

The Sexualized Body  
and the Medical  
Authority of  
Pornography



# The Sexualized Body and the Medical Authority of Pornography:

*Performing Sexual Liberation*

Edited by

Heather Brunskell-Evans

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



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This book first published 2016

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-9958-5

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-9958-1

*I would like to dedicate this book to FiLia*



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## FOREWORD

In 2013-2014 I took part in a series of discussions with a biological scientist and these formed the impetus for this book. Darwin's thesis of evolution was put forward as an explanation for the 'naturalness' of men's consumption of internet pornography. I was stunned by the intellectual paucity and simplistic cause and effect form of argumentation. I had an epiphany. As a social theorist and philosopher of the body it had never occurred to me to research the history of the scientific endorsement of pornography. I decided to write about the masquerade of scientific neutrality, and the historical complicity of the medical sciences with the pornography industry.

I wondered whether there was any current critical research about the relationship between medicine and pornography. I quickly investigated and discovered that a number of international as well as UK scholars were, like myself, turning to this phenomenon as an issue to be researched, explored and explained. The result was a conference I held at the University of Leicester in the autumn of 2014 called *Performing Sexual Liberation: The Body and the Medical Authority of Pornography*. Scholars emerged from all over the globe to present their research, the result of which is their contribution of chapters to this book.

Steve King (Professor of Economic and Social History and the Director of the Centre for Medical Humanities, Leicester) made funds available for the conference. I have learned through experience that the academy is increasingly cautious to support critical rather than neo-liberal sexuality studies. I am very grateful to Steve, not only because he exempted himself from this trend, but also because he has consistently and unequivocally championed my subsequent work on medicine, gender and sexuality.

Lisa-Marie Taylor (activist and Chair of FiLia, a Women's Rights Charity) has been instrumental in making this book possible. Our serendipitous first meeting took place in the Houses of Parliament in the autumn of 2013 where a special interest group of parliamentarians and others convened to reflect upon the sexual politics of pornography. I subsequently attended the annual Feminism in London Conference which FiLia organises. I took

part in one of the discussion groups on pornography. This was facilitated by OTTAR (a Norwegian organisation dedicated to resisting pornography culture) and *Stop Porn Culture* (an American organisation now called *Culture Reframed*).

In the summer of 2014 Lisa-Marie invited me to join her in starting a UK branch called *Resist Porn Culture* (now a branch of FiLia]. It was at this point my own political activism began. Friendships have flourished and grown with Lisa-Marie, with Ane Sto and Asta Beate Haland from OTTAR, and with Gail Dines, founder of *Culture Reframed* and contributor to this book. These enduring relationships have provided a strong support network and forum for the sharing of ideas (sometimes under the Norwegian midnight sun).

Michele Moore (Professor of Inclusive Education and Editor of *Disability & Society*) has sustained me in the past three years in ways too numerous and private to mention. She has maintained a steadfast presence in the face of my relentless discussion about topics she would much rather none of us had need to discuss/know about. In preserving her own sanity, she has helped me keep mine.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the support of my sons Justin, Jude, and Curdie, as well as of my daughter Gudrun. When each boy was born I rejected the idea he was possessed of a pre-disposition to ‘spread his seed over multiple women’ which, when he was a grown man, could legitimate his sexual use of a class of women socially designated as bodies for that purpose. My sons’ full complement of human sensibilities such as empathy, and my daughter’s dynamic agency and autonomy, comprise some of the background experiences which have helped sustain my critical analysis of pornography. The chapters in this book explore pornography’s patriarchal, monotonous, mono-logical, biologically essentialist fantasy as a narrative which helps *construct* rather than reflect our sexual identities.

—Heather Brunskell-Evans  
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# CHAPTER ONE

## THE INTRODUCTION

### HEATHER BRUNSKELL-EVANS

Some time ago I gave an interview for BBC Radio Leicester about my research into internet pornography. The particular programme to which I had been invited is broadcast mid-morning and intersperses popular music, national news and discussion of local topics. I had organised a conference at the University of Leicester in the autumn of 2014 called *Performing Sexual Liberation: The Body and the Medical Authority of Pornography*. It was this local conference that had aroused the interest of the programme makers.

The presenter knew only two personal things about me before we met: firstly that I am critical of the popular idea that internet pornography is sexually liberating for women (or men for that matter); and secondly that I am an academic. He immediately made two telling remarks across the airwaves: he informed the listeners that I didn't look like someone who is critical of pornography; he proposed that pornography, particularly when used by a couple, can strengthen the relationship. He thus called upon two dominant discourses which he judged would be both familiar to the audience and would spark off a debate between him and me. The first is that someone critical of pornography must be traditional, socially conservative, and have a negative, repressed sexuality. My demeanour, whatever he deemed that to be, conveyed to him that I didn't fall into the 'prude' category. The second discourse is that, outside of caveats such as pornography-addiction and paedophilia, consuming pornography can be a positive, healthy experience which can spice up a flagging sex-life.

Although the 'pornography as sexual liberation' discourse is dominant, there are of course other ways of thinking about pornography. For example, anxieties are expressed by parents, educators and health professionals that pornography is accessible to children. Here the problem is located not in pornography itself, but in the fact that children are exposed to pornography

before they are physically, emotionally and psychologically mature enough to cope with it. Another set of anxieties are those expressed by wives and partners who disclose they are devastated their menfolk lead a more intense sex-life on-line than with them off-line. Here the problem lies in the strange 'virtual infidelity' that pornography affords. Psychologists identify a condition called 'pornography-addiction' and they devise therapeutic treatments for its cure. Again the problem is not located in pornography, but rather, like alcohol, pornography is regarded as innocuous if it is consumed in moderation. As a population we are worried that crime statistics indicate the overwhelming majority of men who commit sexual crimes against children off-line are found to have consumed child pornography on-line. Criminologists, sociologists and psychologists produce conflicting research data about a possible relationship between on-line 'fantasy' and committing sexual violence in the 'real' world. Despite the myriad anxieties, explanations, and theories that abound pornography *per se* goes largely unquestioned. The production and consumption of pornography is currently ubiquitous, largely unregulated, and increasingly normalized and mainstreamed.

The chapters in this book have emerged from papers given at the conference referred to above. My overall purpose in holding it was to gather scholars together who could provide a critical counter-point to current liberal media scholarship which is aligned with the populist view and which tends to be pro-pornography. In taking pornography as a cultural and social phenomenon to be critically analyzed like any other, I hoped that concepts could be brought to bear that hold pornography *and* media scholarship up to analytical scrutiny. My own academic background is in sociology and philosophy; I am informed by the work of Michel Foucault and by radical feminists, in particular by the work of Andrea Dworkin. I invited a range of scholars to participate in the conference who would analyse pornography from one or both of these perspectives. The main thesis of the conference and now the book is that, far from being liberating or healthy for women, pornography is the eroticisation of women's submission and men's pleasure in this submission. Pornography is not 'just' fantasy, it is the eroticisation of gender inequality and this matters politically and ethically: It matters in the real world as well as in fantasy; it matters to adults as well as to children; it matters to individuals as well as to relationships; and it matters to men as well as to women.

The focus of the book is heterosexual pornography. Whilst it is true that there is a diversity of pornographies – heterosexual, gay, lesbian, transsexual and so on – the book does not bracket minority pornographies as utterly

distinct from mainstream heterosexual pornography. Firstly, the myriad of pornographies all fall into the category of what Foucault calls 'an incitement to speak sex'; secondly pornography constructs and reproduces feminine sexuality as debased and degraded by sex, and this representation cross-cuts most if not all genres of pornography, including male gay pornography where submissive men are feminised. Lest any male reader, hetero-sexual or otherwise, is now losing interest on the basis the book has nothing to do with him, the chapters constantly address the social construction of masculinity as well as femininity. It should surely go without saying that one can't analyse femininity without thereby also analysing masculinity, since femininity and masculinity each depend on the other for symbolic meaning: masculinity signifies that which is not feminine; femininity signifies that which is not masculine.

At this point a cry usually goes up from liberal men and women alike, as well as from media scholars, that 'Women enjoy watching porn too!', as if this fact invalidates the proposition that pornography sexualises and reproduces gender inequality. Both Foucauldian and radical feminist analyses are predicated on a different and more complex starting point than the liberal one. There are three critical propositions that all authors in this collection share: The first is that pornographic sex has little to do with 'natural' sex but is the orchestrated *performance* of natural sex; the second is that, in that performance, rather than freeing women from patriarchal constrictions on women's sexuality, pornography not only reiterates and endorses hierarchical gender norms but positively incites them; and the third is that medicine, both historically and currently, affords considerable legitimacy to pornography and thus to gender inequality.

I know the last proposition is counter-intuitive. In the populist view medical knowledge is objective and rational, the very antithesis of embodiment which is driven by needs and lusts. The separation of the mind and body is challenged by the authors who argue firstly that medical knowledge does not stand outside of culture but is the product of culture as well as its shaper, and secondly that the body itself is not an independent biological entity separate from culture but on the contrary, the body and its pleasures are invested by culture. Medicine has been complicit in *constructing* the sexed body and gender hierarchy, and in that construction, the relationship between medicine and pornography has not been incidental but fundamental. Sexology in particular has been the 'science' which has taken sexuality as its sole object of study, and it is sexology and its relationship to pornography that the chapters in this volume largely address.

I have taken the liberty of pigeonholing the authors into categories on the basis of their theoretical allegiances: Foucauldian; radical feminist; those divided between liberal feminism and radical feminism; and Foucauldian radical feminists. I apologize to each author in advance. Categorization inevitably restricts, and a scholar doesn't necessarily want to confine her/himself intellectually by a label, especially one imposed by someone else! I define the authors in this way not to confuse the reader but to help her or him chart a course through the political stakes and consequences of different theoretical emphases.

### **Liberal Analyses of Pornography**

The now orthodox, populist way of thinking about pornography is that it represents 'sex-in-the-raw'. In this view, pornographic sex *is* sex, stripped of the taboos, social mores, and the traditions which regulate sexual conduct. Of course consumers are fully aware the sex is staged and that performers are acting. However since the performers are both acting *and* having actual not simulated sex, and since the consumer, in watching the sex acts and masturbating to them, or indeed interacting with performers in the virtual space of web-cams, is undergoing a fully embodied visceral experience, then what pornography does, so the story goes, is touch on some essential aspect of human sexuality for which it gives harmless permission. To be critical of pornography therefore, is to be critical of sex itself, and to be critical of sex itself is to be 'sex-negative' – to store inside oneself sexual repressions, to be morally censorious, to align oneself with outmoded tradition or religious fundamentalism, and to be out of step with liberal culture.

The populist ideas described above are shared in some of their essentials by liberal scholars who are pro-pornography (see for example: Attwood 2010; Attwood 2009; Bright 2013; Smith 2007; Smith and Attwood 2013; Taormino 2013; Weeks 1985). The narrative that sustains this body of work is the following: Sexuality is a dynamic, energetic and unruly property that resides deep within us. Sexual desire exceeds our conscious intention and rational will. Since the Victorian period sexuality has been governed by patriarchal religious and traditional mores; everyone suffered deeply from this punitive sex-negative culture, but particularly heterosexual women and those with non-normative sexual identities who were castigated and even pathologised. Thank goodness, we are told, we no longer live in such a repressive political and ethical regime. Pornography must be protected as an exemplar of free speech and political

freedom alongside other aspects of democracy e.g. a free press, equal opportunities policies, human rights legislation and so on (McNair 2013).

With the development of digital technologies, internet pornography now affords an invaluable sexual resource for heterosexual women and members of the LGBTQ communities. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century ‘respectable’ women (mothers, sisters, and daughters) were thought of as asexual, or as only gently sexual, and who needed protection from men’s sexual exploitation. However women with explicit sexualities, such as prostitutes or women who had sex outside of marriage, were shamed as ‘other’ – women who had little respect for themselves, or who had an over-abundance of sexuality, or who were feeble-minded or who, at best, were poverty stricken and exploited by men. Pornography counters the pernicious dichotomy of virgin/whore: women can now either become pornography performers or can be sexually aroused by consuming pornography without paying the price of public stigma and shame. Pornography is also a resource for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, whose non-normative sexualities are still marginalised and disciplined. Pornography is thus subversive of tradition and is a resource for sexual identity and liberation.

The addendum to the liberal media scholarship approach is that any anxiety about pornography (such as those described earlier) and any critique of pornography *per se* such as those by radical feminists are examples of highly emotive ‘sex-panics’. Sex-panics are an historical legacy from the Victorian period when any form of sexuality other than that of the legitimate married couple caused consternation. Pornography is about fantasy, and as fantasy desire has no intrinsic ethical (or unethical) value. To be critical of fantasy is effectively to be ‘the thought police’. Pornography is not about the sexual degradation of women because it is not ‘one thing’; it is a media form with many genres that cater for different sexualities and different desires, thus creating a space for the democratisation of sexual desires and freedom from the traditional heteronormativity of patriarchy.

## **Foucault and Dworkin: Pornography as Sexualized Discipline**

### *Foucault*

In the *History of Sexuality Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge* (1979) Foucault historicises sexuality, but his historicism is completely different

to that of feminist media scholarship. Indeed it is the hypothesis of sexual repression that his genealogy of sexuality is dedicated to refute. He agrees that 19<sup>th</sup> century attitudes towards sexuality are still resonant, but he deconstructs the liberal narrative on two grounds: Firstly, the sex about which we are constantly urged to be positive and for which pornography gives alleged expression – the essential human property residing at the core of us – doesn't exist! Secondly, Foucault demonstrates that sexuality can't be repressed because it isn't "rooted in a specific and irreducible urgency which power tries as best it can to dominate" (1979:155). The relationship of power to the pleasures of the body does not function as "law and taboo" but productively, through power's "grip on bodies and their materiality, their forces, energies, sensations and pleasures" (1979: 155).

What was responsible for the fabrication of sexuality in whose thrall, as exemplified by pornography consumption, we are still captured, and which we imagine can liberate us? Foucault argues that contrary to the narrative about the silencing of sexuality, the Victorian period partook in the most intense, loquacious "speaking-out" about all things sexual. The medical idea arose that "there is something other than bodies, organs ... sensations and pleasures; something else and something more, with intrinsic properties and laws of its own" (1979: 152-153). The idea of sexuality enabled the "fictitious unity" of "anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures" (1979:154). The French neurologist Charcot was one of the first doctors to isolate sexuality. The sexuality which medicine 'discovered' – the epistemological object 'sexuality' – isn't an extra-discursive dark, unconscious, unruly, desiring force whose inner truths are explained by scientific reason.

On the contrary, sexuality is a discourse, a fictitious object with material effects in that certain desires were incited and sexual subjectivities created. For example, when sexuality was isolated as central to the human being, medicine described it as belonging to both men and women equally. However men's sexuality was valorised and normalized as *the* sexuality *par excellence* whereas female sexuality was understood as subsidiary and passive. If, as the legitimate wife, the woman was a compliant recipient of her husband's active sexuality her sexuality was normalised. If on the other hand women demonstrated an autonomous sexually activity she was pathologised. The knowledge of sexuality as an inherently biological/psychological phenomenon, gained through proximity to medicine and biology, gave the subsequent sciences of sexuality –

psychoanalysis, psychology, and sexology – “a guarantee of quasi-scientificity” (1979: 155).

What the Victorians experienced and what we experience is the fabrication of ‘sexuality’, the construction of something called sexuality through a set of representations – images, ways of picturing and describing, and of organising, inciting and controlling pleasures – that propose and confirm, that make up this sexuality to which we are then referred and in which pornography has taken up a specific and powerful position. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present Foucault argues men and women’s sexuality has been “relayed by the countless economic interests which, with the help of medicine, psychiatry, prostitution and pornography, have tapped into this analytical multiplication of pleasures and this optimization of the power that controls it” (Foucault, 1979: 48).

In attempting to resist power and its grip on bodies “we must not think that in saying yes to sex, one says no to power” (1979: 157). As sexual sophisticates, Foucault proposes we “congratulate ourselves for finally ... having broken free from of a long period of hard repression” (1979: 158). The power that traditionally regulates sexuality is not so much the exercise of sovereign power, as in the liberal narrative, i.e. the kind of power that says No! On the contrary, the power-knowledge relations of sexuality are *productive*, and in that productivity sexual subjectivities are constructed – the sexual freedom fighter, ‘the good wife’, and the ‘whore’. When we say ‘Yes! Yes! Yes!’ to pornography, as if our very sexual freedom is at stake, what we do is invoke the very sexuality that has us in its grip and we thus proliferate power and multiply its effects.

In believing we are finally bringing sex out into the open, indeed that “our ‘liberation’ is in the balance” (1979: 159), what we are actually doing, since sexuality is neither a natural phenomenon which power tries to hold in check nor an opaque domain at the core of our being, is invoking the very sexuality and the sexual subjectivities by which we are constrained and disciplined. If we are to free ourselves from cultural norms of sexuality and gender then it is incumbent upon us to reflect upon the power/knowledge relations that construct sexuality in the first place and the kinds of sexual subjects we have become as a result.

### *Dworkin*

At the same time that Foucault was writing a genealogical history of sexuality, Dworkin was also writing a cultural history of pornography

(1981). Dworkin is much traduced by pro-pornography media scholars. Perhaps her major 'crime' is that she describes pornography as the graphic representation of women as 'whores'. In the pro-pornography view any critique of pornography performers as 'whores' is taken simplistically as a moral judgement about the women thus demonstrating 'whore-phobia'. However it is the reverse theoretical and political move which Dworkin makes, and her thesis is both emotionally searing and intellectually profound.

Dworkin is the inheritor of the critical mode of thought initiated by Simone De Beauvoir in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century in *The Second Sex* (1953). De Beauvoir analysed women's cultural and historical status as arising from the patriarchal view of Woman as Other. Her well known assessment of woman's secondary sexual status is that it is not biologically determined but manufactured by patriarchal civilization and the knowledges which construct her: "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman". Another leading idea is the question of what it means for women "to assume the status of the Other". Dworkin looks through the conceptual lens that de Beauvoir created by analysing pornography as partly constitutive of this 'becoming a woman' and of 'othering'. She points out (1988: 204):

Pornography says that women are sluts, cunts; [...] pornography shows women as body parts, as genitals, as vaginal slits, as nipples, as buttocks, as lips, as open wounds, as pieces; pornography uses real women; pornography is an industry that buys and sells women; pornography sets the standard for female sexuality, for female sexual values, for girls growing up, for boys growing up, and increasingly for advertising, films, videos, visual arts, fine art, and literature, music with words.

Are we so determined to disavow the language and imagery of pornography that we can't bear to have Dworkin bring into broad daylight that to which pornography is dedicated? Everyone reading this book who consumes pornography or who has had only the briefest of acquaintance with it will know the term 'whore' (and other derogatory epithets) is pornography's *lingua franca* and that it is used with the greatest ferocity when overt violence is visited upon her by the male performers.

The post-war period of the 1950s and 1960s witnessed the establishment, growth, and expansion of the pornography industry, making possible the global industry we recognise today. Like all other capitalist industries, the pornography industry created optimal conditions for its expansion. It needed to erase the seedy image of male consumers as 'sad-losers' who could not sustain healthy heterosexual relationships and to rebrand

consumers as counter-cultural freedom fighters. It also needed to rebrand the object to be consumed – women as ‘whores’ – to women as ‘empowered whores’, thus soothing the possible conscience of the consumer during the period when the struggle for women’s liberation was a revolutionary force which couldn’t be ignored. The pornography industry portrayed itself as progressive and sexually liberating; in doing so it was increasingly successful in shaping both public opinion and liberal academic perception.

Dworkin (1988) points out that unlike the Left’s analysis of capitalism in shaping human consciousness and in creating the ‘need’ which the market then supplies, when it came to pornography a strange analytical and political silence fell in the 1970s. She asks women to question the “intellectual and scientific argumentation in conjunction with male history” which justifies what a woman’s body is ‘for’ (1988: 114):

The vital question is: are we to accept *their* world view of a moral polarity that is biologically fixed, genetically or hormonally or genitally absolute (or whatever organ or secretion or molecular particle they scapegoat next); or does our own historical experience of social deprivation and injustice teach us that to be free in a just world we will have to destroy the power, the dignity, the efficacy of this one idea above all others?

Dworkin has left a legacy of how to think about the pornography industry and its representation of Woman by providing concepts which simply did not exist before the 1970s. That legacy is in some of the chapters in this book.

The book is divided into 3 Parts: **Part One** describes the power of the pornography industry and the complicity with it of much current feminist media scholarship. **Part Two** is concerned with the pornographic construction of femininity (and masculinity). **Part Three** describes the inextricable relationship of pornography with sexology.

## **Part One: The Industrial Shaping of Private Desire**

In **Chapter Two**, Gail Dines, a radical feminist scholar, argues feminist media scholarship suffers from a paucity of theoretical analysis, in particular of pornography as an industry. The earlier scholarship of the 1980s and early 1990s examined the relationship between capitalism and the ideologies of media forms through the lens of critical theory, in particular that of Marx, Althusser, and Gramsci. It interrogated how media ownership created markets which shaped its products which are

“distributed and consumed within a society characterized by race, class, and gender”. This critical approach has now died away: Where corporate owned media were previously analysed for how they help shape femininity, neoliberal media scholars pay scant attention to the relationship between capitalism and social relations and analyse pornography from the point of view of the individual, as an expression of women’s intrinsic sexual desire.

Dines points out that the industry itself has no qualms about acknowledging the relationship between the industry and the individual consumer. Sophisticated marketing technologies and public relations companies are dedicated to strategizing how to shape and manipulate our most personal, intimate sexual desires and embodied experiences. Whilst the pornography market grows in size and in public acceptability, few people are aware of its scale, and the way the mainstream industry develops, functions and intersects within the wider economic systems of global capitalism.

Dines concludes that media scholars approach pornography less as critics and “more like fans”, and this relationship is effectively complicitous with the pornography industry. It is incumbent upon academics to address the current industry’s exponential expansion, and its legitimization of the economic and social subordination of women. If feminist scholarship does not return to theory and to an analysis of gender politics the results will be that “feminism becomes one more movement to be coopted by the neo-liberal hegemony that rebrands capitulation as resistance”.

## **Part Two: The Disciplined Female Body**

In **Chapter Three** James Kay, a Foucauldian scholar, argues Foucault’s work, *Discipline and Punish* (1975) describes in detail the mechanisms of disciplinary power as these began to replace sovereignty in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. As such, it provides a rich conceptual resource for understanding the distinctive features of the power exercised by pornographers.

Firstly, surveillance is characteristic of disciplinary power. The pornographic gaze is trained not so much on the complete body, let alone to a life or personality, but rather on specific body parts. Secondly, spatio-temporal control is characteristic of disciplinary power. The performer’s acts are carefully choreographed to allow constant access by the camera to body parts. The duration and manner of each act – an example of which could be the timed sequences of anal, vaginal and ‘ass-to-mouth’ penetrations of

the woman – are dictated by what the pornographer deems the ideal of totally useful time to incite bodily response and pleasure in the consumer.

Thirdly, docility-utility is characteristic of disciplinary power. The performers learn how to present themselves, speak, move and position themselves on camera, and in particular for female performers, take bodily suffering as it is demanded. Performers gain various aptitudes as a result, increasing their utility within the pornographic domain and in some cases gaining a degree of fame. Finally, the examination is a specific technique of disciplinary power exercised by the pornographer. The body is made to display for the viewer “its arousal, its pleasure, and its pain”. The frequent perpetual vocalization and verbal self-narration of performers, serves the same end “laying out an erotic consciousness for inspection and voyeuristic enjoyment”.

Kay argues the idea that pornography disciplines performers is often refuted by liberal advocates. In this latter view sex-work is equivalent to other forms of labour: the performers have consented and have signed legally recognized contracts; to suggest that performers are oppressed is to insult their agency and intelligence. Kay insists the ideas of consent and contract demands our “cautious and critical attention”. Disciplinary power is fundamentally non-egalitarian and asymmetrical, and undercuts the formally egalitarian structures of representative democracies. It is of no matter that the performer contracts to be trained, monitored, and reprimanded by her employer: the mechanism that disciplinary power brings into play fundamentally distorts and exceeds the play of formal equality manifest in the contractual agreement.

Pornography production demands asymmetrical power not necessarily because pornographers are tyrants (although they might well be). Although one of the major tropes of pornography is violence to women, and although the performers are sometimes physically abused and forced to perform certain acts, control of the performers through violence is not generally part of the production process itself. Rather control is exercised through the performers’ insertion into a mechanism of coercion in the form of praise, judgement, training, surgical modification, financial reward and so on. Pornography production requires disciplinary power for its very functioning: it needs the ceaseless “mastery over the bodies it takes as its object, making them more malleable and pliable for its ends”.

Kay concludes that sovereign power and disciplinary power, in many ways opposed, fuse together. Its disciplinary techniques are “a coded display of

symbolic and real dominance, violence and triumphant power". Its consumers are invited to identify themselves with, feel affirmed by, and take pleasure in the host of roles, narratives and ideals that the performers incite. Thus pornography symbolically and in actuality reproduces and mobilises a wide array of power structures and regimes including patriarchy and misogyny, bio-politics, racism, hetero-normativity, and neo-liberalism.

In **Chapter Four** Julia Long, a radical feminist, draws conceptual and political links between the disciplinary subjection of performers and the disciplining of women in the culture. She calls upon Dworkin's thesis that male supremacy is propped up through "a metaphysical assertion of the self" and this self-assertion is maintained, Long argues, through cultural permission for the "violability" of women's bodies, a concept she borrows from the philosopher Martha Nussbaum.

Historically women have been divided into three categories, and each is related to penile penetration and female violability: the 'virgin' (the pre or non/penetrated state); the wife who was rendered violable because of her function in childbearing and her role as supplier of sex to the husband; and the 'whore' (in Dworkin's terminology). In pornography the "woman-as-violable" theme is endorsed *par excellence* because the performer's sole function is her penetrability. This violability includes: vaginal, anal and oral penetration (in combinations of various orifices being penetrated, and by varying numbers of men, often simultaneously); gagging; as-to-mouth penetration; and 'bukkake' involving ejaculation onto a woman's body, face, hair, eyes ears or mouth by multiple men.

Along with the dramatic rise in pornography consumption, Long charts the corresponding rise in the numbers of women undergoing invasive and intimate "beauty" practices. She gives two examples: pubic hair removal and labiaplasty both of which transform women's genitals to resemble that of a pre-pubescent girl or 'virgin' When women give reasons why they subject themselves to such practices they cite personal choice: pleasure, cleanliness, increased confidence about their bodies in relationships with men and so on. Long argues that women's explanations "both pre-suppose and depend upon a notion of women's bodies as fundamentally violable and in turn serve to construct that violability, thus making the prospect of further violation – such as that of pornography – more acceptable".

Long concludes that women's disciplinary internalization of the male gaze is not "caused" by pornography, rather pornography and beauty practices

exist in a mutually reinforcing process of normalisation and legitimation – the pornographication of society.

In **Chapter Five** Tracy Penny Light and Diana Parry examine some women's pleasure in pornography, and they also analyse labiaplasty and other cosmetic procedures and surgeries. As feminist scholars they express allegiance neither to a Foucauldian nor a radical feminist theoretical approach, rather they explore liberal feminist media scholarship on the grounds it has substantive points to make.

Liberal feminist media scholars argue that pornography helps women understand their own desires and creates a forum to explore sexuality without shame. Moreover new digital technologies provide a virtual space for a broad intersection of women to produce, access, consume and discuss pornographic literature. Blogs, fan fiction, e-books, virtual publishers, social net-working sites, and on-line communities with special interests increasingly facilitate more vocabularies of women's sexual desire. With regard to cosmetic procedures and surgery, many women report feeling empowered by their choices to transform their bodies. In conclusion, media scholars report that women experience themselves as self-conscious agents of their own sexual desires and their own lives.

Light and Parry question whether a "feminist quality" can be attributed to women's experience of empowerment, despite assertions by women themselves to the contrary. They are very sympathetic to the radical feminist view that the wider sexualisation of culture constructs a new patriarchal normal that women seek to emulate. Feminist 'empowerment' is inextricably bound with sexism and socio-cultural prescriptions about female sexuality, and pornography and medical practices strengthen traditional patriarchal views of women's sexuality by which women self-subjectify.

In **Chapter Six** Rebecca Saunders, a Foucauldian radical feminist, points out that female ejaculation has become increasingly popular as a genre of pornography. Countless sites are devoted entirely to its representation, and most other sites include it as a searchable category. Moreover, in self-help books, titillating magazine articles and scientific papers female ejaculation is depicted as an essential but historically neglected aspect of women's autonomous sexuality. The woman's newly conceived 'right' to her allegedly cataclysmic ejaculation is now heavily marketed and guaranteed through the accoutrements of dildos and vibrators which allegedly reach all aspects of a woman's anatomy, from clitoris to G-Spot. Indeed the

multitude of self-help books that teach women to ejaculate invariably elevate it not only to the status of maximum pleasure but to a post-feminist “responsibility” or an “act of politicised, feminist freedom”.

Female ejaculation can seem a rival to the male cum shot, where the man is the powerful superior sexual subject and the woman is a submissive, passive object for penetration. The oscillation between blow-jobs and anal penetration, and the enthusiastic moans and endless ‘yeses’ from the female performers culminate in the woman’s enraptured pleasure at having ejaculate squirted onto her body or into her eyes or mouth as she gratefully gobbles the semen. The ejaculating penis is the main driving force of the pornographic narrative and stands as a repeated symbol of both individuals’ pleasure.

Whilst female ejaculation seems to give female pleasure a new-found centrality, Saunders argues it is a means by which the traditional 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century medical pathologisation of female sexuality finds current expression. Women ejaculate copious fluids the consistency and quantity of urine, and this is accompanied by frenzied writhing, screaming and eye-rolling. The seeming involuntary confession of feminine pleasure does not function as a “violent assertion of female parity” but is appropriated as an example of female pathology. Where the male ejaculate is a metaphysical assertion of self, confirmed by the fact it is not the man but the denigrated woman who bears the taint of semen’s viscosity, the female ejaculate implicates her in her own waste product, and she is often encouraged to lick and sniff it in a way unthinkable for a male performer to do with his own semen. Pornography, either through the sub-genre gyno-porn or in the more general representation of female ejaculation, constructs female sexuality as simultaneously disturbing in its naturalness and pathologically in need of authoritative male intervention.

### **Part Three: Porno-Sexology**

In **Chapter Seven** Meagan Tyler, a radical feminist, tells us that after a brief period in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when, in order to retain its scientific legitimacy, sexology began to distance itself from its previous relationship with pornography (which had been strong in the 19<sup>th</sup> century), sexology renewed the relationship. In the 1960s pornography began to achieve respectability, and sexologists gave expert advice in the columns of pornography magazines as these began to proliferate and which presented pornography as sexual liberation. The relationship intensified throughout the 1960s and 1970s when key sexologists such as Masters and Johnson,

the founders of modern sex therapy, began to endorse pornography as a therapeutic tool. At this point, sexology and pornography began a symbiotic relationship which lasted relatively unchallenged for the following two decades, and which is still with us.

There are three ways that sexology, sex-therapy and pornography became intertwined through the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Firstly, sex-therapists watched sexually explicit material as a training device in order to confront their own prejudices about certain sex-acts and therefore be sympathetic and non-judgemental with their patients. Secondly, pornography was used as a relatively unproblematic tool for diagnosing sexual health/ responsiveness in individuals. Finally, pornography was used as a therapeutic ‘cure’ to reorient the dangerous sexualities of certain individuals, for example those with violent sexual fantasies and fetishes. Whilst the history of pornography and sex-research can still be traced to current training, it is in the area of therapeutic treatment that pornography is most visible today.

Pornography as therapy for sexual dysfunction has become fairly standard, despite almost no empirical evidence to support its use. The dysfunctions for which it is thought to be of particular use are female inhibition, frigidity and anorgasmia. Therapy expects women will get aroused by images of other women being dominated, coerced and even assaulted. Some sexologists have begun to question this and have decided that women should be shown “women-made” or “women-centred” pornography. Tyler points to the dubious distinction between pornography produced by men and by women: research demonstrates that female directors produce material with similar levels of violence and also repeat clear themes of female submission and misogyny.

Tyler concludes that pornography as therapy is particularly problematic for women since the version of a healthy sexual response to which the therapy directs her involves a model of heterosexuality in which women’s subordination is eroticised. Pornography gives women very little space to refuse a sex life that is not infused with pornography and, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, gives women *less* not more ability to be sexually autonomous and self-directed since a healthy female sexuality as defined by pornography is always sex-ready.

In **Chapter Eight** Paula Sequira-Rovira, a Foucauldian radical feminist, argues that the disciplinary normalisation of pornography referred to by Foucault has been given added legitimacy through self-help books written

by 'porn-stars'. Self-help books function as instruction manuals where porn-stars as 'experts' give advice to readers on how to technically refine certain practices/ methods in order to enrich their performance with their partners. Where the Church, the Law and medicine once regulated sexuality, sexuality is now increasingly directed by porn-stars and the industry which governs them.

Jenna Jameson's book *Make Love Like a Porn Star* is one of the most successful self-help books. It is written in the form of the author's confession about her own deep, secret sexuality and this sexual confession forms the basis of her authority. Her advice has some essential shared characteristics with the expert advice proffered by sexologists: firstly, femininity and masculinity are constituted as opposites; secondly, the male orgasm is mandatory; thirdly, penile penetration is valorised. If performing pornographic sex does not deliver the promised liberation of one's true, unmediated sexuality this is not the failure of sexuality to deliver its promised delights, but failure to take responsibility for following Jameson's instructions as the "sex-expert".

That porn-stars have become figures of aspiration and authority is indicative of the industry's success in reinventing pornography from something obscene and indecent to something which is liberating. As such porn-stars and their recommendations have become what Sequira-Rovira calls "a new form of porno-sexology".

The book concludes with a chapter which analyses transgender pornography. In **Chapter Nine** Sheila Jeffreys, a radical feminist, places a different emphasis on sexology than other authors. She does not analyse current sexology as constitutive of femininity, or as a research or therapeutic 'tool'. In contrast, she focusses on the deployment of sexological arguments by the transgender community. What role then does she give to the relationship between sexology and transgender pornography?

Jeffreys argues transgender activists are keen to argue that gender is a natural phenomenon, for example that a transgender woman was born female but with a biologically sexed male body. These current 'scientific' truths rest on traditional medicine and sexology of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when scientists went to great lengths to explain and justify why the genital and reproductive distinctions between biological men and women account for gender difference. For example, traditional medical explanations of the homosexual man classified him as possessing a female brain, and in need of therapeutic treatment or medical intervention to re-

align or correct him. Transgender activists resort to the same naturalisation narrative, and support the current medicalization of transgenderism for political purposes: it is a tactic to mobilise public sympathy, and the legal and social policy endorsement that men can in fact be truly women. From a radical feminist perspective the creation of gender identity based on biology is something to be resisted rather than embraced.

Jeffreys writes against the current increasingly populist thesis that transgender signifies the loosening of gender norms, giving transgender individuals access to a more fluid identity than traditional masculine and feminine gender allows. In the majority of cases, male to female transgender masks auto-gynophilia, namely the pleasure heterosexual men experience at the thought of themselves as women and in wearing women's clothing or adopting their body parts.

In conclusion, transgender pornography reproduces hierarchical gender identity: Sexual encounters involve grotesque combinations of male and female body parts to construct and reproduce the very disciplinary accounts of women that radical feminism refutes – the bimbo, women as violable, and women as subordinate.

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**PART ONE:**  
**THE INDUSTRIAL SHAPING  
OF PRIVATE DESIRE**

