

FALSE PROMISES – ANTI-PORNOGRAPHY FEMINISM

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Few political movements sprung into life with more confidence and optimism than the Western women's liberation movements of the late Sixties and early 1970s. 'Sisterhood', as Sheila Rowbotham, enthusiastically declared back in 1973, 'demands a new woman, a new culture, and a new way of living'. Men, perhaps reluctantly, would be swept along as well, she continued: 'We must not be discouraged by them. We must go our own way but remember we are going to have to take them with us. They learn slowly. They are like creatures who have just crawled out of their shells after millennia of protection. They are sore, tender and afraid.' But today many people, women and men alike, are urging all of us to crawl right back into our shells – it's safer, we are told, to stay put, to seek protection, because there is no change in men's eternal and ubiquitous oppression of women. 'Our status as a group relative to men has almost never, if ever, been changed from what it is', Catharine MacKinnon tells us, in 1992. After all these years, what has feminism achieved? Nothing.

The End of Optimism

Yet women's liberation unquestionably *did* expand everybody's horizons, forcing a redefinition of what is personal and what is political. And of course most things have changed for women, much of it due to the persistent pressure of organised feminism. As I argued in *Is the Future Female?*, however uneven and complicated the general achievement of feminist goals seeking women's autonomy and equality with men, they are now widely supported and respectable. A mere twenty years ago women lacked even the words to speak in our own interests, and when attempting to do so invariably met with ridicule.' Campaigns against sexual harassment and violence against women, for childcare provision, abortion rights and women's equality generally are all now familiar on trade union and council agendas, however much recession and cutbacks in welfare have further entrenched working-class and ethnic minority women in increasing

impoverishment. Women today are more aware of their rights, less ready to be exploited and more aggressive.

Despite its own success, however, despair is the theme of much contemporary feminist writing. Once optimism starts to wane, former ways of seeing can quickly become obscured, even disappear altogether. Victories are no longer visible. With confidence in decline, new theoretical frameworks start replacing the old, frameworks which transform memory itself, the stories we tell of our own past, our ideas for the future. We have seen it happen in one radical movement after another since the close of the 1970s. Within feminism, nowhere is this more apparent than in the area of sexual politics.

Only two decades ago, although it feels more like two lifetimes, it was common for women who were politically aware and active to declare themselves both sexual liberationists and feminists. In the early years of the Women's Liberation Movement, women's rights to sexual pleasure and fulfilment, on their own terms, symbolised women's rights to autonomy and selfhood. Despite all its sexism, all its unexamined (pre-Foucauldian) acceptance of drives and their repression, all its complications for women at the time, it was the liberation rhetoric of the New Left of the 1960s, around notions of emancipation and participatory democracy, which provided the inspiration for the emergence of second-wave feminism. Today, however, there has been a shift away from any type of sexual radicalism towards a bleaker sexual conservatism. The same notions of autonomy and **selfhood** are turned around, used against the very idea of sexual pleasure, at least in its heterosexual varieties, as being incompatible with women's interests. Sexual discourses and iconography are seen as ineluctably linking female sexuality (and hence identity) with female submission.

It is true that there has been some powerful yet positive women's writing on female sexuality, but it comes from and addresses lesbian desire and practice – in terms of its specific challenge to the 'heterosexual matrix' linking sex and gender. Lesbian and gay studies and writing are beginning to blossom in academic institutions and popular publishing outlets. In scholarly texts they introduce a heterogeneous range of discourses, debates, research and analyses which constitute a rich and exciting new field of cross-disciplinary theoretical work on sexuality. This development comes out of the still confident and campaigning sexual politics created by the last twenty years of lesbian and gay struggles and self-reflection. Once merely the object of a medical gaze and elaborate scientific classification, lesbian and gay people increasingly set the agenda for a reversal in which the interrogators are interrogated, and compulsory heterosexuality, **heterosexism** and the roping of sexuality to gender themselves become the **problem**.⁵

Two decades of campaigning feminism, however, have yet to produce the same level of confident and diverse reversals which might begin to turn

around the traditional male gaze and phallic construction of the heterosexual woman. Instead, contemporary feminist debate and discourses around heterosexuality remain engulfed by the anti-pornography campaigns and politics of the 1980s. The rhetoric of sexual liberation which featured so prominently in the idealistic politics of the 1960s, inspired many women as well as men to dream of a different world of love and freedom. The early women's liberation movement of the 1970s emerged out of that era, both using and contesting its notions of 'sexual liberation' and 'freedom', while organizing around abortion, childcare and men's domestic responsibilities, to build the power of women. All too soon, however, feminist awareness of both the extent of men's violence against women (much of it sexual) and the cultural ubiquity of discourses linking sexuality and female submission produced new depths of pessimism over the possibilities for any sexual liberation on women's terms.

With denunciation rather than celebration the growing mood of the moment, a type of political lesbianism became the sexual ideal for one influential strand of feminism: 'Women who make love to women are more likely to express their sexuality in a more equal way.' Most feminists simply stopped writing about sex altogether, refocussing on the problem of men's violence. Not to focus thus, in Britain, was to court aggressive attack from the 'revolutionary feminist' faction, increasingly active from 1978. Coincidentally, in the United States, Women Against Pornography groups grew rapidly from 1978. Not coincidentally, as Ann **Snitow** was later to write, this was the time when the mood of the women's movement changed – especially in the US where the feminist anti-pornography campaigns first flourished, and which has always had a profound influence on feminism in **Britain.**' Having just witnessed the defeat of women's rights to state-funded abortion, won only four years earlier, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was coming under serious attack from the growing strength of the New Right, soon to sweep Reagan to power and to derail the ERA. With poorer women facing greater hardship, welfare services being removed, and the conservative backlash against radical politics in the ascendancy everywhere, 'pornography' came to serve as the symbol of women's defeat in the US. From then on, feminists were less confidently on the offensive, less able to celebrate women's potential strength, and many were now retreating into a more defensive politics, isolating sexuality and men's violence from other issues of women's inequality. Today many feminist writers, in tune with the age-old voices of conservatism, insist like Susanne Kappeler, that 'sexual liberation' merely reinforces women's oppression.'

There certainly are formidable obstacles which continue to block women's moves towards empowering political perspectives, sexual, social and economic, but anti-pornography feminism is, in my view, increasingly one of **them**. It accompanies, and resonates with, the rise of pre- and post-

feminist traditionalisms found, for example, in the assertion of Islamic fundamentalism or the recent western 'pro-family' backlash against feminism. Because of the place of sex in our culture and our lives, however, it has always been tempting to displace personal and social crises and discontent onto sexuality. It's not so much that sex can drive us crazy, as Victorians once thought, fearing masturbation as the source of all vice and degeneracy, but the reverse. Sex has been given such a central place in our culture and narratives of personal identity that all our craziness – our wildest dreams and worst fears – are projected onto it.

The Focus on Pornography

To the bewilderment of many of second-wave feminism's founding members (who were often ridiculed for their concern with their own orgasms in seeking to liberate 'the suppressed power of female sexuality' from centuries of male-centred discourses and practices), pornography seemed to become *the* feminist issue of the 1980s. The critique of the sexism and the exploitation of women in the media made by women's liberation in the 1970s had indeed always been loud and prominent. After picketing the Miss World beauty contest as the decade kicked off, pin-ups, pornography, advertising, textbooks and religious beliefs and imagery, all – with spray gun and paint – were declared 'offensive to women'. In the 1970s feminists had not, however, sought legal restrictions on pornography, nor seen it as in any way uniquely symbolic of male dominance – the virgin bride, the happy housewife, the sexy secretary, were all equally abhorrent. With the state and judiciary so comprehensively controlled by men, obscenity laws were known in any case to have always served to suppress the work, if not jail the organisers, of those fighting for women's own control of their fertility and sexuality. Objecting to all forms of sexist representations, feminists then set out to subvert a whole cultural landscape which, whether selling carpet sweepers, collecting census information or uncovering women's crotches, placed women as the subordinate sex.

Representatively, Ruth Wallsgrove, writing for *Spare Rib*, declared in 1977 'I believe we should not agitate for more laws against pornography, but should rather stand up together and say what we feel about it, and what we feel about our own sexuality, and force men to re-examine their own attitudes to sex and women implicit in their consumption of **porn**.'²⁸ This type of feminist emphasis on women's need to assert their own sexual needs and desires, however, and force men to discuss theirs, came to be overshadowed by, and entangled with, feminist concern with the issue of male violence by the close of the seventies. As I have described elsewhere, it was the popular writing of Robin Morgan and Susan Brownmiller in the USA in the mid-1970s which first made a definitive connection between

pornography and male violence.' It was in their writing that men's sexuality was made synonymous with male violence, and male violence was presented as, in itself, the key to male dominance. With pornography portrayed as the symbolic proof of the connection between male sexuality and male violence, anti-pornography campaigning was soon to become emblematic of this strand of feminism. It re-defined 'pornography' as material which depicts violence against women, and which is, in itself, violence against women.

Andrea Dworkin's *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* is still the single most influential text proclaiming this particular feminist view of pornography, in which 'pornography' not only lies behind all forms of female oppression, but behind exploitation, murder and brutality throughout human history.'" Following through such logic to draft model feminist anti-pornography legislation – the Minneapolis Ordinance – Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon define pornography as 'the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures or words'." Armed with this definition, they propose that any individual should be able to use the courts to seek financial redress against the producers or distributors of sexually explicit material if they can show it has caused them 'harm'.

And yet, despite the growth and strength of the feminist anti-pornography movement during the 1980s, particularly in the United States and in Britain (where we have seen the emergence of the Campaign against Pornography and a similar Campaign against Pornography and Censorship), some feminists, and I am one of them, (represented in Britain by the Feminists Against Censorship) passionately reject its analysis and its related practice. We see it as a mistake to reduce the dominance of sexism and misogyny in our culture to explicit representations of sexuality, whatever their nature. Men's cultural contempt for and sexualization of women long pre-dated the growth of commercial pornography, both stemming from rather than uniquely determining the relative powerlessness of women as a sex. (Other subordinated groups are somewhat similarly sexualized and exploited, whether as Black Stud, *Sapphire*, 'effeminate' male, or working-class wanton.) Narrowing the focus on women's subordination to the explicitly sexual downplays the sexism and misogyny at work within all our most respectable social institutions and practices, whether judicial, legal, familial, occupational, religious, scientific or cultural.

More dangerously (in today's conservative political climate) we risk terminating women's evolving exploration of our own sexuality and pleasure if we form alliances with, instead of entering the battle against, the conservative anti-pornography crusade. These are alliances which Dworkin and MacKinnon have unhesitatingly pursued in the USA, collaborating almost exclusively with the extreme Right: Presbyterian minister

Mayor Hudnut III in Indianapolis, anti-ERA, anti-feminist, Republican conservative Bealah Coughenour in Minneapolis, far right preacher Greg Dixon and, of course, pro-family, anti-feminist Reagan appointee responsible for removing funds from Women's Refuges, Edwin Meese.¹² Certainly, the most effective opponents of pornography, have traditionally been, and remain, men. The men of the Moral Right (like Jesse Helms in the USA) are as deeply horrified by the feminist idea of women as sexually assertive, autonomous and entitled to sex on their own terms, as they are by gay sex or indeed any display of the male body as the object of desire rather than the subject of authority.

Any type of blanket condemnation of pornography will discourage us all from facing up to women's own sexual fears and fantasies, which are by no means free from the guilt, anxiety, shame, contradiction, and eroticization of power on display in men's pornographic productions. And even here, those few scholars, like Linda Williams in *Hard Core*, who have chosen to study rather than make their stand over pornography, point to changes in its content which are worth studying, rather than simply dismissing. There is, to be sure, little change in the monotonous sexism of soft-core pornography. But this is increasingly *identical* with the come-on, passive and provocative portrayal of women in advertising, or many other clearly non-pornographic genres – except for the explicit crotch shot. William's research suggests that the most significant change in hard-core pornography (one of the few genres where women are not punished for acting out their sexual desires), is its increasing recognition of the problematic nature of sex, with clearer distinctions being made between good (consensual and safe) and bad (coercive and unsafe) sex. She attributes this shift to more women now seeing, discussing, buying, and – just occasionally – producing pornography." The changes in contemporary pornographic production mean that more women are beginning to use it. In the USA, 40% of 'adult videos' are said to be purchased by women. Nevertheless, it is men who predominantly still produce and consume pornography, which means that it is *men's* fears and fantasies which pornography primarily addresses. (Even though more women are now hoping to enter that restricted country – if they can find the right backing and the images which turn women on.)

Uninterested in the particulars of any such shifts, the basic feminist anti-pornography argument sees all pornography as very much of a piece, and its very existence as central to the way in which men subordinate women. Pornography, on this view, both depicts and causes violence against women. Fundamental to anti-pornography feminism, most recently and comprehensively presented in Britain in Catherine Itzin's new collection, *Pornography: Women, Violence and Civil Liberties*, is thus the connection made between pornography, violence and discrimination against women. Itzin opens her collection, for example, with the claim that the US Attorney General's Commission on Pornography (carefully selected by

Edwin Meese III in 1985 to seek stronger law enforcement against sexually explicit images) was 'unanimous in its finding of a causal link between pornography and sexual violence'. In fact, as Itzin must know, there were only two feminists on the Commission, Ellen Levine and Judith Becker, both of whom rejected the Commission's findings and published their own dissenting report, claiming: "To say that exposure to pornography in and of itself causes an individual to commit a sexual crime is simplistic, not supported by the social science data, and overlooks many of the other variables that may be contributing causes."

Itzin's own collection, despite its numerous essays claiming to provide consistent and conclusive proof of links between pornography and violence, itself unwittingly undermines any such claim. For here, the psychologist James Weaver overturns what little consistency there was in the previous experimental data which had suggested that it was *only* sexually explicit *violent* material which could, for certain individuals, in specific laboratory conditions, be correlated with more calloused responses from men towards women. Weaver's data, however, 'proves' that it is exposure to any sexually explicit images, but in particular to 'consensual and female instigated sex', which produces the most calloused responses from men to women." It is not hard to imagine just what the conservative right might conclude using this data – from banning sex education to banning any feminist representation of sex.

What we might more reasonably conclude from the existing experimental muddle, which provides anything but clear and consistent proof of anything at all, is not really so hard to see. It is never possible, whatever the image, to isolate sexuality out, fix its meaning and predict some inevitable pattern of response, independently from assessing its wider representational context and the particular recreational, educational or social context in which it is being received. Men together can, and regularly do, pornographise any image at all – from the Arab woman in her chador to any coding of anything as female (nuts and bolts, for example) – while the most apparently 'violent' images of S & M pornography may be used in only the most consensual and caring encounters between two people. Context really does matter. This might help to explain why inconsistency is the only consistency to emerge from empirical research which ignores both the semiotic and the social context of images of sexual explicitness. As the most recent Home Office report on pornography commissioned in the UK concluded: 'inconsistencies emerge between very similar studies and many interpretations of these have reached almost opposite conclusions'.¹⁶

Women's Experience of Harm

Some anti-pornography feminists who are more aware of both the inconsistency **and** possible irrelevance of the experimental proof of pornography's

harm have preferred to call upon the testimony of women's own experience of the harm they feel pornography has caused them. A typical example is the evidence provided by one woman at the Minneapolis public hearings. There she described how, after reading *Playboy*, *Penthouse* and *Forum*, her husband developed an interest in group sex, took her to various pornographic institutions and even invited a friend into their marital bed. To prevent any further group situations occurring, which she found very painful, this woman had agreed to act out in private scenarios depicting bondage and the different sex acts which her husband wanted her to perform, even though she found them all very humiliating." It was only after learning karate and beginning to travel on her own that this woman could feel strong enough to leave her husband. This is indeed moving testimony, but surely all along there was only one suitable solution to any such woman's distress: having the power and confidence to leave a man, or any person, who forced her into actions she wished to avoid, and who showed no concern for her own wishes. Pornography is not the problem here, nor is its elimination the solution.

Another type of gruesome evidence frequently used by anti-pornography feminists to establish links between pornography and violence draws upon the myth of the 'snuff movie', first circulated in New York in 1975 about underground films supposedly coming from South America in which women were murdered on camera apparently reaching a sexual climax. On investigation such movies, like the classic film *Snuff* itself, released in the US in 1976, have always turned out to be a variant of the slasher film, using the special effects of the horror genre, and thus distinct from what is seen as the genre of pornography.¹⁸ There is, however, also the personal testimony of some former sex workers, exemplified by that of 'Linda Lovelace'/Marchiano. Linda Marchiano in her book *Ordeal* has described how she was coerced, bullied and beaten by her husband, Chuck Traynor, into working as a porn actress. (Interestingly, however, although coerced into sex work by a violent husband, the book actually describes how it was her success as a porn actress in *Deep Throat* which gave Linda Traynor the confidence to leave her husband, re-marry and start campaigning for 'respectable family life' and against pornography.)¹⁹

The more general problem here is that other sex workers complain bitterly about what they see as the false and hypocritical victimization of them by anti-pornography feminists, whose campaigns they believe, if successful, would serve only to worsen their pay and working conditions, and increase the stigmatization of their work."²⁰ (I am not referring here, of course, to the production of child pornography, which is illegal, along with other forms of exploitation of children.) Some sex workers declare that they choose and like the work they do, and the type of control they believe it gives them over their lives. Indeed, it has been suggested that the feminist anti-pornography campaign itself primarily reflects the privileges

of largely white and middle-class women who, not being as exploited as many other women, can self-servingly present the issue of women's sexual objectification by men as the source of oppression of all women."

Whether it is from abused women or abused sex workers, however, what we hear when we do hear, or read, women's testimony against pornography or the pornography industry, are stories of women coercively pressurised into sex, or sexual display, which they do not want – varying from straight, to oral, anal, bondage and group sex. But we would be more than foolish if we saw the harm we were hearing about as residing in the pornographic images themselves, or in the possibility of enacting them (all, without any doubt, practices which certain women as well as men, at certain times, freely choose), and not in the men's (or possibly, although very rarely in heterosexual encounters, women's) abuse of power. The harm, it is important we should be clear, is contained not in the explicitly sexual material, but in the social context which deprives a woman (or sometimes a man) of her (or his) ability to reject any unwanted sexual activity – whether with husband, lover, parent, relative, friend, acquaintance or stranger. And this is one fundamental reason feminists opposed to anti-pornography campaigning are so distressed at each attempt to bring in some new version of the Minneapolis Ordinance, like the so-called Pornography Victims' Compensation Act first introduced into the US Senate in 1989, and cropping up against in New York, in 1992, or Itzin's own proposals taken up by MPs like Dawn Primarolo and Clare Short in Britain.

It is not just that these bills, quite contrary to the self-deceiving rhetoric of their advocates (Itzin and Dworkin claim to be 'absolutely opposed to censorship in every form') would suppress sexual and erotic materials by opening up the threat of quite unprecedented levels of censorship through harassing lawsuits and financial penalties against producers, distributors, booksellers, writers, photographers and movie makers. It is also that, again quite contrary to the stated goals of their supporters, such legislative proposals cost nothing and do nothing to provide real remedies against men's violence. State funding for women's refuges, anti-sexist, anti-violence educational initiatives, and above all empowering women more fundamentally through improved job prospects, housing and welfare facilities, would seem to be the only effective ways of enabling women to avoid violence.

Instead, however, the idea that pornographic material causes men's violence tends to excuse the behaviour of the men who are sexually coercive and violent, by removing the blame on to pornography. Men who rape, murder and commit other violent sex crimes against women, children or other men may (or may not) have an interest in violent pornography. However, as overviews of all the available empirical data suggest, the evidence does not point to pornography as a cause of their **behaviour**²².

When Itzin, along with so many of the authors in her collection, weirdly but repeatedly cite as 'evidence' for pornography's harm the final testimony of serial killer Ted Bundy before his execution, they surely do more to expose rather than to support their argument. Today both the rapist and, even more hypocritically, tabloid wisdom, has learnt to lay the blame for sex crimes on 'pornography' (whereas once, with the same sort of certainty, they would lay the blame on 'mothers').

Meanwhile, although Dworkin, **MacKinnon**, Itzin and their supporters continue to argue that it is pornography which violates women's civil rights by increasing discrimination against them, studies in the USA and Europe have tended to reverse the picture. In the US it is in states with a preponderance of Southern Baptists (followers of leading anti-pornography campaigner Jerry **Falwell**) that the highest levels of social, political and economic inequality between women and men can be found – despite the lowest circulation of pornography." Indeed Larry Baron discovered a positive correlation between equal opportunities for women in employment, education and politics and higher rates of pornography which he attributed to the greater social tolerance generally in these states. Such findings are consistent with those from Europe, where we find far higher levels of overall economic, political and other indices of gender equality in Sweden and Denmark compared to either the USA or Britain, and lower levels of violence against women – coupled with more liberal attitudes towards pornography.²⁴ **Baron's** survey, interestingly, also found that gender inequality correlated with the presence and extent of legitimate use of violence in a state (as measured by the numbers of people trained to work in the military, the use of corporal punishment in schools, government use of violence – as in the death penalty), as well as with mass-media preferences for violence, as in circulation rates of *Guns and Ammo*).

Beyond Pornography

It is time for feminists, and their supporters, who want to act against men's greater use of violence and sexual coercion, and against men's continuing social dominance, to abandon anti-pornography feminism. It was, after all, a type of feminist anti-pornography rhetoric which facilitated Jesse Helms successful attack on state funding for exhibitions of gay artists like Robert Mapplethorpe in the US, on the grounds that it 'denigrates, debases or reviles a person, group or class of citizens', in this case straight men. And the frightening truth is that the type of legislation anti-pornography feminism has proposed encourages new and far wider forms of censorship than anyone has yet admitted. Feminists are surely well aware that censorship does not operate simply through any single legal act or institution. Feminist anti-pornography legislation, if passed, would enable women and men to seek financial redress, through the courts,

against publishers or distributors of sexually explicit material if they felt they had been 'harmed' by it. Given the current encouragement of rapists today (and certain 'experts') to point the finger of blame at 'pornography' for sexual and violent crimes, such legislation could entail all kinds of self-imposed censorship on anyone trying to market sexually explicit material – particularly material transgressing prevailing heterosexual sexist norms. (Using similar legislation in Canada, the lesbian sex magazine, *Bad Attitudes* was recently condemned and fined.)

One fundamental theoretical disagreement in the debate between anti-pornography feminists and their opponents is over the question of fantasy. In defining pornography as 'sexually explicit subordination', anti-pornography feminists want to condemn all representations which in any way eroticize power. Within any erotic power relation, they assume that men always line up as the subjugator, women as the subjected. But, whether looking at the pleasures some men find in the pornography they consume, or the enjoyment women gain from romance novels (both characteristically portraying the eroticization of power), it is far from clear where precisely women and men do line up. (In *s/m* or bondage pornography there are more portrayals of men as submissive and women as dominant than the other way around.)

Even were it possible to detect some fixed positioning of identification in a person's enjoyment of fantasy, we could never generalize from that to predict that person's public status or behaviour in everyday encounters. The indulgence of heterosexual masochistic fantasies of spanking and subordination, for example, once a favourite pastime of the Victorian gentleman, neither undermined his accompanying social and sexual domination of women nor dented his sense of superiority to any other type of person, black or white. There is an autonomy to fantasy life which, if consuming pornography, may provide the setting for us to take up any number of volatile and impossible positions: active and passive, strong and weak, male and female, desired and repulsive, sacred and contemptible, pleasure-filled and suffering, and anything else as well and its opposite, all at one and the same time.

It is the social context of pornographic consumption which is all important. Men may use pornography as a form of male bonding, in the boys night out to the sex arcades. The very same pornographic stimulation, however, may serve quite different functions when consumed in, perhaps guilty, isolation. And boys, of course, have countless other ways of male bonding. A man may also force a woman against her will to enact some sexual act he has seen in pornographic material. This is a situation, however, quite distinct from one where such material is used as a stimulus to some freely chosen sexual encounter – whether heterosexual, gay or lesbian. And of course a man, or occasionally a woman, can easily force a person to do their bidding without pornography, if that person lacks the power to refuse.

Before we start to proscribe any type of representation as in itself unquestionably harmful, we do need to raise all manner of questions about fantasy, what it means and how it works. Just as we do need to raise all sorts of questions about men and women's actual freedom to lead sexual lives of their own choosing, and seek ways of empowering women both socially and sexually. Without a more measured view on pornography, we are in danger of forfeiting the setting of sexual agendas to the right, with its traditionally repressive attitudes towards women, and towards sexuality generally.

Some men are, as they always have been, quite capable of using violence without the assistance of pornography. We are, it is true, ubiquitously surrounded by images and discourses which represent women as passive, fetishised objects; men as active, controlling agents, devoid of weakness, passivity or any type of 'femininity'. They saturate all scientific and cultural discourses of the last hundred years – from sexology, embryology and psychoanalysis to literary and visual genres, high and low – and they construct the dominant images of masculinity to which so many men, inevitably, fail, in any way, to match up. Women provide the most available scapegoats for the shame and anxiety this failure causes them.

Men don't need pornography to encounter these 'facts' of crude and coercive, promiscuous male sexualities; helpless and yielding, nurturing female sensitivities. The anxious mirrorings of these narratives of male transcendence and female passivity (as well as occasional challenges to them) are, it is true, on offer in the culturally marginal and generally disparaged genre of 'pornography'. Women (or men) may well choose to pull down or deface the sexist pin-ups or pornography which men together may use to create their own exclusionary space or to try to taunt the women around them. (Some women have preferred to paste up their own images of penile display, which usually bring down the pin-ups). From the Bible and Desmond Morris, to Roger Scruton and the *Sun* newspaper, we see messages of male transcendence which we can and should attack. There are a variety of tactics which we can use to discredit, mock or remove images we find offensive from the personal and public spaces of our lives. It is a battle which has only just begun. But there is no compelling reason to focus upon sexually explicit material alone, unless as feminists we do wish to throw in our lot with the initiatives and goals of the Moral Right.

In the end, anti-pornography campaigns, feminist or not, can only enlist today, as they invariably enlisted before, centuries of guilt and anxiety around sex, as well as lifetimes of confusion and complexity in our personal experiences of sexual arousal and activity. In contrast, campaigns which get to the heart of men's violence and sadism towards women must enlist the widest possible resources to empower women socially to seek only the types of sexual encounters they choose, and to empower women sexually to explore openly their own interests and pleasures. We do need the space

to produce our own sexually explicit narratives and images of female desire and sensuous engagement if we are even to begin to embark upon that journey. And there are certain to be people who will feel harmed and provoked by our attempts.

There are lessons to be learned from the current flowering of lesbian and gay studies and politics. They are that it is time for feminists everywhere to expand our horizons and re-build our hopes. Even in these economically depressed and politically conservative times, we can still recognize our victories and attempt to surmount the real obstacles which stand in the way of building upon them. This will return us to some of the former insights and strategies of socialist feminism, now, however, enriched by the perspectives which black and other more specific feminist priorities can add to them. It will return us, as well, to the need to forge alliances with any progressive – not reactionary – forces, working against all forms of political, economic and cultural domination.

NOTES

1. Sheila Rowbotham. *Women's Consciousness, Men's World*, Penguin, 1973, p.xi.
2. *ibid*, p.38.
3. Catherine MacKinnon, 'Pornography, Civil Rights and Speech' in Catherine Itzin cd. *Pornography: Women, Violence & Civil Liberties* Oxford Univ. Press. 1992. p.456.
4. Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female: Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism*, Virago. 1987.
5. Diana Fuss, *insidelout: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, Routledge, 1992, Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, Oxford Univ. Press. 1992.
6. Ann Snitow, 'Retrenchment Vs Transformation; the Politics of the Anti-pornography Movement' in *Caught Looking*, Caught Looking Inc. 1986.
7. Susanne Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation*. Polity Press, 1986. p.160.
8. Ruth Wallsgrove, 'Pornography: between the devil and the true blue Whitehouse', *Spare Rib*. 1977. no. 65, p.15.
9. Lynne Segal. *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* Virago. 1992, ch. 8, and Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh, eds. *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*, Virago, 1992, introduction.
10. Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, Women's Press. 1981.
11. Catharine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*, Harvard. 1987, p.176.
12. Lisa Duggan 'Censorship in the name of feminism' in *Caught Looking*, Caught Looking Inc. 1986, p.63.
13. Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'*, Pandora, 1990.
14. In Philip Noble and Eric Nadler, *United States of America Vs. Sex*, Minnesota Press, 1986, p.311.
15. James Weaver, 'The Social Science and Psychological Research Evidence: Perceptual and Behavioral Consequences of Exposure to Pornography'. in Itzin ed. *op cit*.
16. Dennis Howitt and Guy Cumberbatch. *Pornography: impacts and influences*. Home Office Research and Planning Unit, 1990. p.94.
17. In Everywoman. Pornography and Sexual Violence: Evidence of Links. Everywoman, 1988. p.68.
18. See Linda Williams, *op cit*, 1990. pp.189–195.
19. See Anne McClintock. 'Gonad the Barbarian and the Venus Flytrap; Portraying the female and male orgasm' in Segal and McIntosh eds., 1992 *op cit* p.129.

20. See F. Delacoste and P. Alexander. eds. *Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry*, Virago. 1988.
21. Carla Freccero, 'Notes of a post-Sex War Theorizer', in M. Hirsch and E. .Fox Keller eds., *Conflicts in Feminism*. Routledge, 1991. p.316.
22. See D. Howitt and G. Cumberbatch, op cit, 1990. p.94.
23. Larry Baron. 'Pornography and Gender Equality: An Empirical Analysis' *Journal of Sex Research*, 1990, vol. 27, no. 3.
24. B. Kutehinsky. 'Pornography and Rape: Theory and practice: Evidence from Crime data in Four Countries where Pornography is Easily Available'. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 1990, vol. 13, no. 4, 1990.