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Pornography: Masquerading as Fantasy, Producing Reality

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PORNOGRAPHY:
MASQUERADING AS FANTASY,
PRODUCING REALITY

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ABSTRACT

Our society believes that the social practices within the pornography industry are not important enough to be addressed. Indeed, as Gail Dine notes in *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, “what is surprising is how many people, even those who do not like porn, insist that the carefully constructed images that are formulaically scripted and produced by the multibillion-dollar porn industry belong in the realm of sexual fantasy, not reality” (100). Problems arise from the belief that the social practices intrinsic to porn—racism, creating dirty sexualities associated with women, and popular video searches depicting “forced sex”—exist within a vacuum. This article examines the social practices of pornography, creates a concrete definition of the oppression engendered by pornography, and challenges societal social mores that reflect those within pornography. I limit myself to adult, heterosexual pornography, but I will comment on the taboo of creating “barely legal” porn and the practice of catering to the masculine gaze by the creation of the “willing lesbian” fantasy. This research acts as a literary synthesis of the writing of anti-pornography scholars, experienced actors from the porn industry, and feminist philosophers.

OPPRESSION

“Women today are still not major consumers of hardcore porn; they are, however, whether they know it or not, internalizing porn ideology that often masquerades as advice on how to be hot, rebellious, and cool in order to attract (and hopefully keep) a man.”
—Gail Dines, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality* (100)

The word “oppression,” as Marilyn Frye explains, has been overused: “The word...is being stretched to meaninglessness; it is treated as though its scope includes any and all human experience of limitation or suffering no matter the cause, degree, or consequence” (11). Such careless uses of the word infringe upon the struggle of individuals who experience genuine oppression. The common misconception of this oppression, whether systemic or internalized, does not necessarily change the reality of oppressed peoples. Individuals may be happy but not liberated. For example, the limitations that exist within pornography, specifically for women and people of color, systematically keep the participants within distinct roles that are accepted as true representations of the group. Such limitations do not, however, affect the “happiness” displayed by porn-stars, as their monetary gain is completely dependent upon their acting. And individuals who gain money from such structures may indeed experience happiness through their capitalistic gain. “Oppression” must be defined by the social constructions that have been created, and the reality of privilege.

“Oppression” may be defined as having three specific characteristics: first, individuals experience oppression according to their position in our society (socio-economic level, race or ethnicity, sex, sexuality, etc.). Frye writes that, “one of the most characteristic and ubiquitous features of the world as experienced by oppressed people is the double bind—situations in which options are reduced to a very few, and all of them expose one to penalty, censure, or deprivation” (12). Secondly,

the experience of oppressed people is that the living of one’s life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction. (Frye 12)

Third, “oppression” must be classified as lacking certain privileges that permit people to live with relative ease. Such privileges are distinguished by the characteristics that allow individuals not to be hindered by their social standing. In our

society, heterosexual, cisgendered white men of able body are capable of experiencing monetary gain from most, if not all, capitalistically defined careers and occupations. Those who follow the dominant Christian ideology, and are defined by our current mental health definitions as “sane,” are the most privileged individuals. Therefore, in relation to this definition of privilege, individuals who are not members of these groups are likely experiencing some form of oppression. But, it is important to realize, when discussing oppression that,

Both “women” and “men” are oppressed sexually by the porn industry, but the consequences to their oppressions are not the same, given society’s dominant patriarchal social forces that privilege males over females. At the same time, one cannot assert that all “women” who live in a society where pornography has become commonplace personally experience the same kinds of sexual oppressions, but, we can certainly identify “oppressive” experiences they all share whether consciously recognized or not. (DeKeseredy and Corsianos 82)

Sexual Expression and Choice

While most people understand the limitations posed by oppression, the common issue, usually when dealing with questions of sexual expression and sexuality, is choice. If women are being oppressed and do not accept their oppression, then why take a job within pornography?

The image that these men seem to have of women in porn is of a woman accidentally stumbling onto a porn set one day, and realizing that this is what she has been looking for all her life. That these women are acting, and may have come to porn not so much through choice, but due to a lack of alternatives is rarely considered, because this premise threatens to puncture the fantasy world created by both pornographer and user. (Dines 65)

Women who work in the pornography industry are shown as both completely willing and happy to do whatever is asked by a man, for a heterosexual male audience. The audience does not realize that the actors may have limited options. This is illustrated in Sinnamon Love's account of her life as a performer in pornography in the early 1990s:

I merely wanted to provide for my family and finish college, I wanted to have a kind of financial stability that I didn't see possible as a divorced, single mother of two toddlers working two mall jobs and carrying a full load of classes. That first time, having sex with a complete stranger in his apartment wasn't about a feminist agenda or some sort of promiscuous sexual itch I sought to scratch. It was about the best option I saw for myself at that time; it was about financial freedom. (Love 98)

It is short-sighted to condemn women in pornography for their choices:

Men's choices to buy or rent pornography are complicated by two facts. First, he can't know the conditions under which women made their choices, and hence cannot know how meaningful the choices are. And second, even if he could make such a determination about specific women in a specific film he watches, the demand for pornography that his purchase helps create ensures that some women will be hurt. (Jensen 88)

Those who purchase pornography reinforce a system that consistently devalues women. According to Jensen, Dines, and other anti-pornographers, whether or not the women are conscious of their position, accepting of that position, and expressing themselves through media, they are still hurting themselves because pornography, as a specific genre, places certain individuals lacking power into positions that devalue them.

I undertook this research to better understand popular female porn stars, their emersion in social media, and their

participation in “gonzo” porn. “Gonzo” porn is characterized by a “wall-to-wall” script where there is little to no plot, and the sexual acts depicted are consistently aggressive. Common practices within gonzo porn include double penetration (various orifices or one orifice [i.e., double anal, double vaginal]) and violence that the video does not explicitly describe as healthy role-playing, bondage, dominance, submission, or sadomasochism (BDSM) but rather hinges on the idea that the female participant is forced into it. I wanted to see if porn stars who were gaining a widespread following on social media sites were still featured in gonzo porn. If, I theorized, they had decreased their gonzo productions, or their gonzo porn was not as popular as it had previously been, then the personalities displayed on their social media sites might have affected by how their customers viewed them. However, there were several problems with this research: First, because of the vastness of the Internet, it would be difficult to determine whether a certain film or video would be considered “more” or “less popular,” as there are various sites that could display a variety of “page views.” And second, the research depended too much upon the idea of the women’s choice to perform in gonzo porn.

Social Norms within Pornography

“Gonzo,” as a genre of pornography, has become increasingly popular. According to the Adult Video Network (AVN), gonzo is “the overwhelming dominant porn genre since it’s less expensive to produce than plot-oriented features...[it is] the fare for the solo stroking consumer who merely wants to cut to the chase, get off on the good stuff” (“The Directors”). When searching pornography on the web, without limiting the search to certain performers or acts, most descriptions of porn contain violent language, specific race and body descriptions of the actors/actresses, and often (but not always) involve multiple men and one woman. Because of these factors, Jensen explains,

To enter into the pornographic world and experience that intense sexual rush, many of us have to turn off some of the emotional reactions that typically are connected to sexual experience

with a real person—a sense of the other’s humanity, an awareness of being present with another person, the recognition of something outside our own bodies. (113)

This disconnect is difficult because it requires the viewer to experience sexual arousal without other emotional factors. It asks the viewer to ignore memories of previously watched porn when participating in actual sexual intercourse. It also suggests that the social practices of our own world do not translate to pornography.

Objectification in Porn

Catharine MacKinnon defines sexual objectification as “having a social meaning imposed on your being that defines you as to be sexually used, according to your desired uses, and then using you that way” (329). This definition is crucial in understanding how women are objectified in pornography and within their everyday lives.

In this paper, the “porn equation” shall be defined as the consistent script displayed in most heterosexually-focused pornography, as “[p]orn, because of its formulaic nature, becomes predictable” (Dines 68). The porn equation follows a loose guide in which the beginning of the film contains either a filmed interview, or a compilation of shots of a woman from various angles as she removes clothing, or remains clothed in a revealing piece of lingerie. Next, the introduction of characters (whoever will be having intercourse) contains brief interaction through kissing or undressing. Afterward, the woman performs fellatio for a significant amount of time (usually comparable in time to the pre-show interview or undressing montage). Finally, various sexual acts proceed until the man ends up ejaculating on or inside the woman, and usually, but not always, on her face. This is defined as an “equation” because of how frequently this structure is used. Dines further explains this by stating,

There are X number of minutes given over to oral sex, often leading to the woman gagging, then anal, then double penetration, and then

ejaculation. And while the next film may have a few more minutes on one particular act, or may have anal before oral, the story unfolds in much the same way as it did in the previous films, and the images begin to look the same. (Dines 68)

This equation does not always exist in porn, but it is the usual format maintained by many non-role playing or BDSM-centered porn films. The two most important factors in this equation are the length of time committed to fellatio, compared to the amount of time, or lack thereof, spent on cunnilingus, and the man's ejaculation ending the scene. The porn that always depicts fellatio as the central act of foreplay, in the very least, perpetuates a belief that this sex act is *heterosexual normative behavior*. The ideology that male pleasure should be prioritized, and that these men are "entitled" to the sexual act, creates a "common knowledge" of sex. Indeed, the sexual encounter ends when the male actor has reached orgasm.

The women in these films are always shown as willing participants. They are depicted as both willing and available to do anything asked by their partners, and enjoying every moment of it. Dines describes this behavior thus:

[T]hey never complain, never say no, and have three orifices always available for penetration, irrespective of time or place. They don't grimace when a man ejaculates in their mouth, and their anuses and vaginas have no limits. They have absolutely no needs outside pleasing men, they ask for nothing. (Dines 75)

In her article "Sexuality, Pornography, and Method," Catharine MacKinnon writes,

[Porn] shows what men want and gives it to them. From the testimony of the pornography, what men want is: women bound, women battered, women tortured, women humiliated, women degraded and defiled, women killed. Or, to be fair to the soft

core, women sexually accessible, have-able, there for them, wanting to be taken and used, with perhaps just a little light bondage. Each violation of women—rape, battery, prostitution, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment—is made sexuality, made sexy, fun, and liberating of women’s true nature in pornography..Women are made into and coupled with anything considered lower than human: animals, objects, children, and (yes) other women. Anything women have claimed as their own—motherhood, athletics, traditional men’s jobs, lesbianism, feminism—is made specifically sexy, dangerous, provocative, punished, made men’s in pornography. (327)

Women are told, throughout the porn films, that their sexual behavior is “dirty.” Many mainstream and amateur porn includes male porn actors calling their female partner names such as “dirty little slut.” These descriptions ridicule the woman’s sexuality, infantilize her through adjectives such as “little,” “tiny,” or “baby,” insinuating that a woman’s genitalia, and the uses of her genitalia, warrant such comments. Porn actresses are routinely called “honey,” “sweetie,” “darling,” etc., in social media outlets. These women have become the ultimate fantasy, willing to do anything for “love,” including being degraded and objectified. MacKinnon states that, “Women, who are not given a choice, are objectified, or rather the object is allowed to desire, if she desires to be an object” (328).

The Lesbian Fantasy

On February 26, 2016, the pornography Internet site Pornhub released an article exploring the most common porn searches by state (“The United States”). An overwhelming thirty states identified “lesbians” as their most popular porn genre. Lesbian pornography, however, does not represent a progressive attitude toward the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual/transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) community. The “lesbian fantasy,” for the purposes of this paper, shall be defined as a heterosexual viewer

seeking out, minimally, two women performing sexual acts upon each other in the effort to provide sexual stimulation to a male audience. The women can be shown in scenes that include male actors, such as “threesome” porn or “gang-bang” porn. The lesbian fantasy typically includes two stereotypically “attractive” women, performing acts similar to those performed with men, without intimacy or romance.

The Barely Legal Taboo

The aforementioned 2016 Pornhub study identified “teen” pornography as the most popular category in nineteen states (“The United States”). This category, commonly known as “barely legal” pornography, represents fantasies of men having sex with underage participants. Many times, in amateur and professional porn, women are given the appearance of teens, or infantilized in a similar way. They wear their hair in pigtails or dress in clothing that implies that they have only just reached the legal age of consent. They are part of an “undamaged” and “untainted” fantasy; their pubic hair is completely removed in order to maintain the appearance of girlhood. DeKesserdy and Corsianos explain:

Many different categories of women today have been targeted by the porn industry: mothers, grandmothers, and even pregnant women, career and college women, younger and older, physically smaller and bigger women, and women of various racial and ethnic groups. The porn industry tries to ensure that no category of woman escapes its wrath in their pursuit to secure the message that any woman desires and/or deserves body-punishing sex and/or brutality. (12)

The Oedipal Fantasy

According to Pornhub, “mothers I would like to fuck” (MILF) and “step-mom” porn, are highly popular in at least six states (“The United States”). Another five states searched “keeping it in the family,” or “step-sister” pornography, most frequently. While these two categories differ and possibly reveal more psychological

differences between the searchers, it is important to recognize that all of these viewers are seeking depiction of sex inside familial groups. Incest is taboo in most cultures and societies; one might conclude that the “keeping it in the family” fantasy hinges upon the ideas of “sexual ownership,” or Oedipal “dominance.” The female objects of desire in MILF and step-mother porn are married, yet they serve as sexual instructors to “naïve” teens partners, often their own step-sons, and in this manner allow the young men to gain sexual dominance over their cuckolded fathers.

Racism within Pornography

The social practices within pornography also rely on racial depictions that damage the identity of people of color and reinforce stereotypes. Love comments:

Rarely do you see...intense hardcore, blowbands, rough sex, and/or fetish content featuring all black actors. These types of scenes are more likely to be interracial and feature a submissive white woman paired with a dominant/aggressive black man taking charge and/or advantage of her—or a submissive yet hypersexual black female is paired with an aggressive white male performer. (Love 100)

Black Porn

Mireille Miller-Young examined the racial dynamics of black pornography. Her book, *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women, Sex Work, and Pornography* (2014), examines African American women in the sex industry:

While all porn’s workers are subject to the disciplining force of racialized sexuality,... women of color are specifically devalued within a tiered system of racialized erotic capital. Within this hierarchy black bodies are some of the most degraded, and their degradation mobilizes the very fetishism driving their representations. (Miller-Young 107)

It is fairly rare to find two black individuals having sex in mainstream heterosexual porn. Even “lesbian fantasy” porn rarely shows sex between two women of color. Dines writes, “this belongs to a genre called interracial. According to an article in *Adult Video News*, this is one of the fastest growing and most bootlegged subgenres in gonzo pornography today” (122). Indeed, interracial porn, especially those films that use African American actors, tend to be gonzo pornography. Black male actors are typically depicted as “savage.” Titles such as *Blacks on Blondes*, *White Pussy-Black Cocks*, and *White Sluts on Black Snakes* (xvideo.com, n.d.), signal the stereotype of racial physiological differences. The black men are generally shown as well endowed, driven by a desire for white women, and hyper-masculinized: “the porn industry would prefer to keep below the surface that black men are routinely depicted as monstrous in their uncontrolled desire for white women” (Dines 122).

Black women do not receive better treatment in the industry. Indeed, in his book *Money Shot: Wild Days and Lonely Nights inside the Black Porn Industry*, Lawrence Ross quotes Lexington Steele, an established black porn actor:

In a boy/girl scene, one girl one guy, no anal sex, the market dictates a minimum of \$800 to \$900 per scene for the girl...Now a white girl will start at \$800 and go up from there, but a black girl will have to start at \$500, and then hit a ceiling of about \$800. So the black girl hits a ceiling at the white girl's minimum. (Ross 14)

Black women are narrowed down into two categories, based on whether they are “dark skinned” or “light skinned.” This kind of colorism is displayed in general society as well. Lighter-skinned women are usually able to find work similar to white women. They have to follow many of the same rules as white women do in pornography, but their race still affects their experience. Love writes, “African American women on screen were put into one of two categories: assimilated to appear as close to white as possible (‘they are almost one of us’), or completely ghettoized to reflect debased images of black culture (it doesn’t

matter because ‘they are only one of them’)” (99). Their sexuality is called “dirty,” but their body parts are also described with race-based adjectives (i.e., “little dark pussy”). Dark-skinned women are sub-sectioned even further into “ghetto projects,” which deny their personality, pain, or pleasure. They are never required to look as if they are enjoying the sex, and unlike white and light-skinned women, darker women are never expected to produce an orgasm, real or fake: “there is no attempt to even pretend that these women like the sex, as they are shown close to tears, grimacing, and, in many cases, thoroughly disgusted” (Dines 130).

“Ghetto projects” may, on the other hand, take a dark-skinned woman and, through a series of sexual encounters, teach her to become more “civilized.” The videos can include “before” and “after” shots in which, in the final shot, she is shown with styled hair, more expensive clothing, and jewelry. She is “grateful” to the man who was able to provide her with such luxury. For example, Dines dissects the porn site “Pimp My Black Teen,” “a spoof of the popular ‘Pimp My Ride’ MTV series”:

This site, like many other pimp sites, has pictures of so-called before and after makeovers, in which a teenage black woman is shown in sweatpants and jeans for the “before”—and sexy revealing underwear for the “after.” One caption reads, “We caught up with Reneeka looking like a tattered hood rat. Once we styled her fine brown ass, her wet pussy took a long black cock just fine.” (Dines 127)

Black women in pornography often appear in films that make them appear to be dependent on a white man to “save” them, an ironic reflection of the fact that white men are in control of the porn industry. Indeed, while interracial porn has become significantly popular, it has become more popular in white communities.

Asian Porn

Similar to “Black Porn,” in which black men are recognized as the hyper-masculine, Asian women in pornography are consistently hyper-feminized. The Asian woman is seen as the ultimate fantasy:

she is physically small and submissive, while Asian men are almost non-existent in the porn world today. Dines writes,

the image of Asian women is sexually exotic, enticing and submissive in both the text and pictures. Using words such as naive, obedient, petite, cute, and innocent... we are all told [they] will do anything to please a man, since this is what they are bred for. It seems from these websites, however, that Asian women are interested in pleasing only white men, because Asian men are almost completely absent as sex partners. (124)

Asian women are seen both as always available and forever young. They are infantilized and seen as more submissive than white women; however, they too are almost never depicted with Asian men. Miller-Young writes, “Through the prioritization of normative gender and sexual codes, behaviors, and relations we have sought to recuperate ourselves from myths associated with black sexual deviance, and the systematic violence attached to those myths. Pornography offers a site to see how those myths attach to fantasies” (118).

The Undiscovered Exotic

While Asians are hyper-feminized, and blacks are hyper-masculinized, whites are never categorized by their “whiteness” in the same way that other performers are featured by their race. Performers from other racial and ethnic groups, such as Latinos and Arabs, are often depicted as “undiscovered exotics,” or coming from groups of racial mystery. Mia Khalifa, a distinguished porn actress who identifies as Arab-American, has made numerous videos; in 2015, a study conducted by SoTrender and Pornhub revealed her as one of the most followed porn stars on the social media outlets Twitter and Instagram. Some of her most popular videos feature her appearing in hijab, as was shown by the popularity of her films on the sites xvideos.com, xhamster.com, and Pornhub (“Naked Truth”). When searching the term “Arab” on these sites, similar results with other performers were found. Latino women are given similar treatment: their

videos carry markers that define their race, and they are often subjected to harmful stereotypes, such as performing in the role of a “maid.” When searching the most-viewed “Latina” videos on the aforementioned websites, Latinas are most often represented as “house-cleaners.” These women of color are treated very differently from white women. According to Dines,

In all-white porn, no one ever refers to the man’s penis as a “white cock” or the woman’s vagina as “white pussy,” but introduce a person of color, and suddenly all players have a racialized sexuality, where the race of the performer(s) is described in ways that make women a little “sluttier” and the men more hyper-masculinized. (123)

And Miller-Young summarizes the racist industry by concluding,

This relentless binary, which is problematic for all women but especially so for women of color whose sexualities have been deployed as primary mechanism of colonization, expropriation, and genocide, exposes the impossibility of rendering an authentic view of black women’s sexualities in any media, let alone pornography. (115)

The pornography industry is, in short, marketed for a white audience. DeKeseredy and Corsianos expand on this in their comment on a study done by Michael Kimmel:

Almost none of the Asian-American men he spoke with, as well as Chicano men on the West Coast or in the Southwest expressed any significant interest in pornography. Latino men in the Northeast especially Puerto Rican and Dominican men, as well as African American men across the United States indicated some interest but, small in relation to the consumption by white men. One of the most comprehensive studies done of sexual behavior in the United States (Laumann et al., 1994) found that the rates

of masturbation among black men were about half the rates of white men. Kimmel notes that if we assume that one component of porn is to facilitate masturbation, then the lower rates of masturbation among black men may indicate lower rates of porn consumption. (13)

Transcending the Screen

Pornography has historically been discussed as if it exists within a vacuum. Some argue that the fetishism and degradation of pornography, and the gendered and racialized oppression it promotes only exists within the bedroom. The idea that the fantasy does not transcend into everyday reality is a fallacy. However, current legislation and common patriarchal structures reinforce the idea that pornography has no influence on American life. For example, Corsianos comments on how police investigate assault, specifically within pornography:

Detectives often stress the difficulty in determining whether the women in the videos are “performing” or, assume that they have given “consent” to the violent acts committed against them. But when investigating any assault (stranger or domestic), the job of the police is to determine whether there is “probable cause”: that is, if there’s evidence to suggest that an assault has occurred, then an arrest must be made. Officers do not ask alleged victims if they consented to the assault. Consent to being assaulted/abused is irrelevant....But in violent pornography, for example, detectives appear to view women as “consenting” to the violence. (DeKeseredy and Corsianos 35)

Violence against Women

Pornography is primarily created to offer white male viewers an opportunity to gain sexual satisfaction by, as DeKeseredy and Corsianos write, “creat[ing] the illusion of complete power and control over women without fear of rejection or fear of sexual failure” (12). Furthermore,

While we know that women featured in much of today's porn suffer from violent and degrading behaviors committed against them primarily by men, they are typically portrayed as enjoying the various degradation ceremonies they are put through during the filming process. As well, gonzo porn and other disturbing sexually explicit media send out a strong message that women's primary purpose is to satisfy men's desires. (48)

Pornography centered on female abuse may reinforce the idea that these depictions of degradation mirror everyday life. For example, "in studying battered women who were filing criminal charges against their husbands, [researchers] found that 40 percent of husbands used pornography, and that the use of these materials was significantly associated with the participants being asked or forced to participate in violent acts" (DeKeseredy and Corsianos 63). DeKeseredy and Corsianos report that the Canadian National Survey (CNS) of female abuse in university/college dating found that,

Of the female CNS respondents who reported being physically abused in a dating relationship, 15.4 percent also reported being upset by pornography. Only 4.5 percent of those who were not physically victimized reported being upset. Turning to the men, one third of all those who admitted to upsetting a woman within request to imitate pornography also admitted to physically abusing a woman after high school. Of course those who did not admit to upsetting a woman, 17.2 percent admitted to physical abuse. (62)

Revenge Porn

Since the popularization and accessibility of the Internet, people have been able to voice their personal opinions in a virtual setting. While some servers enforce mandates on acceptable behavior (e.g., Instagram and Facebook forbid graphic images, Tumblr requires users to verify that they are above 13 years old), there are few current laws that restrict Internet content (e.g.,

websites, blog posts). “Revenge Porn” is one of the consequences of this accessibility: “Revenge porn images and videos are made by men with the consent of the woman they were intimately involved with, but then distributed online without their consent, typically following the termination of the relationship” (DeKeseredy and Corsianos 73). Once revenge porn is available on the Internet, anyone can access it, and women in the videos may face negative consequences in their professional and private lives.

The Cosmo Effect

Pornography’s effect on our culture is evident in magazines and other media marketed towards women. “The Cosmo Effect,” a term I have named after *Cosmopolitan* magazine, is characterized by the media holding women to specific norms taken from pornography, without openly relating these norms to their pornographic origins. Marketed as methods designed to assist young women in attracting and maintaining romantic relationships with heterosexual male partners, women are encouraged to remove their pubic hair, dress in provocative clothing, and learn to perform various acts to enhance male sexual pleasure. Ironically, as Dylan Ryan, a porn star with a Masters in Social Work has noted, many women who are deeply influenced by the material in these magazines “give up on porn after one or more times out of a sense of alienation, revulsion, lack of arousal, shame, or any mix of these emotions” (121). Pornography is more easily condemned than the socially acceptable media that promote the same sexual practices—at women’s expense—as a source of capitalistic gain. Miller-Young comments that,

The porn industry is not simply...an agent of rapacious greed that destroys our health and our environment. Porn is perceived as the cause of our modern cultural decline, the trafficker of thousands of innocent women and girls, and the purveyor of a rampant and misogynist prurience that is infecting the minds of our youth. (p. i-ii)

Women are unable to experience sexual liberation through a structure that is designed to confine them to damaging limitations.

CONCLUSIONS

Sex, as our society has defined it, is oppressive towards women. As Catharine MacKinnon states,

Male dominance is sexual. Meaning: men in particular, if not men alone, sexualize hierarchy; gender is one...Recent feminist work, both interpretive and empirical—on rape, battery, sexual harassment, sexual abuse of children, prostitution, and pornography supports it. These practices, taken together express and actualize the distinctive power of men over women in society; their effective permissibility confirms and extends it. If one believed women's accounts of sexual use and abuse by men; if the pervasiveness of male sexual violence against women sustained in these studies is not denied, minimized, or expected as deviant or episodic; if the fact that only 7.8 percent of women in the United States are not sexually assaulted or harassed in their lifetimes is considered not ignorable or inconsequential; if the women to whom it happens are not considered expendable; if violation of women is understood as sexualized on some level—then sexuality itself can no longer be regarded as unimplicated. (MacKinnon 316)

Pornography and sex are not the same, and I do not wish to create that fallacy. However, because pornographic practices have transcended the screen to become a part of mainstream American culture, it is critical to examine the forms of oppression contained in pornographic material. Men of color, women of color, and white women are assigned stereotypic behaviors that both appease a white male audience and are incorrectly assumed to be actual minority behavior. Such assumptions may form the basis of both discriminatory practices and are used to justify violence against women. Rape, sexual assaults, and revenge porn are part of the “permissibility” of male dominance that is mirrored

in pornography. Yet perhaps the greatest danger comes, as Gail Dines has written, in our lack of understanding in how deep the messages of pornography are embedded in our behavior:

The reality is that women don't need to look at porn to be profoundly affected by it because images, representations, and messages of porn are now delivered to women via pop culture. Women today are still not major consumers of hardcore porn; they are, however, whether they know it or not, internalizing porn ideology that often masquerades as advice on how to be hot, rebellious, and cool in order to attract (and hopefully keep) a man. (p. 99-100)

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