speech, Equality and Harm: Feminist Perspectives on Pornography and Hate Propaganda*, *OFF OUR BACKS*, Apr. 1993, at 4.

31. This now ubiquitous phrase was apparently originally used by Robin Morgan. See ROBIN MORGAN, *GOING TOO FAR: THE PERSONAL CHRONICLE OF A FEMINIST* 169 (1977). See also Robin Morgan, *Theory and Practice: Pornography and Rape*, in *TAKE BACK THE NIGHT* 134, *supra* note 6, at 139.

questions are yes; our entire society is built on the premise that the answers are yes. The fight in schools and universities over textbooks and the literary canon assumes the answers are yes. And I, like most feminists, do think that representations of women affect the way both men and women internalize values, images, and beliefs about themselves and others.

This position is not without complications. For one, our society values people and sells things by associating them with sexual desirability and economic success. A valued person, certainly a "real man" in this society, is sexually active and finds important personal identity in achieving and receiving sexual pleasure. But sex can kill.<sup>32</sup> The old *Playboy* ideal, championing the man who sleeps around, is less likely to be successful with women and more likely to endanger men now than thirty years ago.

Pornography appears to be an ideal solution. It is completely safe sex that allows the viewer fantasized power, as well as the pleasures of masturbation and voyeurism. It is physically safer for its watchers because it need not involve encounters with the fluids or the angers of other people. It will not in itself get anyone pregnant or lead to AIDS. It may be psychologically more dangerous, however, because it is a fantasy medium free from feedback from another real person, who can temper the viewer's selfishness or grandiosity.

Technology and changes in our social habits apparently make pornography an increasingly popular option among Americans. As our society divides more fiercely between rich and poor, many people cannot afford to go out. Fewer people, especially young people, think of churches or other non-commercial groups as places where they can comfortably socialize.<sup>33</sup> Videocassette recorders have become increasingly affordable, and taped entertainment is the cheapest medium available, next to free television. Young married couples with children who cannot afford babysitters, men who do not want to be associated with the semi-public sleaze of the porn house, the elderly, the divorced, single, and lonely all can afford to rent a videotape. They may want a private pornographic evening to assuage loneliness, fantasize without the need for a partner, or

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32. See Richard M. Selik et al., *HIV Infection as a Leading Cause of Death Among Young Adults in U.S. Cities and States*, 269 JAMA 2991, 2991 (1993) (concluding that, during the 1980s, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection, the cause of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), emerged as the leading cause of death in the United States among adults between 25 and 44 years of age).

33. See Kenneth L. Woodward, *The Rites of Americans*, NEWSWEEK, Nov. 29, 1993, at 80, 82 (stating that only 19% of adult Americans regularly practice their religion); *Researching Religious Trends*, 110 CHRISTIAN CENTURY 1232, 1232 (discussing the downward spiral of church attendance of families who have children entering the teen years).

persuade present partners into a media-induced fantasy of being prettier, younger, fitter, or simply sexier and less self-conscious or inhibited than they usually are.<sup>34</sup>

The substitution of relations with machines over relations with people affects more than pornography. It extends to automatic bank tellers, computerized work stations, and video games in arcades where boys zap cartoon enemies for hours. This crisis in representation also extends to the sense many people have that the media is becoming all-encompassing. Children grow up spending more hours in front of televisions than in contact with their parents or other people. Working parents use television as a babysitter and then feel guilty about it. Substantive encounters with other people may be diminishing in many people's lives, and infomercials and dramatized news make it harder to distinguish media representations from reality. Media images permeate our culture, perhaps superseding older traditions such as religion. Many parents fear that they no longer control their children. However, current versions of masculinity represented in the media make parents ambivalent about disobedience and anti-authoritarian sass, particularly from boys. Parents may laugh at Bart Simpson, but do not want their sons to imitate him. They may want boys to stay out of trouble, but fear their becoming teachers' pets or sissies. Thus, our society is pervaded and confused by media images of masculinity and sexuality.

Pornography has different meanings for men and for women. So far it has been assumed that pornography users are men and that anti-pornography crusaders are women. But anti-censorship feminists point to the use of pornography by women, including the new explicitly erotic materials that are made by and/or marketed to women and couples, lesbian and heterosexual.<sup>35</sup> Most mainstream pornography objectifies women so that the heterosexual male viewer finds the imaged women both safer and sexier than the women he really knows. They have curvy young bodies, and they appear welcoming to all partners, eager for all sexual practices, insatiable and grateful. As a result, anti-pornography feminists stress the baleful results when men learn to objectify women by watching such

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34. See Wendy Melillo, *Visualizing Erotica*, WASH. POST, July 21, 1992, at Z13 (discussing a new genre of adult films to be used by couples as a form of sex therapy); see also Karen Karbo, *Sex Ed for Grown-ups: Can You Learn to be a Better Lover by Watching How To Tapes?*, REDBOOK, Nov. 1993, at 62, 64 (describing a new market for pornographic videos composed of educated middle-class couples who seek to add excitement to their sex lives).

35. See LINDA WILLIAMS, *HARD CORE: POWER, PLEASURE, AND THE "FRENZY OF THE VISIBLE"* 246-51 (1989) (describing Femme Productions, a company started by Candida Royalle, which produces pornography directed by women and marketed specifically for women or couples).

representations. But the results are more complicated when women also watch pornography.

Women expect more sexual pleasure than they did in the past, but, in turn, they are also held to higher standards of sexual performance. Sexual expertise was previously supposed to be the man's department. When bedroom athleticism and variety may be expected of her, however, pornography may be used to frighten, teach, arouse, and inspire women as well as men. For some women, pornography may actually de-objectify women because they can use it to validate their own desires and pleasures. They can also reinterpret or take control of the fantasy. For example, they may point out that a particular pictured position is not fun, but awkward and uncomfortable. Furthermore, women too can make comparisons between their lovers and the performers—the male stars' larger organs or more sustained erections—and they can use the pornography to encourage or instruct their partners how to please them. Pornography may also serve women by de-familiarizing and romanticizing their present relationships. For example, in a pornography sequence produced by the women of Femme Productions, a woman, dressed in sexy finery is picked up by a man on the street who turns out to be her husband. The woman has left their child with her mother in preparation for their sexy night together.<sup>36</sup>

According to feminist film theorist Linda Williams, pornography deems all problems sexual problems to which the answer is more sex.<sup>37</sup> She suggests that because pornography answers all problems with more sexual representations, that is, with more pornography, the viewer's anxieties can be both allayed and increased.<sup>38</sup> This ambivalence breeds both the popularity of pornography today and, conversely, the misguided belief that censoring pornography will stop patriarchy.<sup>39</sup> The anti-pornography movement responds to sexualized misogyny, violence against women, and the growing confusion and anomie of our society by attributing them to pornography.<sup>40</sup> Anti-censorship feminists respond that fighting against sexually explicit images may be more harmful than helpful

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36. *See id.* at 263 (describing *The Pick Up*, in *A TASTE OF AMBROSIA* (Femme Productions 1988)).

37. *See id.* at 276.

38. *See id.*

39. *See id.* at 22.

40. *See, e.g.,* CATHARINE A. MACKINNON, *TOWARD A FEMINIST THEORY OF THE STATE*, 196 (1989) (asserting that “[p]ornography contributes causally to attitudes and behaviors of violence and discrimination which define the treatment and status of half the population”); ANDREA DWORKIN, *PORNOGRAPHY: MEN POSSESSING WOMEN* 202 (1989) (describing pornography as a technology which legitimizes the uses of women conveyed by it).

to women.<sup>41</sup> In addition, more pertinent and effective solutions to sexism, solutions that do not impinge on constitutionally guaranteed individual rights or on women's partial progress toward sexual self-determination, need to be suggested.

Such solutions must address issues of masculinity and representation as well as sexism and violence throughout society. The need to build institutions for more frequent and egalitarian interpersonal interactions, especially for young people, and to encourage positive media representations of such egalitarian relationships must be realized. Effective solutions may include, for example, campaigns in high schools to foster mixed-sex activities, which would lead to a reduction in sexual harassment, and to ridicule homophobia as being stupid and immature. Also, broad campaigns should be promulgated against domestic violence, corporal punishment, gun ownership, and rape. A good example from mainstream media is the movie *Pump Up the Volume*.<sup>42</sup> In the movie, the high school hero, who has been bragging over the radio about his sexual prowess and loudly pretending to masturbate, learns to communicate with a young woman and to work with her to save the radio station. When he

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41. See, e.g., Nadine Strossen, *A Feminist Critique of "The" Feminist Critique of Pornography*, 79 VA. L. REV. 1099, 1141 (1993). Professor Strossen presents ten reasons underlying her conclusion that censoring pornography would undermine the rights and interests of women:

1. Any censorship scheme would inevitably encompass many works that are especially valuable to feminists.
2. Any censorship scheme would be enforced in a way that would discriminate against the least popular, least powerful groups in our society, including feminists and lesbians.
3. Censorship is paternalistic, perpetuating demeaning stereotypes about women, including that sex is bad for us.
4. Censorship perpetuates the disempowering notion that women are essentially victims.
5. Censorship distracts from constructive approaches to countering anti-female discrimination and violence.
6. Censorship would harm women who make their living in the sex industry.
7. Censorship would harm women's efforts to develop their own sexualities.
8. Censorship would strengthen the power of the religious right, whose patriarchal agenda would curtail women's rights.
9. By undermining free speech, censorship would deprive feminists of a powerful tool for advancing women's equality.
10. Sexual freedom, and freedom for sexually explicit expression, are essential aspects of human freedom; denying these specific freedoms undermines human rights more broadly.

*Id.*

42. PUMP UP THE VOLUME (New Line Cinema 1990).

tells her he "needs" her, a cooperative project supplements and supersedes his sexual desire. Thus, instead of treating a woman as a sexual object, the film represents a positive image of the sexes working together to achieve a common good.

Definitions of masculinity that do not depend on sexualized misogyny or on homophobia are available and must be fostered. Such a definition of masculinity would involve moral courage in standing up for one's convictions and protecting the weak. It would involve physical prowess in overcoming obstacles, including one's own disabilities, self-control over anger and aggression, capacity for familial as well as sexual love, reliability in work and obligations to others, the ability to give pleasure to one's lovers, as well as pride in having a male body and in being a male who does not devalue women. This conception avoids homophobia, but it does not insist that men reverse all their presently valued traits to become traditionally feminine, as they fear feminists demand.<sup>43</sup> Activists and citizens could work toward such redefinitions not through calls to censorship, but by adopting, modeling, and teaching new behaviors and images, including sexually explicit ones. Redefining masculinity is a broad goal, and harder to accomplish than abolishing pornography. It is more pertinent, however, to improving women's lives. Moreover, the contradictions within current definitions of masculinity make it so difficult for men that they, too, have an interest in working for this change.

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43. My definition of femininity would be the same, except that it would include pride in being female and having a female body.



