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PRIVATE 'I's:
INVESTIGATING MEN'S EXPERIENCES WITH PORNOGRAPHIES

by
MICHAEL PUTNAM

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University Of New York

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ABSTRACT**PRIVATE 'I's:
INVESTIGATING MEN'S EXPERIENCES WITH PORNOGRAPHIES.**

by

Michael Putnam

Adviser: Professor Judith Lorber

This presentation of original research on men's experiences with pornography draws on various theoretical approaches, including the social construction of gender and sexualities, pro-feminist men's studies, queer theory, and cultural studies. The research consists of lengthy, qualitative interviews with 64 pornography fans in the New York metropolitan area. The purpose of the study was to describe men's experiences with pornography and to test the hypothesis that the current literature on pornography does *not* represent their experience. The impetus for this argument is that there is a vast literature on pornography, but no data on the experiences of bisexual, gay, and straight pornography fans. This study enters their world in an attempt to *understand*, in the classic Weberian sense, why pornography is meaningful to them. It emphasizes pornography as a form of popular culture and these men as its audience, and it addresses these men as "fans" of pornography rather than "users," reflecting the language of the men themselves.

Four central questions are at the heart of this work: 1) Is masturbation with pornography a normative sexual practice in some men's lives?; 2) What is the relationship, if any, of pornography to men's sexual fantasies?; 3) To what extent is pornography involved with men's experience of power?; 4) How, if at all, have men negotiated their interest in pornography while involved in long-term intimate relationships?

In addressing these questions, the research documents a wide diversity of practices with pornography. The findings do support the connection between pornography and sexism by showing that for some men pornography can tie into and solidify pre-existing sexist scripts. In addition, it introduces new issues and new data about men's experiences with porn: the variety of pleasures, the extent and effects of shame, and the proliferation of multi-sexed, multi-gendered fantasies.

This research concludes that sexist men may learn to solidify their misogyny with porn, but other men, bisexual, gay, and straight, get a lot from pornography that is positive for them and for their partners. The answer is not in the porn itself; it is in the men's biographies, what they bring to their pornographic practice.

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To my wife,

Wendy Barron,

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CHAPTER I. THERE'S MORE TO PORNOGRAPHY THAN MEETS THE EYE

A. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to describe straight, gay, and bisexual men's experiences with pornography. The focus is men's use of pornography, concurrent with masturbation and/or sexual activity with a partner. The data were gathered through in-depth, qualitative interviews that covered men's understandings of their own practices with pornography.

Kimmel and Linders (1996) mark the *decontextualization* of pornography use (studying pornography in a laboratory, for example, rather than as it is used, in the privacy of one's home, or in a peepshow booth) as one of the central pitfalls of social science literature on pornography. As the word-play in the title of this study indicates, the focus is on the private contexts of pornography use: the "private eyes" that view pornography; the "private selves" that experience it; and lastly, the tensions of the "private investigator" (having used pornography myself since early adolescence) inevitably investigating my own "private 'I's" while investigating those of others.

Four central questions organize the body of this work: 1) Is pornography use a normative sexual practice in some men's lives?; 2) What is the relationship, if any, of pornography to men's sexual fantasies?; 3) To what extent is pornography involved with men's experience of power?; 4) How, if at all, have men negotiated the use of pornography while involved in long-term, intimate relationships? This study is not designed to find a singular truth or theory of men and pornography, unless that truth is the existence of a *multiplicity* of experiences. The voices interpreted herein are nuanced

and tension-packed, each incorporating to some extent the conflicts and pleasures which are part and parcel of virtually all sexual practices in our current social order.

The study has been designed to test the hypothesis that current discourse and research on pornography does *not* represent men's experiences of pornography. The pornography controversy has generated a massive literature by any standard. Scholars, activists, and politicians have looked at pornography and theorized (Brod, 1990; Dworkin, 1979; MacKinnon, 1993; Stoltenberg, 1989); interviewed women and men who have been involved in its production as performers (Delacoste and Alexander, 1987; Chapkis, 1997; Faludi, 1995; MacKinnon and Dworkin, 1997), and as producers (Indiana and Katzman, 1993; Matrix, 1996; McElroy, 1995; Stoller, 1991); done experiments of its effects on women and men (Malamuth and Donnerstein, 1984; Zillman and Bryant, 1990); surveyed men about their exposure to pornography, but in reference to effects rather than experiences (Boeringer, 1994; Davies, 1997; Garcia, 1986; Padgett et al., 1989); talked with women about their experiences with pornography (Loach, 1993; Matrix, 1996); collected essays written by male scholars and journalists (Kimmel, 1990a); asked men to interpret mainstream heterosexual pornographic texts (Hardy, 1998); interviewed sex offenders about the influences of pornography on their crimes (Jensen, 1998b; Scully, 1990); listened to voluminous expert and personal testimony (Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, 1986 [hereafter referred to as the Meese Commission]); conducted national survey research on attitudes and experience with pornography (Abelson et al. 1971; Potter, 1996); written autobiographies of their experiences working in the pornography industry (Lovelace and McGrady, 1980; Queen, 1997; Sprinkle, 1998). But to date there has

been no serious attempt to talk to men in detail, to *understand*, in the classic Weberian (1978) sense of *Verstehen*, what pornography means to them and the roles they see it playing in their lives. The only works that come close are Winick (1971) and Hardy (1998).

Winick (1971) interviewed porn fans for the 1971 Commission on Obscenity and Pornography. That report addresses some important issues which will be discussed later, but besides being sorely out of date,¹ it is lacking in detail as the researcher did not identify himself as such. The interview was therefore masked as a one-time, casual conversation. Hardy's (1998) study is limited in a number of basic ways, and a more detailed critique of his work appears later in this chapter. Briefly, however, Hardy is primarily interested in the problematics of heterosexual desire, so his sample of 24 men includes no bisexuals or gays. Furthermore, the study was conducted in Britain where hardcore pornography is prohibited; thus, it addresses only softcore pornographic writing. It is questionably applicable to U.S. fans. Finally, Hardy is cripplingly conservative about gender and sexuality. He repeatedly insists, despite a great deal of evidence, that women do not like and do not produce pornography.

Plainly, there has been much discussion of pornography, yet few attempts to understand what men are really doing when they masturbate with pornography. What is more, the strongest voices at present are those of condemnation, in particular, government commissions, policies, and anti-pornography feminists. Indeed, my interviews indicate that such stereotypes as the trench-coated lonely man at the pornography house are alive and well. Pornography and men are still shrouded in a sort of ironic mystery: continually talked about, yet continually unknown. One of the

central goals of the study is to demystify and debunk men's experience of pornography, and to document what I believe to be the difference and variety of experiences among these men. Thus, it was conducted with focused open-ended, in-depth, qualitative interviews with men who answered advertisements requesting participation in research on pornography.

One of the study's guides is pro-feminist men's studies. The men's studies approach, though in its fledgling stages, promotes the study of men self-consciously as men. Men are no longer the objective representatives of humanity (Brod, 1987b); they are gendered actors, acting within the frame of masculine agendas. By definition then, men's identification with or resistance to particular masculinities, and the social construction of those masculinities, become the central focus of any study of men. Like women's studies before it, the purpose of men's studies is to reveal aspects of history and experience that have previously been "hidden" from study.² History hidden not because of second-class status as in the case of women, but precisely because of men's first-class status. As first-class citizens, as the "non-Other," as the writers of history and social science, men have unself-consciously cast themselves as normative, never looking critically at their own actions as constructed upon masculine, gendered premises and interests. The effort of men's studies is not to steal the limelight from feminism, but to participate in the feminist project of deconstructing the masculine monolith. As Harry Brod (1987b) points out, special studies of men, which are focused on "de-centering" men, are necessary in order to remove women from the status of other.

Although pornography is often thought of as a women's issue, it is in many respects a critical *men's* issue. On one level it is the ultimate men's "club." At the same time, men's discussion of pornography amounts to nothing more than a "deafening silence" (Kimmel, 1990b, p. 2). Men's silence is not always about inarticulateness, however; it can very well be about maintenance of power (Sattel, 1976). Men's silence sustains unquestioned the commercial juggernaut that is pornography. The silence of pornography fans contrasts with countless dollars spent and massive capital invested. Men and pornography: structural power on one hand, individual silences on the other. Silences, Kimmel (1990b) hypothesizes, perhaps guilty, frightened, angry, maybe bored. Silences that nonetheless reflect what is at the heart of pornography, one of the most basic sociological issues: the relationship between social structure and individual. What is men's take on this practice so deeply individualistic, private, yet so fundamentally informed by social power?

Before we can really discuss men and pornography, however, a discussion of definition and the multitude of positions is necessary. Definitional debates are common in the pornography discourse. My definition draws on Robert Stoller's: "Pornography is that product manufactured with the *intent* to produce erotic excitement" (1985, p. 15). For the purposes of this project, pornography is thus defined quite widely to include triple X (aka "hard-core") film and magazines, as well as pulp magazines, such as *True Detective*, which, although not sexually explicit, focus almost exclusively on sexually violent, "real-life" police stories (Dietz et al., 1986). I do not accept, however, Stoller's assertion that all sexual excitement entails hostility. While hostility is often present in sexual excitement, it is not necessary to it.

To further complicate our understanding, we might think of pornography as *pornographies*. Although I will use this term only intermittently in this dissertation because of its awkwardness, it is an important conceptual tool that deserves elaboration. Susan Sontag (1969) first used the term to distinguish between pornography in social history, as a psychological phenomenon, and as a minor convention in the arts. Within the current debates, however, this term takes on greater significance. In addition to clearly emphasizing the differences among types of pornographies, the term has three major advantages. First, it moves beyond simplifying and obscuring dualisms: good sex/bad sex; pornography/erotica (Steinem, 1980). Second, it can maintain the distinction between violent and non-violent pornographies, but also complicate it. For example, violent pornographies may include those which represent real violence that is coercive, real violence that is consensual, and fictional violence performed by actors. Furthermore, the sexually violent content in R-rated films (see Donnerstein et al., 1987; and especially Palys, 1986) has pornographic components under my definition, but not under the definitions of Dworkin and MacKinnon (1986) or Steinem (1980). Finally, this term enables us to recognize the similarities between mass market fiction, for example, and more typical pornographies (Snitow, 1983).³

Beyond definitional debates there are a number of positions within the pornography debate as a whole. I have generalized them into six: 1) conservative: emphasizes control of sexuality and stronger enforcement of obscenity laws (Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, 1986); 2) liberal: emphasizes First Amendment rights (ACLU a, b); 3) feminists against pornography: emphasizes pornography as the central site of men's power and women's powerlessness; this

position also emphasizes pornography as a violation of women's civil rights (Dworkin, 1979; MacKinnon, 1987); 4) feminists against censorship: emphasizes sexual pluralism, women's stake in sexual freedom; this position argues that more control of sexuality means more control over women (Snitow, Stansell and Thompson, 1983; Ellis et al, 1986); 5) gay male: emphasizes pornography as an affirmation of gay sexuality in a sexually *oppressive* (as opposed to repressive) society (Bronski, 1984; Burger, 1995; Preston, 1993); 6) marxist: emphasizes pornography as a compensation for men's powerlessness in the labor market (Soble, 1986). Although these categories do not do justice to all work on pornography,⁴ I believe that they represent, at least ideologically, the major positions in the current debate on pornography.

The position that is missing is one that recognizes pornography as a form of popular cultural production. As studies of audiences of other popular cultural forms (see Hay et al., 1996; Radway, 1984, 1988), this project studies the male audience of pornography. Typical terms for these men are porn "consumers" (Segal, 1998), and, more often, porn "users" (see Jensen, 1998b; O'Toole, 1998). "Consumers" directs attention to pornography in the market place and away from personal meaning and masturbation. The latter is problematic because of its stigmatizing connotation with drug "user." Furthermore, "user" implies that pornography is nothing more than a masturbation aid. I prefer Winick's (1971) term, pornography "fan." He does not explain this choice, but while effectively side-stepping the problems above, the term points towards the study of an audience and implies a commonplace and rich involvement in the varied practices of popular culture. Just as a devoted baseball fan does not simply watch the game but knows all about the teams and players, so it is with

pornography fans. Perhaps most important, however, is that this is the word that fans use for themselves.⁵ The men I interviewed had extensive knowledge and informed opinions about directors, films and videos, authors, stars, photographers, magazines, political battles, historical periods and styles, trends and controversies in the industry, guide books, and cultural leaders (e.g. Susie Bright, Pat Califia, Larry Flint, Al Goldstein, Candida Royalle, Annie Sprinkle). The culture of pornography entails knowledge of fetishes, sex toys (e.g. buttplugs, cock rings, strap-ons), and the language of pornographic production (e.g. the “reverse cow-girl” and “DP” sexual positions, an “ECU” camera shot, the “pussy light”). There are industry conventions attended by stars and many fans (see McElroy, 1995). When stars go on the road touring strip clubs to promote their videos (a very common practice), fan clubs, which all popular stars have, inform fans of dates and venues. At the clubs stars meet fans, pose for pictures with them, and give autographs. Although not all the men I interviewed had all this knowledge (a few had more), there was always a sense of shared knowledge, a *common language* of the pornography world. Although this project will not focus on the wider pornography culture described here, this specialized knowledge was vital to my interviews and adds a specifically sociological context from which we can begin to understand the men in my sample.

There is a stigma for porn fans, however, that does not exist for fans of most popular culture. A more accurate comparison is the audience of romance novels, who are also stigmatized (Radway, 1984).⁶ Indeed, Radway argues that one central aspect of the stigma attached to romance novels is their sometimes softcore pornographic content. I will draw a number of parallels between Radway’s romance readers and the

men I interviewed throughout this work, but there are important similarities and important differences that I should mention here briefly. Perhaps the most remarkable similarity is how romance novels and pornographic media function as emotional outlets for their respective audiences. The similarity in language is *exact*: both audiences speak of “escape” and “private time, time for me.” Thus, these media give their audiences an opportunity to withdraw from the demands of everyday life into a fantasy world where their needs are attended to unconditionally.

There are, however, many differences between these two audiences. The social stigma against pornography, for example, is much stronger, and thus its audience is extremely atomistic. Paradoxically, the pornography audience has a great deal of common knowledge, but it is rarely shared among its members (although the internet has changed this to some extent, face-to-face interaction is, I believe, still rare). Compare the images in Radway’s study of Dorothy advising her customers on what to buy and why. This never happens in men’s pornography culture.⁷ Radway’s description of women readers sitting together and collapsing in laughter about the experiences of sister readers is difficult to imagine of pornography fans. Many, though not all, of the gay men in my sample, and a handful of straight men, had a community of friends with whom they could trade and talk pornography, but most did not. The extreme social stigma attached to enjoying pornography prevents the creation of community, despite the existence of a common language. Although this difference is profound, it does not preclude comparison between the two audiences.

This dissertation, then, is unique in a number of ways. It is the only work that interviews bisexual, gay, and straight fans of pornography about what their

masturbation, fantasy, and pleasure with pornography means to them and the role they see it playing in their lives. It treats these men as “fans” of pornography rather than “users.” It emphasizes the fact that pornography is a media form, a cultural production, and, in the language of cultural studies, these men are its audience. The cultural studies perspective facilitates a fruitful comparison to women who read romance novels (see Radway, 1984), who comprise another stigmatized group of media fans. Finally, this study attempts to document a wide diversity of fans and practices, and thus it expands the feminist debates on pornography.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

This review is comprised of two areas of study and controversy: the pornography debates and academic research on pornography.

1. The Pornography Debates

Debates about pornography have been active in this country at least since Comstock’s aggressive and often successful campaign against pornography via the U.S. Postal Service in the late 1800s (e.g. Comstock, 1883). In this section I will focus on the current era and briefly outline each of the six positions on pornography listed above: conservative, liberal, feminist anti-pornography, feminist anti-censorship, gay men, and marxist.

The conservative position is best summarized by the Meese Commission’s *Final Report* (Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography, 1986). the Meese Commission endorsed stronger regulation and stronger enforcement of existing laws. Moral outrage against pornography is central to The Meese Commission: “To a number of us, the most important harms [resulting from pornography] must be seen in moral terms, and the act of

moral condemnation of that which is immoral is not merely important but essential” (p. 32). In accord with these arguments, the Meese Commission endorses the current legal definition of “obscene:” the Supreme Court’s decision in 1973 *Miller v. California* (henceforth referred to as the *Miller* standard) upholding a combination of local, state, and national standards for the definition and recognition of pornography.⁸ One of the most interesting aspects of *The Meese Commission* is its use of anti-pornography feminist arguments (pornography as violence against women) to recommend deployment of law-and-order tactics against pornography. Thus, they incorporate contemporary feminist arguments to underwrite a traditional right-wing position. The Meese Commission also solicited a great deal of expert testimony from social-psychologists who have conducted research on pornography. This strategy may have backfired, however. Because *The Meese Commission* asserted that clinical and experimental research almost unanimously confirms a causal link between sexual violence in pornography and violent behavior, they have been accused of distorting testimony and current research (Linz, Donnerstein, and Penrod, 1987).

A group’s definition of pornography often reveals a great deal about their position. In the case of *the liberals*, the futility of definition is the cornerstone of their position. The ACLU delights in what it sees as the impossibility of an accurate definition of pornography. Indeed, their position rests on the indeterminacy of pornography, that is, the socially constructed, historical, and cultural grounding of any definition of pornography. Noting that the Supreme Court’s 1973 *Miller v. California* decision is still in effect, they insist that no one understands what phrases like “the average person,” “community standards,” and “patently offensive” mean (ACLU, a). They cite the U.S.

district judge in Los Angeles who dismissed charges against a pornography distributor because there was “no positive evidence of what the entire community believes in” (Clark, 1991, 972).⁹ Their stance is that “standards” in a pluralistic society are impossible to measure. Justice Thurgood Marshall summarized the classic civil liberties position for the ACLU: “If the First Amendment means anything, it means that a state has no business telling a man, sitting alone in his own house, what books he may read or what films he must watch” (ACLU, b).

The sexist language used by Justice Marshall falls right into the hands of the *feminists against pornography* argument about pornography and the First Amendment. From Dworkin and MacKinnon’s point of view, it is men and men only who have freedom of speech in our society. Pornography and pornographers are protected; women are systematically silenced (Dworkin, 1988). Their definition of pornography is intrinsic to their position: pornography is the “sexually explicit subordination of women, graphically depicted, whether in pictures or in words.” This definition was taken from Dworkin and MacKinnon’s Minneapolis Ordinance¹⁰ (hereafter referred to as the Ordinance) whose aim was to empower women by making the production, sale, exhibition, and distribution of pornography a civil offense. Thus, it would have allowed people who were hurt by pornography to sue on the basis of sex discrimination. The basis of the Ordinance was the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which addressed individuals infringing on the rights of other individuals.¹¹ The Ordinance attempted to subvert the Miller standard, obscenity law, and the liberal First Amendment approach to the issue by asserting that it is not the speech of men and pornographers that should be protected, but

society in general, and women in particular, from pornography's encouragement of sexual violence (e.g. Russell, 1998).

Feminists against censorship are a diverse group, but their main point is that cultural productions should not be censored, and that it is impossible to distinguish between permissible erotica and tabooed pornography. Willis' (1983) response to Steinem's (1980) distinction between pornography and erotica covers these key points. Willis is unmoved by Steinem's categorical denunciation of pornography as violence. Willis sees pornography as sexual by definition rather than violent. She states that use of the term erotica is merely a class bias, boiling down to "what turns me on is erotic; what turns you on is pornographic" (p. 463). The desire for dichotomy—erotica/pornography, good sex/bad sex, good girl/bad girl, good girl/bad boy—is what Willis objects to most of all. For her, such dichotomies are restatements of hackneyed, traditional feminine (not feminist), patriarchal values.¹²

Willis and all the authors in the anti-censorship group are in favor of sexual freedom (e.g. Snitow et al., 1983; Ellis et al. 1986; Segal and McIntosh, 1993), but as above, distinctions can be made among these feminists as well. For example, there are feminists who are clearly pro-pornography (e.g. McElroy, 1995; Queen, 1997; Sprinkle, 1998; Tisdale, 1994). McElroy (1995), for example, lists a number of benefits of pornography, political as well as personal. She argues that pornography provides images of women having any and all types of sex without a hint of shame, and thus, images of women's sexuality *impossible* to find elsewhere. "No sexual question is wrong to ask; no sexual preference is wrong to pursue. Pornography is the true arena of tolerance" (p. 139). One does not get the same sense of elation about pornography from a number of

ardent antagonists of the anti-pornography feminist position, for example: Segal (1998) Chancer (1998), Strossen (1995). Segal states pornography “embodies the most outrageous sexist (often also racist) misogyny. That is its function: to position women as – and only as – passive, commoditized objects for men’s sexual arousal” (p. 48). However, she lambastes the anti-pornography feminist perspective as reductive, behavioristic, and dismissive of fantasy.

Gay male pornography as an affirmation of hidden desires, as speaking the unspeakable, is the overriding theme in gay men’s writing about pornography (Bronski, 1984; Clark, 1990; Preston, 1993; Tucker, 1990). In a heterosexist culture, closeted gay men find themselves isolated and ashamed of their attraction to other men. John Preston writes that even today when gay culture is stronger than ever before, “I’m still stunned by how many people talk about their coming out and describe their feelings that they were the only ones.... Porn, like any other kind of gay art, tells people that they aren’t alone” (1993, 117). Because they see gay pornography as political, some gay writers distance themselves from straight pornography in response to feminist concerns about sexism (e.g. Bronski, 1984; Preston, 1993). Scott Tucker (1990) and Chris Clark (1990) though, see *all* pornography as desire for sexual freedom and expression of the forbidden and therefore see basic connections between gay and straight pornography.

Alan Soble’s (1986) *marxist position* on pornography is unique. Much of his work is in response to the anti-pornography feminist perspective, attesting to their power within the debate. Soble, in fact, takes the exact opposite approach as far as men are concerned. Soble’s argument is not that men have power and use pornography to keep it, but that they do not have power and use pornography to fantasize about it. As opposed to

the feminist view in which men are unified by gender, Soble argues, as a marxist, that men are fundamentally divided by class in capitalist society. Because male workers are powerless, “pornography is an attempt to recoup in the domain of sexual fantasy what is denied to men in [capitalist] production” (1986, 81).

The positions outlined above by no means possess equal influence in the debates. The anti-pornography feminist stance has essentially set the stage in the current era. The view of feminists against censorship is a direct reaction to their high-profile court battles, anti-pornography protests, and widely read work. Pro-feminist men’s work is always careful to include it, and much of the social-psychological research makes an effort to answer questions they pose. Although it is likely that anti-pornography feminists’ partnership with the Meese Commission made their position questionable for many on the left, it probably had the opposite effect upon those in the center and on the right, giving the anti-pornography feminist position cultural and political clout it never had before. In fact, the anti-pornography position is seen as *the* feminist position by many. Only a few participants in my research, for example, revealed an understanding of controversy within feminism over pornography. Furthermore, the feminists against pornography have made significant strategic shifts (towards addressing pornography as hate speech), since the Ordinance was found unconstitutional. For all these reasons, I find it necessary to present a more detailed account and critique of the anti-pornography feminist position.

I will begin this discussion with a review of some of the basic arguments surrounding the early debates. I will then establish some of the varied positions inside what are generally considered two distinct camps. I will end by addressing two

contemporary developments which seem to result from the Ordinance's unconstitutional status: First, feminists against pornography have joined hands with critical race theorists in order to fight pornography (and racial slurs) as hate speech (MacKinnon, 1993; Lederer and Delgado, 1995); and second, there are a number of new texts seeking to reconcile the divisions among feminists or reframe the issue in new and creative ways (among others: Chancer, 1998; Chapkis, 1997; Hardy, 1998; Juffer, 1998; Kipnis, 1996; Williams, 1989).

To anyone even marginally familiar with the pornography debate, Morgan's epigram, "Pornography is the theory, and rape is the practice" (1980, 139) has become litany. Somewhat less familiar but equally dramatic is one of Dworkin's final lines in her book, *Pornography*: "We will know we are free when the pornography no longer exists" (Dworkin, 1979, 224). The anti-pornography feminists take men and pornography very seriously, and not without reason. In the truly harrowing accounts presented at the Minneapolis public hearings (MacKinnon and Dworkin, 1997), woman after woman told of her travails at the hands of men with pornography. Violence, abuse, objectification, rape were the consequences of pornography. For anti-pornography feminists, all of these abuses equal the silencing of women. These are the roots of their rage toward efforts to protect pornography and pornographers from censorship. Putting a novel twist on the meaning of sexual freedom, Stoltenberg quotes passage after passage of (written) violent pornography and asks, "Where's the freedom from hatred? Where's the freedom from degradation? Where's the sexual freedom?" (1989, 125). For these writers, only men have freedom in this society; pornography is not only evidence of the violence that this society does to women, it is the violence that society does to women. It was this

assertion, that pornography is violence against women, which led Dworkin and MacKinnon to develop the Minneapolis Ordinance discussed above.

Although feminists against censorship are sympathetic to the anti-pornography feminists' concerns about sexual violence and women's subjugation, they raise a number of questions about the anti-pornography analysis. First, is pornography really the seat of men's power? Anti-censorship feminists consider pornography to be one in a constellation of problems for women in patriarchal society. They argue that analysis of institutions such as the family, work, the political structure, the economy, and the military cannot be abandoned for the single-issue politics of the anti-pornography movement. Snitow (1986) has argued that the anti-pornography perspective is a response to backlash and feminist frustrations experienced around issues like abortion, child care, and tokenism.

Second, do women and men have essentially different sexualities? Echols (1983) cites Morgan as arguing that:

Every woman ... knows ... the vast differences between her sexuality and that of any patriarchally trained male's.... [E]mphasis on genital sexuality, objectification, promiscuity, emotional noninvolvement, and coarse invulnerability was the *male style*, and that we, as women, placed greater trust in love, sensuality, humor, tenderness, commitment (Morgan in Echols, 1983, p. 449).

In Echols' opinion, Morgan is suggesting that women have somehow avoided patriarchal training, and somehow have a "natural" access to their sexuality. Echols contends that such essentialism formulates a portrait of women's and men's sexuality as fundamentally opposed to each other, entirely discrete, and feeding into patriarchally defined gender dichotomies and stereotypes: women as nature, men as culture; moral gatekeepers vs. sexual aggressors; love and compassion vs. individuality and self-interest.

For Echols, the feminine is as socially constructed as the masculine. It cannot be valued as women's truth or nature and is exactly what feminism should be opposing.

The model of male and female relations that the anti-pornography feminists are working with, however, is represented in the early adulthood of Linda Marchiano, aka Linda Lovelace (Lovelace and McGrady, 1980). Marchiano's relationship and marriage to Chuck Traynor was characterized by constant physical and mental abuse, surveillance, and what can only be described as slavery. Traynor broke Marchiano. He regularly prostituted her and other women to johns and pornographers. Most notoriously of course, she starred in the most financially successful pornography film ever: *Deep Throat*. MacKinnon writes: "Her experience is on the one hand individually extreme, specifically horrible, and unusually brutal, and is on the other hand a very common, every-woman kind of experience" (1987, p. 128). The brutality of Marchiano's early adult life is documentation of the brutality of some male and female relationships in our society. What, these feminists might ask, should we be opposing: femininity or violence against women?

Marchiano's experience ties into a third question raised by feminists against censorship: are the women who work in the sex industry victims of patriarchy and false-consciousness or agents making conscious choices? While many of the writings in Delacoste and Alexander's (1987) collection of essays by sex workers portray dangers and terror, there is a palpable sense of pride, pleasure, and power in equally as many essays. These sex workers defend their work as therapeutic and valuable in today's society, some say that the first time they felt power was when they finally charged money for sex. Nina Hartley, an actress in pornographic films, writes: "In choosing my roles

and characterizations carefully, I strive to show, always, women who thoroughly enjoy sex and are forceful, self-satisfying and guilt-free without also being neurotic, unhappy or somehow unfulfilled" (1987, 142).

It seems unlikely that anti-pornography feminists would be swayed by one woman's account of pleasure in making pornography. It hardly discounts the torture that many women are subjected to in making it, experiencing their lives "through" it. A common reaction to claims of either pleasure or torture might be to ask how many?, how pervasive?, what percent of women in pornography experience this? But in an exchange with Kathleen Barry (known for her work on women in the sex industry, *Female Sexual Slavery* [1979]), Chapkis (1997) reports her admiration of Barry's refusal to "play the numbers game" (p. 48). Barry insists that the suffering of one woman should be enough for anyone who cares about violence against women.

In her relentlessly fair-minded study, *Live Sex Acts*, a cross-cultural account of sex work in the United States and Holland, Chapkis counters:

The seriousness of forced prostitution is in no way diminished by evidence that trafficking is not the most common form of "recruitment" into the sex trade. Even using low estimates, the reality remains that many thousands of women and children are involved in commercial sex against their will. Many more have "chosen" prostitution from a desperately limited range of options, and most prostitutes work under exploitative labor conditions. This, however, is a different set of claims than the argument that commercial sex is inevitably a form of slavery (1997, p. 49).

The issue of sexual slavery versus sex work ties into a fourth question raised by feminists against censorship: is it better for women and the women's movement to focus on "victim feminism" or "power feminism?" (Wolf, 1993). Because feminists against pornography have focused so much upon women's subjugation at the hands of men, they (among others) have been accused of creating "victim feminism." While Naomi Wolf

(1993) recognizes the importance of women's documentation of sexual harassment, rape, and domestic violence, she is wary of a feminism that redefines victim status as strength and identity. Wolf's argument is that such a feminism teaches that power is brutal, undesirable, and necessarily male, undermining any ability of women to gain power. Such a feminism mistakes the ability of those with power to do great harm with the inevitability of doing harm.

While anti-pornography feminists may valorize the victimized woman, clearly they are far from the passive women implied by Wolf's argument. First, the importance of giving voice to women's pain in sexual exploitation cannot be overemphasized. There are new voices, new stories; they have no history or precedent (Phummer, 1995). Anti-pornography feminists have been instrumental in helping women recognize their own suffering for what it is rather than blaming themselves, pulling these women out of isolation, and contributing to the process of healing (for a personal account see Russo, 1998). Furthermore, it is mistaken to suggest that victim feminism and power feminism are somehow opposites when MacKinnon, Dworkin, and their colleagues organized one of the most powerful feminist campaigns in history to pass the Ordinance against pornography.

At the same time, the campaign was extremely controversial among feminists. Two briefs filed against the Ordinance considered it an institutionalization of second-class status for women through its depiction of traditional gender definitions such as: women as victimized by voracious male sexuality, and women as inherently weaker than men (Hunter and Law, 1995; ACLU, cited in Strossen, 1995). These briefs further argue that asking the state to come to women's aid "is precisely the type of sex-based

protectionism that inhibits the evolution of genuine equality between the sexes” (ACLU, cited in Strossen, 1995, p. 31).

A fifth and final question is raised by anti-censorship feminists: What is the nature of pornographic fantasy? The subject of fantasy is derided by feminists against pornography however, because the “fantasy” is one-sided: the man’s. The woman/model on the other hand is living a nightmare, far from a dream. As one woman testified at the Ordinance hearings in Minneapolis, “Pornography is not a fantasy. It was my life, reality. It involved abuse to my body to create it” (MacKinnon and Dworkin, 1997, p. 112).

Ellis, O’Dair, and Tallman (1986) do not see fantasy as strictly generated by women for men’s pleasure. They see fantasy as potentially beneficial to women and claim pornography as one aspect of women’s sexual agency. Women can be true to themselves in fantasy and sexual play (choosing if they wish bizarre, forbidden, or degrading images), while maintaining outrage at non-fantasized, coerced situations (such as actual rape) (Ellis, O’Dair, and Tallman, 1986). Susie Bright (1992) and Sallie Tisdale (1992) carry this point one step further by arguing that it was not only male but *feminist* ideas of “correct” women’s fantasies that had to be expurgated in the name of sexual freedom. Both authors identify pornography and their acceptance of stereotypically oppressive fantasies (rape or bondage) as key to their sexual agency. Neither author suggests that such fantasies are necessary sources of sexual liberation; their point is that women have never been free to explore sex without guilt, and domination fantasies ironically release these authors from guilt, enabling them to be freely sexual. Note Tisdale’s words: “When I envision my own binding, my submission, I am seeing myself

free. Free of guilt, free of responsibility" (1992, 46). Though not reflecting on personal experience, other authors note similar phenomenon. Both Chancer (1992) and Silverman (1984) note the power and agency intrinsic in the "passive" position in sadomasochism. Feminists against censorship argue that at a time when women are just beginning to explore sex freely, limits should not be set on their sexual experimentation (Ellis, O'Dair, and Tallman, 1986).

This concludes a small sampling of the issues involved in pornography debates in the 1980s surrounding the battle over the Ordinance. Since it was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1986, a number of directions have been taken by feminists and others interested in pornography.

The feminists against pornography have recently shifted strategy by rethinking pornography as "hate speech" (MacKinnon, 1993) in response to their defeat at the hands of the First Amendment, that is, the right to free speech. Their argument asserts that the First Amendment has been favored at the expense of the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees equal protection for *all* under the law. As MacKinnon (1993) writes, "The law of equality and the law of freedom of speech are on a collision course in this country" (p. 71.) Pornography's representation as hate speech to the courts may prove to be an effective side-stepping of First Amendment protection for pornography (Butler, 1997). Anti-pornography feminists have aligned with critical race theorists to form a united front of women and minorities who wish to curb free speech protections in favor of constitutional protections of equality (e.g. Lederer and Delgado, 1995; Matsuda et al., 1993).

In *Only Words*, MacKinnon (1993) argues its production involves real people, and speech itself is action. In her view, pornography constructs a pornographic world. In this world, women's speech is obstructed and silenced, while men's speech is protected. Women's speech can be twisted, so that "no" means "yes." MacKinnon makes a compelling case about women's twisted speech in her depiction of the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas judiciary confirmation hearings. In the pornographic world, when Hill repeats the alleged words of Thomas, she herself becomes culpable in the act. That is because her speech is sexual, and she becomes sexualized. As a sexualized woman, her testimony is cheapened, made less credible:

In a world made by pornography, testimony about sexual harassment is live oral pornography starring the witness. Because the account becomes a form of sex, the abuse is rendered consensual in the mind of the viewer.... There is nothing else like this: because she says she was hurt, it is believed she had a wonderful time (MacKinnon, 1993, p. 67).

In her recent book *Excitable Speech*, Butler (1997) analyzes the political and linguistic arguments of MacKinnon and the critical race theorists.

Butler's project is to ask what form the performative takes in MacKinnon's exposition. In Austin's classic of linguistic theory (1975), he establishes two types of performative speech, illocutionary and perlocutionary. Illocution is speech that equals action by virtue of speaking the words themselves: "I do" in the context of a heterosexual wedding, "you're fired" in the context of employment hierarchy. Perlocution is speech that leads to action as its consequence: hurt feelings after an effective insult, laughter after a well-told joke. Thus, in illocution there is no gap between speech and action, in perlocution, there is a clear gap. According to Butler, MacKinnon makes no distinction between perlocution and illocution, in her theory of language there is only illocution: speech that acts without a gap between speech and meaning. Thus, if a man calls a

woman a slut,¹³ and *intends* it as an insult, his speech acts on her, and in the pornographic world she has no response. Critical race theorists hold this position as well: Delgado writes that “nigger and spick have no connotation,” but as Butler points out, in this very writing we see that the author himself has used connotative versions of the words.

Citing Habermas and his theory of ideal speech community in which meaning must be hammered out before democratic communication can take place, Butler suggests that MacKinnon’s concerns are common, and that speech can be twisted and contorted in ways not associated with the pornographic. In so far as MacKinnon identifies speech intention and meaning as equivocal and dissociated in Hill’s testimony, she is correct. Butler would add though, that risk and equivocity is in the nature of language, of speaking. Though she doesn’t address the sexism that is intrinsic in the distortion of Hill’s speech, Butler sees political advantages to this system of speech as risk-taking. Ultimately, Butler emphasizes the agency rather than the distortion of Hill’s speech. Hill shows us exactly what Thomas didn’t count on, that anyone’s speech may be cited, expropriated. It cannot be denied that Hill’s expropriation brought multiple meanings and resignifications to Thomas’ words that he could not control. For her part, MacKinnon does not account for these numerous *other* meanings that were generated in Hill’s citations. That is, the twisting of Hill’s intended meaning was far from the only consequence of her speech. Indeed, the resignification that took place achieved the widest discussion of sexual harassment this country has ever known. It provided this nation with a symbol of active female defiance to male power at the highest levels. Although it’s clear there were no clear-cut victories for feminism in this case, it cannot be

written off as a singular example of the perverse twisting of women's language in pornographic society.

If everyone is "vulnerable in a specifically linguistic sense to a social life of language that exceeds the purview of the subject who speaks" (Butler, 1997, p. 87), then the possibility of defiant minority voices disrupting accepted meanings is always and continually possible. MacKinnon's legal solutions tether meanings to expression concretely and ahistorically, making those expressions actionable. Historically speaking however, minorities shift and redefine themselves, difference and potential resignifications are continually emergent. Thus, rather than defining pornography as illocutionary force as MacKinnon would, and tether meanings to expression legally, Butler suggests that by leaving a gap between expression and meaning, it is possible to talk back to pornography as it were, and shift its meaning to one's own purposes: critical, sexual, playful, creative, enraged.

Indeed, resignification is currently underway. There are a number of women producing pornography today that is remarkably different from much of what is produced by men.¹⁴ Legislation would likely entrench the industry's male-dominated, extremely competitive hierarchy, thus making already difficult in-roads by women ever more difficult. Work cited throughout this chapter indicate a fertile feminist scholarly imagination in re-reading and resignifying pornography (Chapkis, 1997; Kipnis, 1996; Juffer, 1998; McElroy, 1995; Tisdale, 1994; Williams, 1989). Legislation will no doubt put a chilling effect on such creative processes, especially the use of pornography in the classroom (for uses of pornography in the classroom see Atlas, 1999; Durbin, 1996).

Also stifled will be women's exploration of pornographic pleasures and women's freedom to investigate different sexual practices (Juffer, 1997).

At the same time, these repressive efforts will have productive effects as well (Foucault, 1990a). Butler argues that efforts at legal reform will "simply be incorporated into the pornographic thematic as one of its more savory plots concerning the law and its transgression" (p. 95). This process is illustrated in the magazine *Barely Legal*, which enacts the eroticization of the legal age of consent.¹⁵ Putative repression and control thus produce meanings and status unlikely to be achieved otherwise.¹⁶ More insidiously, however, if the state endorses hate speech as illocutionary, it *produces* hate speech. That is, the state produces speech which legally, is always hurtful. Once produced, Butler argues, it can be misappropriated, and the "political neutrality of legal language is highly dubious" (p. 101). Strossen (1995) has shown, for example, how rules designed to protect minorities on campus have most frequently been used against minorities. For example, using University of Michigan hate speech rules, 20 whites accused blacks of hate speech.

A number of feminist pornography studies have begun to approach pornography as a cultural form (Hunt, 1993; Juffer, 1998; Kipnis, 1996; Williams, 1989). In the 1960s, Marcus (1964) and Sontag (1969) discussed pornography as culture, but these authors, especially Sontag, compared pornography rather unfavorably with other literary forms. The revival of this type of interest in pornography has been largely due to Williams (1989). She works her way through a cultural history of film and video pornography, from the early stag films to 1980s triple-X video. Putting aside the elitism of the high and low cultural distinction, and the anti-pornography feminist protests,

Williams subjects the 1970s pornographic classic *Deep Throat*, among others, to dazzling cultural/literary interpretations. (These will be discussed in more detail below.) Hunt (1993) and Kipnis (1996) see pornography as an intrinsically political form of expression. Essays in Hunt's collection document the use of outlaw sexual representation to satirize and bring down to earth powerful religious and political figures as far back as 1500. This tradition is quite clear in the 18th century writings of de Sade (1965), for example. Kipnis (1996) suggests that Larry Flint's numerous sexual satires of Jerry Falwell in *Hustler* are directly linked to the political roots of pornography. She is fascinated by the remarkable variety of pornographic narratives,¹⁷ and claims that cultural transgression continues to be intrinsic to its appeal.

Another recent trend spurred by the pornography debates, of which this project is part, is an interest in hearing from men who use porn (Hardy, 1998; O'Toole, 1998; Potter, 1996). Though each of these studies acknowledges that men's experiences with porn have not been addressed in the feminist debates, their theoretical frame and methodologies diverge greatly. Only one of these works is a book length study of men, and interestingly, none of them were generated in the United States (two are from Britain, and one from Australia). O'Toole's (1998) work is a generalist look at the world of pornography (history, industry, controversies, new technologies), the final chapter of which informally gathers opinions and experiences of porn fans from letters solicited in magazine ads and Usenet discussion groups such as alt.sex.movies. Fans' experiences touch on a number of important issues including: fluid character identification in pornographic fantasy, pornography as sex education, addiction, issues of fantasy and reality. Unfortunately, there is only scant evidence presented and little analysis.

Like O'Toole, Potter (1996) devotes only part of his work to the study of fans of adult entertainment. Nevertheless, Potter's anonymous survey of 380 Australian pornography fans is noteworthy. Though he cautions that his sample is not random, generated by gaining access to the records of a large adult mail-order establishment, Potter paints an important portrait of pornography fans. The sample is 90% male, and though sexual orientation is not accounted for, other demographic features (age, income, education, occupation, residence, marital status) seem representative. To summarize: 41% were married and 33% single; most had about 10 videos at home, and watched once a week or less. Few were open about their pornographic habits with people other than family. The vast majority (75%) watched mainstream, straight videos with intercourse and oral sex "fairly or very often." Forty-nine percent watched anal sex videos "fairly or very often." Videos featuring more "specialized" activities such as rape, bestiality, and bondage, were clearly marginal. Fans viewing these types of videos "fairly or very often" were 2.5, 3, and 6 percent respectively. This is a particularly important finding because these types of themes are discussed as if they are commonplace by both the anti-pornography feminists and the right wing (MacKinnon and Dworkin, 1997; Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, 1986). According to Potter's survey, men usually watch videos alone, but 56% of men in relationships watch pornography with their partners "fairly or very often." Not surprisingly, the most popular motivations cited for watching adult videos are entertainment, masturbation, and enhancement of sexual fantasy. Finally, Potter included questions which tested attitudes about women's equality. Assessments were based on agreement or disagreement with statements about women and work, e.g. "a married woman should not attach much importance to a career"

(Potter, 1996, p. 143). He found that traditional sociological variables such as age and educational attainment were the most significant predictors of attitudes about women, whereas *none* of the pornography variables (e.g. types of pornography enjoyed, frequency of viewing) played a significant role in predicting these attitudes.

Hardy (1998) bases his work on a sample of 24 heterosexual men who currently enjoy or have enjoyed porn in varying degrees. He gives them typical pornographic stories from magazines to read and interpret. This methodology is problematic in that the men are interpreting stories chosen by the researcher rather than discussing stories which they themselves enjoy. To analyze his respondents' interpretations, Hardy relies on Stuart Hall's (1980) "encoding/decoding" schematic which Hall himself has since criticized as oversimplified (see Hall, 1994).¹⁸ Hardy's use of this simplistic model reeks of adjusting the data to the theory, rather than the theory to the data. Emblematic of this approach is his obdurate and conventional analysis steamrolling material with great potential. For example, Hardy finds that sometimes a man takes the role of the woman in his fantasies. Hardy argues the fan does so *solely* "to view better his triumphant gesture of ejaculation in the mirror of her submission" (p. 134). By disallowing the possibility of a man entering the woman's position with desires other than those of domineering heterosexuality, Hardy misses his own hint at self-love (man looking into mirror), evades the question of men's desire for submission, and skirts the homoerotic possibilities of a man in a woman's position desiring a man. Interestingly, though, Hardy believes the harm of pornography is not to women, but to men, in that it may prevent men from interacting with real women.

2. Academic Research on Pornography

There are four paradigmatic types of research covered here: 1) social-psychological, experimental research (focusing either on attitudes or aggression), 2) aggregate research, 3) interviews with convicted sex offenders.

a. Social-psychological, Experimental Research

Early laboratory research on pornography was commissioned by the U.S. Commission on Obscenity and Pornography in 1970. The results generally acquitted pornography of doing social harm (Donnerstein et al., 1987). These studies came under some criticism. Diamond (1980) notes that only three of fourteen laboratory studies tested the relationship between pornography and aggressive behavior (i.e. Tannenbaum 1971; Mosher 1971a; Mosher 1971b). Furthermore, Diamond (1980) contends that only Tannenbaum's study is useful because both works by Mosher lack basic experimental design features, such as controls. A common concern among critics (Diamond, 1980; Bart and Jozsa, 1980; Cline, cited in Donnerstein et al., 1987) was the discrepancy between the Surgeon General's Report on Television Violence and the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography. The first concluded that violent behavior *can* be learned from media exposure, and the second did not. It was criticisms like these that led to the explosion in laboratory research in the 1970s that continues to this day.

For clarity, I will divide the discussion of these studies in two: first, those that tested non-violent pornography, and second, those that tested violent pornography. These studies invariably associate this distinction with non-coercive and coercive sex. They do not recognize practices of bondage and sadomasochism, nor that depictions of these practices can be fictional and real, and that the vast majority of these pornographies are

consensual. It should also be noted that the fantasy of coercion (taking either the dominant or submissive position) can be very pleasurable for men and women fans alike. The studies outlined below *never* make such distinctions.

Significantly, the studies that tested non-violent pornography were unable to show that pornography increased aggression towards women (Donnerstein et al., 1987; Zillman and Bryant, 1984). It was then hypothesized that subjects may be inhibited in a laboratory setting from aggressing against women (administering mock electric shocks). It was only when experimenters provided subjects with *multiple* opportunities to aggress against women did they produce a significant effect.

Little research has been conducted on the effect of non-violent pornography on attitudes. The most significant, though very controversial, findings are those of Zillman and Bryant (1984, 1990 [1982]). Findings indicated that men and women under conditions of “massive exposure” to pornography: 1) became more tolerant of bizarre and violent forms of pornography; 2) became less supportive of statements about sexual equality; and 3) became more lenient in assigning punishment to a rapist.

Zillman and Bryant’s studies incurred serious criticism (Brannigan, 1987; Donnerstein et al., 1987; King, 1993; Thompson, 1994). It was contended by Donnerstein et al. (1987) that the use of film clips rather than full narratives removes context and the development of characters, and thus callousness would be more facile. That said, it should also be recognized that much video pornography has no story and no character development whatsoever, and consists simply of a number of sex scenes pasted together without much connection. Studies showing full-length, unedited narrative pornography did not replicate Zillman and Bryant’s findings (Donnerstein et al., 1987).

Even more damning, however, is King's (1993) criticism of the lack of *prior* attitude testing of Zillman and Bryant's subjects. According to King (1993), in a series of experiments, Zillman and his colleagues had discovered the importance of prior attitude testing, but neglected to apply it in subsequent experiments. In sum, in laboratory settings, the prior attitudes of research subjects formulate their responses to strong stimuli. Aggression is the result of strong stimulus, no matter the stimulus, but response can be manipulated; thus, aggression is only one possibility (cf. Schachter, 1965).¹⁹ To this day, prior attitude screening is not standardized practice. Only Kelley and her colleagues, the one woman publishing original experimental research on pornography, have developed a body of work which face the issues raised by Zillman et al.'s findings (Fisher, Byrne, White, and Kelley, 1988; Kelley, 1985a, b; 1986; Kelley and Musialowski, 1986; Kelley et al., 1989).²⁰ The main implication of their work is that individual differences in attitudes about sexuality matter a great deal in predicting reactions to and behavior after exposure to sexually explicitly and/or sexually violent materials.

Because viewing non-violent pornography failed to produce aggression in men, researchers hypothesized that perhaps an increased arousal rate, provided by violent, sexually explicit material, would instigate aggression (Donnerstein et al., 1987; Thompson, 1994). When subjects were angered before they were shown violent pornography, Donnerstein (1980a, b; see also Donnerstein and Berkowitz, 1981; Malamuth, 1981) succeeded in producing aggression against a female research confederate, more than against a male. Such findings led to questions about the number of influences on the subjects at one time. "Is it the sex or is it the violence?" became the

driving question (Donnerstein et al., 1987). To test one aspect of this question, Malamuth and Check (1981) showed two films on a college campus. One group of students saw a neutral film, and the other group saw a film of non-explicit sexual violence. Several days after the showings the researchers surveyed the students in such a way that they would not associate the films and the survey. The results showed that the men, but not the women, who saw the sexually violent film had higher rate of acceptance of interpersonal violence and rape myths than the control group.

In another set of experiments based on the same issue, four film types were used to distinguish between the possible overlapping effects of sex and violence: 1) a neutral film; 2) a sex only film; 3) a violence only film; and 4) a sexually violent film (Donnerstein et al., 1987). The results showed that men who saw the sexually violent film aggressed at the highest level of all the conditions. Also of import, the violence only film produced more aggression against a female than did the sex-only film. There was no difference in aggression between the sex only film and the neutral film.

Finally, there have been a small number of studies which have focused on male fans of pornography (Boeringer, 1994; Davies, 1997; Garcia, 1986; Padgett et al., 1989). Generally, they found no evidence that pornography contributes to negative attitudes about women. More specifically, the group of pornography fans scored much better than even the women college students on scales of attitudes about women. The authors note, however, that a possible explanation is that the fans were aware of political climate surrounding pornographic practice, and may have tailored their answers accordingly.²¹

Experimental studies have been extremely influential in the pornography debates, especially with official commissions. Their prestige is no doubt due to our society's

general faith in science and objectivity. However, a number of authors within and without the cohort of experimental researchers on pornography question this faith (Boeringer, 1994; Davies, 1997; Fisher and Barak, 1991; Fisher and Grenier, 1994; Hardy, 1998; King, 1993; Padgett, Breslin-Slutz, and Neal, 1989; Rubin, 1993; Segal, 1993; Thompson, 1994). Byrne and Kelley (1989) characterize objectivity as the “impossible dream” and argue that “we select, believe, remember, and conclude in large part on the basis of our existing emotions, attitudes, beliefs, and values (p. 367). Perhaps the issue most contributing to this problem is that there are no accepted standards by which to conduct this type of research (Thompson, 1994.) Lack of standards also comes into play in the choice of films, pictures, and stories used in these experiments. There is never any information about which films are shown.²² This makes it extremely difficult for other researchers to replicate experiments, and it makes it impossible for reviewers and critics to judge the content for themselves. In addition, this point goes to the heart of experimental interpretation. Meaning is intrinsically unstable, inconstant, differing (Kaite, 1995). Researchers state that they are showing material which is dehumanizing and demeaning to women, such as a man ejaculating on a woman’s face. But this convention in mainstream pornography is typically portrayed as pleasurable. No sexual act has intrinsic, constant meaning (Weeks, 1985). *Context* is the critical issue here. As Thompson says, “To justify the claim that any movie has encouraged a subject’s belief in ‘rape myths’ [sic], one requires that person’s interpretation of the movie; but even objective researchers are very reluctant to talk to their subjects” (1994, p. 128.)

This reluctance to talk to subjects raises the specter of behaviorism. Segal (1993) argues that these studies fail to consider the “complex question of the relationship

between fantasy and reality, between psychic arousal and behavior" (p. 13). For example, Malamuth (1983; 1986) equates arousal (penile tumescence) in response to a rape story with proclivity to rape. Furthermore, questions are not raised concerning *what* exactly arouses a subject. As McClintock writes, in heterosexual male porn "the camera's I-for-an-eye is fluid and mutable. Identification in porn can be multiple and shifting, bisexual and transsexual, alternately or simultaneously" (1993, p. 125, see also Barrowclough, 1982).

In their efforts to defend the experimental model, as opposed to real world correlates and observations,²³ Donnerstein et al. (1987) submit that the strength of laboratory experiments is their ability to control circumstances by randomly assigning subjects to conditions. "Because the men in these experiments are chosen randomly to view one of the film types,²⁴ we can be confident that there was no unique background feature that is systematically associated with viewing a certain kind of film" (p. 11). Thus, their efforts are not to study people in the context of their social worlds, but to remove that context entirely. The point of the experimental paradigm is to create a controlled environment. However, as human action is always social, contextual, and meaningful, such an environment is simply artificial (Segal, 1993). It is an appropriate model for medical or drug research (Hardy, 1998), but it is misguided to apply it to human beings and contend that extrapolation to a complex social world is meaningful (Fisher and Grenier, 1994).

Fisher and Grenier (1994) intentionally replicated the methods and used the same pornography clips of studies which had produced aggressive behavior against female confederates (e.g. Malamuth, 1981; Donnerstein and Berkowitz, 1981). In order to make

the laboratory less artificial, however, these researchers allowed the subjects the *choice not* to aggress against the female confederate. Experiments without choices are “ecologically invalid” because natural settings always provide options (Fisher and Grenier, 1994, p. 26). Thus, after exposure to pornography participants could either proceed to the debriefing stage of the study, talk with the female confederate, or deliver shocks to the female confederate. Of the 14 subjects, nine chose to proceed to debriefing, three talked with the female confederate in a “pleasant, and non-aggressive” fashion, and two choose to send electric shocks to the confederate (p. 35). The authors note that these two subjects, however, had expressed considerable interest in using the Buss apparatus (the tools with which electric shocks are delivered) when they were introduced to it, long before the conditions of the experiment had begun.

b. Aggregate Research

Aggregate studies are macrosociological comparisons of city, state, or national level data sets. In the pornography controversy, they have been used to correlate, for example, rape rates with the availability of pornography. Aggregate methods are sometimes employed in innovative ways to measure the effects of change in societies as it is occurring. For example, legislation often affects the availability of pornography, curtailing or increasing it. These historically unique moments provide windows to test the influences of pornography on a particular city, state, or country (see Kimmel and Linders, 1996; Kutchinsky, 1971; Winick and Evans, 1996). The exemplar of aggregate researchers among pornography researchers is Kutchinsky, who made his mark with his Denmark sex crime studies for the U.S. Commission for Obscenity and Pornography (Kutchinsky, 1971; see also Kutchinsky, 1973; 1985; 1990; 1991). Kutchinsky’s early

work focused on sex crimes in general, including peeping, exhibitionism, and physical “indecent” towards girls and women (fondling and other physical contact). Findings indicated that sex crimes as a whole, and against women in particular, decreased drastically at the time that pornography in Denmark became unrestricted. Rather than committing sex crimes, Kutchinsky argued that masturbation with pornography provided a “safety valve” (1973, p. 164) for many men, diverting sexual tensions and needs.

Kutchinsky preferred discussion of the contingencies of his findings, and avoided causal argument (though Kutchinsky, 1973 is a notable exception). One of the key contingencies was reporting of crimes. It was clear from his interviews with Danes that their attitudes about sexuality were changing rapidly. Thus, women were not reporting sex crimes, nor defining certain sexual acts as criminal, any longer. Changes in reporting accounted for much of the decrease in sex “crimes” for adults. Kutchinsky (1973) argued that reporting crimes against children were not affected in the same way at all; sexual attitudes had not changed in terms of children.

The Denmark studies were highly influential, but they came under serious attack. Most important were the feminist criticisms by Bart and Jozsa (1980). They pointed out that Kutchinsky had conflated less serious sex crime with more serious, and that a closer look at his own tables revealed that rape did *not* decrease along with some of the less serious crimes. They also suggested that what Kutchinsky identified as “attitude” changes may have been the result of young women feeling less entitled to report lesser sex crime precisely because of the more permissive legislation. Finally, they pointed out that Kutchinsky did not account for the decriminalization of a number of sex crimes (such as voyeurism) which occurred in the interim between the liberalization and his study.

Among aggregate researchers in the pornography controversy, the anti-pornography feminist critique has been taken most seriously by Baron and Straus (1984, 1989). While aware of the deep divisions among feminists about the meaning and consequences of pornography, they suggest that most feminists probably agree with Lederer (1980) that “pornography is the ideology of a culture which promotes and condones rape, woman-battering, and other crimes against women” (pp. 19-20). In order to test the hypothesis that “the higher the readership of pornography in a state, the higher the rape rate” (1984, p. 189), Baron and Straus correlated sex-magazine circulation rates with rape rates by state. The research revealed a high correlation between sex-magazines circulation and rape rates.²⁵ This finding is corroborated by a number of other studies (Baron, 1990; Baron and Straus, 1989; Kimmel and Linders, 1996; Scott and Schwalm, 1988a). Baron and Straus (1984) caution us against jumping to causal conclusions from this finding. Such a correlation indicates that exposure to pornography may induce some men to rape, but most likely *not* that a rise in the sex-magazine circulation will cause more rape. Possible mitigating factors must also be taken into account, one of which may be what Baron and Straus call “hypermasculine culture” (p. 206). They argue their findings may reveal the existence of a men’s culture that influences *both* the sex-magazine circulation rate and the rape rate *independently*. Scott and Schwalm (1988b), who found no statistically significant relationship between rape rates and “adult” theaters, included a measure of hypermasculine culture in their study – the circulation rates of outdoor sports magazines such as: *American Rifleman*, *Field and Stream*, *Guns and Ammo*, *Sports Afield*. They found that only the circulation rates of these outdoor

magazines and the percentage of the state which is a metropolitan area had statistically significant (.678) relationships to the rape rates in each state.

In the most ambitious aggregate project to date, Baron and Straus (1989) include pornography as only one factor among four predicting rape rates. The others are social disorganization, gender inequity, and legitimate violence. They found a strong correlation between sex-magazines circulation rates and rape rates, including *Playgirl* magazine! Using the Violence Approval Index (VAX) as an intervening variable, Baron and Straus found that it erased all associations between sex-magazine circulation rates and rape rates.

The greatest disadvantage of the Baron and Straus studies (1984, 1989) is that they are based on static snapshots of one specific moment in time. The advantage of comparing change over time can be seen in Kimmel and Linders (1996), where the rape rates of five cities and their respective states were studied from 1980 to 1989. In two of the cities, Cincinnati and Jacksonville, anti-pornography legislation was adopted. These cities were seen as test cases for the effectiveness of such legislation to prevent rape. As with other studies cited here, this study also found a high correlation between rape rates and sex-magazine circulation rates. But while sex-magazine circulation plummeted during the target years, the rape rate remained stable in Cincinnati and increased slightly in Jacksonville.

Winick and Evans (1996) also take a longitudinal approach, studying four states in which pornography statutes were rendered inoperable for various reasons and various lengths of time between 1973 and 1986. Based on 200 on-site interviews with retailers, customers, and distributors, they determined that there was in fact a surge in the amount

and explicitness of pornography during the periods studied. These researchers studied arrest rates for rape, prostitution, and sex offenses in the period before and during statute suspension. There were no statistically significant increases in the crimes studied during the target periods; however, non-sexual violent crime did increase significantly, indicating that the period studied was long enough to detect changes in crime rates were they present. Winick and Evans (1996) suggest that it is possible that those who commit sexual offenses are different from those who enjoy pornography, or that there is simply no link between using pornography and committing sexual offenses. They suggest that the availability of pornography might increase sex offenses in some groups, decrease them in others, and simply not affect a third, therefore not changing the rates at all.

The studies cited here tend to corroborate the influence of violent masculine culture on rape rates across the country. One criticism that could be leveled against *all* these studies is that the focus on softcore magazines is unlikely to be associated with rape rates. If one does suspect a link between pornography and rape, perhaps it would be advisable to look into correlations of rape rates and the circulation of sadomasochistic or bondage-oriented pornography, because of their focus on power. Unfortunately, because of their marginal status, circulation records for these materials are probably unavailable or unreliable.

c. Interviews with Convicted Sex Offenders

Studies of known sex offenders is another way of assessing the effects of pornography. Methodologies vary extensively from the use of standardized psychometric instruments (Ford and Linney, 1995), to structured single interviews (Goldstein, 1973; Scully, 1990), to multiple and extended interviews emphasizing rapport (Marshall, 1988).

Scully's (1990) study of convicted rapists found that the differences between use of pornography among rapists and non-sexual criminals was insignificant. She argues, however, that these findings must be interpreted cautiously because pornography may play a more indirect role in the creation of a masculine culture. For Scully, this culture encourages men to ignore women's point of view and experiences, therefore allowing men to consider rape a low risk and highly rewarding crime.

Goldstein (1973) found that sex offenders (rapists and child molesters) had less exposure to pornography in adolescence than did dedicated pornography consumers who were non-offenders and controls. As for adulthood, sex offenders and controls had the same amount exposure, while dedicated consumers had much more. Other work has corroborated Goldstein's findings (Cook, Fosen, and Pacht, 1971; Condron and Nutter, 1988; Goldstein, Kant, Judd, Rice, and Green, 1971; Nutter and Kearns, 1993).

Marshall (1988, 1989) has criticized much of this work, however, for not distinguishing clearly between types of pornography these offenders used. Child molesters, he suggests, are likely to enjoy child pornography, thus to limit questioning of pornography exposure to *adult* pornography, as Goldstein (1971) and the other studies cited here did, will distort the true picture. Contrary to this hypothesis, however, Marshall (1988) found that child molesters do *not* have higher access to child pornography than other groups, nor do rapists use violent pornography more than other groups. The majority of rapists indicated that they use *consensual* pornography to incite rape fantasies.²⁶ Furthermore, the offenders indicated that simply seeing women or children in public typically triggered rape fantasies. Such findings shift the burden of

responsibility from pornography to the offenders. Marshall (1988) did find 83% of the rapists and 67% of the child molesters in the sample used pornography.

It is generally agreed upon in research on sex offenders however (Carter et al., 1987), that the correlational nature of these findings cannot be overemphasized. Donnerstein argues that “even if every violent rapist we could find had a history of exposure to violent pornography, we would still not be justified in assuming that these materials ‘caused’ their violent behavior” (quoted in Kimmel, 1996). There are further difficulties with these studies as well. For example, some authors concede that if any group that has motivation to exaggerate their use of pornography, thus taking the onus off themselves, it is known sex offenders (Condron and Nutter, 1988; Marshall, 1988). An additional problem is the behaviorist tendencies in this literature (see especially Marshall, 1988, p. 269), which suggest that having sexual fantasies is closely related to acting out those fantasies. Carter et al. (1987) argue, though, that “if an individual is prone to act on his [sic] fantasies, it is likely that he will do so irrespective of the availability of or exposure to pornography” (p. 207).²⁷ Goldstein (1973) is the only researcher I am aware of who, in addition to a typical control group, included a group of dedicated pornography fans who are *not* known offenders, i.e. pornography fans who did not commit crimes. The inclusion of pornography fans, besides making the study more representative of the issue under scrutiny, significantly alters assumptions about the nature of pornography and the people who enjoy it.

Finally, these studies have mixed results in terms of pornography and sex crime, but findings are more consistent on issues such as violence and alcohol abuse in the family, especially by fathers (Langevin, Paitich, and Russon, 1985; Marshall and

Christie, 1981; Rada, 1978), prior sexual abuse (Bernard et al., 1985; Groth, 1979; Seghorn, Prentky, and Boucher, 1987), and lack of the social skills necessary to develop trusting, personal relationships with individuals either sex (Groth, 1979; Awad and Saunders, 1991). While Ford and Linney (1995) are probably right that there is no single personality type that characterizes all sexual offenders, such powerful familial and social fissures cannot be ignored. Taking these problems into account, Donnerstein et al. (1987) summarize this literature by saying that while there may be some indirect influence of pornography on sex offenders, “the present state of knowledge [is] still lacking on what this influence might be” (p. 71).

In sum, the most important problem of current research on pornography is its lack of direct knowledge of pornography fans, pornography’s audience. Thus, there is little sense of the context in which masturbation and other pornographic practices take place, and the contingencies of sexual fantasy are ignored. Finally, there is no discussion of the meanings and motivations in the lives of pornography fans that lead them to make this stigmatized practice an important part of their lives. These issues are central to this project. The next chapter will establish the theoretical framework I use to address these issues.

C. ENDNOTES, CHAPTER I

¹ First, Winick interviews patrons of pornographic movie theaters, which are all but non-existent in today's home video market, and second, his sample is restricted to straight men, which is simply not representative of today's multi-gendered, multi-sexed climate.

² Note Kimmel's (1994) discussion of classical social theory as a hidden meditation on masculinity. Other examples include: Messner (1987) on sports, Sedgwick (1985) on male homosocial desire in literature, Kaufman (1994) on men's contradictory experience of power, Rotundo (1993) on the transformation from community to individual as the foundation of contemporary constructions of masculinity, Fasteau (1975) on the Vietnam war and the "cult of toughness," Herdt (1981) on anthropological constructions of masculinity.

³ Snitow (1983) points to romance novels for women, for men see magazines like *True Detective*, *Detective Files*, or *True Police*.

⁴ Two paradigmatic approaches span the discrete ideological divides outlined above: experimental and other research on pornographies, and men's studies approaches. Discussions of these approaches will be developed in Chapter 2, the theoretical framework.

⁵ For examples of the use of this term, see the threads in the Usenet Newsgroup rec.arts.movies.erotica. This is a moderated newsgroup devoted to the discussion of "aspects of erotic movies" according to the FAQ. Participants in this and other newsgroups in porn culture always refer to themselves as fans. Furthermore, see newsgroups devoted to the trading of pictures of specific stars: alt.fan.ashley-lauren; alt.fan.lisa-boyle, and so on.

⁶ I am grateful to Barbara Katz Rothman for bringing this book to my attention.

⁷ Compare services at women's sex shops like Eve's Garden and Toys in Babeland. Though not personal service, friendly advice and cheerful, guilt-free atmosphere is beginning to happen on the internet, visit: <http://www.blowfish.com>.

⁸ In *Miller v. California*, a 5-4 majority declared that a work is obscene if *all three* of the following conditions are met:

1) "the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest..."

2) "the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law."

3) "the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value" (cited in Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, 1986, 17-18).

To guarantee that non-obscene material is not erroneously found obscene the Meese Commission adds the unanimous 1977 finding of the Supreme Court in *Smith v. United States* that: “the third facet of the Miller test, that the work lacks ‘serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value,’ is never in any event to be determined by reference to local standards. Here the frame of reference must in all cases be national” (cited in Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography, 1986, 18, note 36).

⁹ This article, while not written by the ACLU, is included in their policy statements.

¹⁰ The definition is a truncated version of the very lengthy original contained in the Ordinance. For the full text, see for example Ellis et al. (1986). The standard texts for this position are: Barry (1978), Dworkin (1979), Griffin (1981), Lederer (1980), MacKinnon (1987), Russell (1998). The Ordinance was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1986.

¹¹ Constitutional law regarding individual rights and civil liberties is concerned with protection of individual rights from *government* infringement. Thus, the Ordinance viewed pornographers as individuals infringing on the civil rights of other individuals, women.

¹² For a man’s perspective see Jensen, 1998a.

¹³ See Sprinkle (1992; 1998) for a sex-positive feminist appropriation of this term.

¹⁴ Note the videos, magazines, and fiction produced by Susie Bright, Chloe, Nina Hartley, House o’ Chicks, Shar Rednour, Candida Royalle, Shane, Annie Sprinkle, Jane Waterson, Ona Zee.

¹⁵ I am grateful to Robert Reuss for this insight.

¹⁶ One humorous example of this is Jerry Falwell’s declaration of the character on the popular children’s television program *Teletubbies* named Tinky Winky is gay, because “he” (the characters are genderless) carries a purse. The New York Times reported that the program became very popular among the gay and wider community due to the added attention that the program received after Falwell’s claim.

¹⁷ Kipnis (1996) writes in detail about transvestite and transsexual porn as well as fat porn (that which eroticizes fat people). To name all forms would be difficult, but aside from mainstream straight and gay video others include: bisexual porn, bestiality, incest (all of which is fictional narrative), bondage and sadomasochistic, interracial/ethnic/geographic, female ejaculation, “barely legal” girls, all forms of physical variations (big butts, tiny tits, big dicks, hairy men and women, body builders, corpulence, male and female midgets, tall women, and so on). It is important to note that once on enough mailings lists the vast majority of these are very accessible. The only exceptions are bestiality, which is rare, and child pornography which is non-existent (except on the internet).

¹⁸ Hall (1994) levels a number of critiques of this model. One is that it assumes that a clear, distinct “message” from power exists, audiences simply apprehend and interpret it. Another is that, the distinction between dominant interpretations, negotiated interpretations, and oppositional interpretations is problematic. He argues that *all* readings are by nature negotiated, the question really is to what extent are they negotiated.

¹⁹ I am grateful to Wendy Barron for this reference.

²⁰ It should also be noted that her work is all but absent (oddly appearing in the bibliography, but not in the author index) from Donnerstein et al. (1987), the standard and extensive review of the literature. Her importance is prominent in Zillman and Bryant’s (1989) collection, however.

²¹ Though not an experimental study, Davies (1997) found a way around this problem. She conducted a mock “current issues” survey with 194 men who had rented adult videos in the past year. The men were *not* told that their names were obtained from an adult video outlet, nor were there any references to pornography in the survey. Davies’ compared the number of videos rented with men’s attitudes about feminism and rape: no correlation was found.

²² The *only* pornography title evident in all the articles and reviews read is *Debbie Does Dallas* (1982).

²³ For example, observations made in Scandinavia of lowering of sexual violence rates *after* the legalization of pornography (Kutchinsky, 1971), discussed in the aggregate studies section below.

²⁴ Usually there are four types of films shown: 1) neutral (no sex or violence); 2) sexual only (standard XXX); 3) sexually-violent (sodomasochism, bondage and domination); and 4) violent, no explicit sexual content (Texas Chainsaw Massacre). It should be noted, though it is usually not, that most “sexually-violent” films do not have the typical sexual content of the standard XXX films (explicit fellatio, cunnilingus, vaginal and anal intercourse). The producers impose a form of self-censorship due to their fears that mixing *explicit* sex and s/m or b&d would “cross a line” and would place their work in jeopardy of confiscation, or other legal action. Therefore, sexual content is usually limited in these films to nudity, masturbation, use of dildos, vibrators, and the like.

²⁵ A regression coefficient of 6.99, thus if the sex magazine index rises by one point, it is predicted that the rape rate would rise by approximately seven per 100,000 persons.

²⁶ While there is a majority, the exact numbers are unclear. Marshall indicates that sixteen of the 23 rapists made similar reports. Furthermore, this finding arose unexpectedly, and unsolicited, about one third of the way through data collection.

²⁷ It should be noted that, while this argument is compelling, albeit disturbing, it is in direct contention with Kutchinsky's (1971) findings in Denmark and elsewhere which support a "safety valve" hypothesis.

CHAPTER II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF PORNOGRAPHIES AND SEXUALITIES

The discussion so far has mapped the variety of positions on pornographies and discussed feminist controversies over pornography. Sexualities and pornographies themselves have yet to be discussed in detail. In this project, the primary means used to understand both is social constructionism. The social construction of pornographies will be addressed first, followed by the social construction of varieties of sexuality. These provide the theoretical framework of this project.

1. The Social Construction of Pornographies

The central tenet of the social construction of pornographies is that they vary across time, across cultures, and within cultures. Furthermore, there are social processes and practices which are continually (re)producing and transforming pornography. Walter Kendrick's (1987) *The Secret Museum* provides the best example of pornography varying across time and culture. He describes the archeological digs around Pompeii, which revealed huge sexually explicit frescos (depicting intercourse and bestiality, among other things) displayed in public market places and almost every public and private space right along side of what we would consider scenes of everyday life. Although it is not known how these sexual displays in Pompeii were understood by its residents, Kendrick speculates that the presence of these images in the market place may have been a celebration of fertility, of bounty. Describing the perturbed and embarrassed archeologists and their attempts to explain away what our culture couldn't understand, Kendrick comments: "The problem was purely modern: however the Romans might have responded to such representations, what was one to do with them now?" (p. 10).

According to Kendrick, morality was the central discourse surrounding pornography in early modern Europe. Hunt (1993) traces this trend as far back as the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent in 1563. Pornography began to appear significantly on the European scene only in the middle of the 18th century, and has flourished with a number of fluctuations ever since (Marcus, 1964). It was not until the middle of the 19th century, however, that sexuality, and pornography specifically, entered the heart of British Parliamentary debate (Weeks, 1989). It was at this time that moral crusades and police actions began (Hunt, 1993; Weeks, 1989).

Another major shift in the discourse surrounding pornography came about when feminists began to see pornography as a significant woman's issue. It is not clear whether this shift means that moral discourses have ended and feminist discourses of sexism, objectification, and women's exploitation have replaced them. Perhaps morality and feminist analysis should be portrayed as concurrent discourses, or, as Foucault would have it, parts of the "polyvalence of discourses" (1990a, 100). The use of feminist analysis of pornography by non-feminists such as the Meese Commission is an example of this trend.

The Meese Commission (1986) almost completely abandons moral discourses in favor of the argument that pornography is violence against women, the discourse developed by the anti-pornography feminist movement. Vance (1993) states that the Meese Commission appropriated the feminist lexicon because the authors believed the American public would have been unreceptive to their conservative moralistic discourse, since, as Kendrick argues, Americans "are no longer afraid of 'sex' as we used to be" (1987, 236). Vance asserts, however, that the Meese Commission did not for a moment

abandon its moralistic *agenda*. Its appropriation of feminism was a calculated strategy to achieve moralistic ends, by deploying and strengthening obscenity law, under the patriarchal auspices of protecting women. If Vance is right, moralism in this country, backed by the public or not, still has enormous power.

Beyond discourse and power stands the question of the varieties of sexuality that pornographies represent. Is the content of pornographic desire socially constructed as well? Marcus (1964) suggests that the desires expressed in pornography are transhistorical, but he is looking only at heterosexual men's desires. Weeks (1989) argues that there were few homosexual pornographies before the middle of the 20th century, but cross-class seduction, especially of working-class women and servant girls, was particularly prominent in the mid-19th century. Today, there is little cross-class seduction in pornography, but in our racially/ethnically charged society, there is an enormous amount that is inter-racial and inter-ethnic. A further historical twist is shown in Hunt's (1993) collection of essays, which emphasizes again and again the virtually inextricable link between pre-19th century pornographies and political satire, commentary, and ruthless social criticism. Although many would deny this is still the case today, Kipnis (1996) makes a compelling case otherwise.

If gender is a social institution as Lorber (1994) persuasively argues, then it is still another fundamental site that contributes to the construction of pornographies as we know them today. The gendering of statuses, sexual scripts, personalities, division of labor, ideology, beliefs (incorporation or resistance to gender ideology), processes ("doing gender," either appropriate, or inappropriate if rebelling) (Lorber, 1994) all contribute.¹ The stereotypical gender dichotomies are, of course, present, but thinking

about the polyvalence of Lorber's components leads us to a much more complexly constructed view of gender's contribution to pornography. Consider, for example, some of the reasons why heterosexual sex work is appealing to some women: sexual power, for some women the only power to which they have access; feeling fully feminine and sexually attractive; having few other job opportunities that pay as well; rebelling against traditional constraints on feminine sexuality; being nurturing and therapeutic (Delacoste and Alexander, 1987). Contemporary sex work pivots on contemporary gender structure; gender is crucial in making pornographies *as we know them possible*.

Motivations for men to masturbate with pornography have similar variations based on the polyvalence of gender components: proving masculinity through pornographic fantasy; abandoning traditional masculinity through identification with the women performers; voyeuristic continuation of watching women on the street; fantasizing conquest of a "madonna" and use of "whores;" fantasizing "dirty" women and "dirtying" a clean woman; having more sex, anonymous sex, sex outside a relationship, and sexual variety; experiencing women's sexual power; fantasizing intimacy; fantasizing control.

Pornography is constructed by history, culture, power, and gender. But what of sexuality itself? How does the social construction of pornographies dovetail into the social construction of sexuality?

2. The Social Construction of Sexualities

According to social constructionists, sexuality has a human physiological basis, but what triggers desire, and how that desire is acted on, and what the consequences are, vary by time, place, culture, class, ethnicity, religion, gender and other social variables

(Gagnon and Simon, 1973, 1987; Foucault, 1990a; Rubin, 1984; Weeks, 1989). Gagnon and Simon (1973) argue that sexual arousal depends upon *social and sexual scripts* that identify situations as appropriate for sexual interaction. Biological events (such as erection, moistening, and increased heart rate) and their corresponding sexual feelings occur only when appropriate social/sexual *meanings* are provided by scripts. Thus, only when people interact in specifically scripted ways do those biological events occur.

Numerous potentially sexual activities do not instigate those events because of the lack of a sexual script: insertion of tampons, mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, football players slapping each others' asses, genital or colon examinations. The same argument is true across cultures. What is scripted as sexual (or non-sexual) in one culture may not be in another. Furthermore, while there may be biological sexual imperatives, these in no way determine the *type* of activity that is defined as sexual or arousing from culture to culture. Rubin makes a similar point with an analogy to hunger: "the belly's hunger gives no clues as to the complexities of cuisine" (1984, 276).

Simon and Gagnon (1987)³ distinguish among three types of sexual scripts: cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic scripts. Cultural scenarios are general guidelines for sexual conduct that are embedded in wider cultural narratives. Cultural scenarios do not determine behavior, however. Using the metaphor of clothing, Simon and Gagnon state that cultural scenarios are "tried on" for size, to see if they "fit" (1987, 365). Interpersonal scripts constitute a socially interactive choosing of cultural scenarios with others. In this context the agent is constructing sexual identities based on her/his own images of self and "implied mirrorings of ... others" (Simon and Gagnon, 1987, 365). If interpersonal scripts are tried on for self and others, intrapsychic scripts

constitute the efforts to find a desirable “fit” for the self alone. Do these scripts satisfy one’s images of oneself, one’s desires and wishes for oneself? Do they work for the self? Indeed, do they “elicit and sustain sexual arousal, at times making orgasm possible[?]” (Simon and Gagnon, 1987, 366). Via these three distinct types of scripts, Gagnon and Simon construct a complex social matrix that incorporates an individual’s interaction with culture, with others, and finally within her/himself.

Foucault (1990a) points to the role that power and scientific discourse have in the construction of sexual knowledge. During what he calls the “discursive explosion” (1990a, 38) in the Victorian period, the new science of sexology began to classify the variety of sexual acts. In the process of typologizing, the conjugal couple came to function as the norm and the others as the *unnatural*. Foucault argues that much more came of this classification process than simple prohibition, however. Medicalization and regimentation, rather than law and penalization, became the new instrument of power. In addition, individuals were now being marshaled in new ways. Before this period, homosexual acts were criminal acts; now these criminals were re-formed as a new type of human being: “the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (1990a, 43). While Foucault acknowledges the repressive qualities of such deployments of power, he insists upon their *productive* qualities as well. That is, they produce and construct sexual knowledge in addition to controlling it.

Rubin (1984) points to a set of axioms or ideological formations that inhibit free thinking about sexuality. For her, these ideological formations encapsulate the current construction of sexuality in our society. Three ideological formations are important here: sex negativity, the hierarchical valuation of sex acts, and the lack of a concept of benign

sexual variation.³ In Rubin's three-tiered hierarchy of sex acts (the second ideological formation), procreative sex within marriage is at the top. At the bottom of the hierarchy are transvestites, sadomasochists, and at the bottom of the bottom are generational transgressors. Pornography *and* masturbation fit between "good sex" at the top and "bad sex" at the bottom as "major areas of contention," along with promiscuity and homosexuality.⁴ Rubin states that Christianity's sexual sanctions were forms of social organization and control rooted in kinship concerns (that is, production of proper kin). Modern forms of sexual sanction are independent of religion, and rely upon medical, psychiatric, and psychological models of mental health. Medicalization was a significant shift in the history of sexuality. "When medicine and psychiatry acquired extensive powers over sexuality, they were less concerned with unsuitable mates than with unfit forms of desire" (Rubin, 1984, 279). The DSM-III is a reliable map of the current moral hierarchy of sexual activities, according to Rubin. Their list of "paraphilias"⁵ or "sexual disorders" includes: fetishism, transvestitism, zoophilia, pedophilia, exhibitionism, voyeurism, masochism, sadism, transsexuality. There has been no change in the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

These concerns with the administration and control of desire tie in directly to Rubin's third ideological formation, the lack of a concept of benign sexual variation. "The format of a single sexual standard is continually reconstituted within [numerous] rhetorical frameworks, including feminism and socialism" (p. 283). She points out that while the content varies, the concept does not. Religion promotes procreative marriage as its single sexual standard; psychology promotes mature heterosexuality. Even political

progressives display routine chauvinism about sexuality that they would find abhorrent in other contexts.

Weeks (1989) has put forth perhaps the most systematic notion of the social construction of specifically modern sexuality. He argues that sexual behavior cannot be reduced to any single, simplistic explanatory factor, social or otherwise. Sexuality is constructed by an ongoing and active complex of social factors. The following five are most important: 1) kinship and family system; 2) economic and political changes; 3) changing forms of social regulation; 4) the political moment ("that period when moral attitudes are transformed into formally political action" [p. 15]); 5) cultures of resistance.

Weeks is also concerned with the primacy that our society places on sexual acts (1985; 1986). When discourse focuses on sexual acts, it is attempting to attribute *a particular nature to the act itself*. In what Weeks (1985; 1986) describes as "radical pluralism," he proposes that the relationship between the people involved in the act is much more important than the act itself.

If we endorse the radical approach that no erotic act has any intrinsic meaning this suggests that, though they may not be the conclusive factors, subjective feelings, intentions and meanings are vital elements in deciding on the merits of an activity. The decisive factor is an awareness of *context*, of the situation in which choices are made (Weeks, 1985, p. 219, my emphasis).

By "context" Weeks is describing social relations of two kinds. First, are the intimate relations in which choices are constrained and enabled; second, are wider socio-historical relations in which intimate relations are embedded. Both sets of relations are crucial to understand the context in which choices are made to engage in a particular sexual activity. Weeks (1985) emphasizes, then, choice and relations (rather than acts), and meaning and context (rather than external rules of correctness).

The use of pornography cannot be reduced to a single sexual act. Thus, Weeks' (1985) model is particularly applicable to the negotiations and choices made about the use of pornography within the intimate relationships of couples, and also applies to the meaning and context of choices made by single individuals.

The social construction of pornographies and sexualities combined with Weeks' (1985) "radical pluralism," work together as a robust theoretical foundation for this project. The issues of power that are intrinsic in Weeks' framework have remained unaddressed so far. The following section addresses these concerns in detail.

B. MEN AND POWER

White, middle and upper class, heterosexual men have almost unilateral control of structural power in our society. Their power is critical to the extraordinary success of men's heterosexual pornographies. Men's access to economic and structural resources make pornographic production possible. Men's economic resources also allow them to purchase pornography on a massive scale, making production, distribution, and sale all enormously profitable. Because men do in fact have controlling access to these resources, women have less access to them. These resources and the entitlement they spawn allow men to create a self-absorbed, fantastic and often brutally sexist view of women and themselves. These are only some of the reasons why pornography has become such a target for some feminists. Its purpose is seemingly so singular and one-sided that many have come to see it as the "undiluted essence of anti-female propaganda" (Brownmiller, 1975, 394).

Two assumptions underlying much of the pornography debate are that the male viewer's fantasy is the same as the pornographic fantasy, and that there is an

undifferentiated mass of male viewers, all of whom act in the same way and identify with the same point of view (Barrowclough, 1982). Men and masculinity are viewed as uniform and monolithic. To understand men, power, and pornography, we must dissect the relationship among these three. For example, men's structural power does not rely upon each individual man having power, and clearly some men have more power than others. Indeed, Connell (1987a, b; 1995) argues that many men are dominated by other men. He identifies "hegemonic masculinity" as the dominant form of masculinity, followed by "complicit," "subordinated," and "marginalized masculinity." Hegemonic masculinity is defined as the "configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy" and therefore embodies a "successful claim to authority" of men over women (1995, 76). This form of masculinity is most clearly manifested in top business, military, and political leaders. It can also be represented by cultural icons, be they movie actors or fictional characters. Though the numbers of hegemonically masculine men might be quite small, most men benefit from what Connell (1995) calls the "patriarchal dividend." Their masculinity is complicit, according to Connell. They do not establish masculinity as the gender of authority, but reap the benefits of membership in the masculine club.

Subordinated masculinities are most clearly associated with gay men (Connell, 1995). As the repository for all that is expurgated from hegemonic masculinity, gayness is associated with the feminine. The result is not just stigmatization of gay identity, but material oppression as well, including street violence, cultural and political exclusion, and economic discrimination. In his concept of marginalized masculinities, Connell includes issues of race and class variation. Although both black athletes and images of

working class masculinity may provide exemplars for hegemonic masculinity, these *groups of men* gain no power. The wealth of these exemplars is of course limited to a few individuals. The social authority of hegemonic masculinity is denied them.

Just as we need a concept of multiple pornographies, Connell's model makes it clear that we also need a concept of multiple masculinities. Connell delineates the complex relations of power among masculinities, but he does not develop a nuanced understanding of the effects that power has upon men. Kaufman (1994) argues that masculinity exacts deep tolls upon men because of the way men have constructed power: complete control and denial of the "feminine." Such concerns were popular in the 1970s in "Men's Liberation" literature. Sawyer called "for men to free themselves of the sex-role stereotypes that limit their ability to be *human*" (1974, 170, my emphasis). Becoming human by abandoning traditional masculinity is a consistent theme in these early writings. The members of a men's consciousness-raising group (1971) continually lament their "lost humanity." Fasteau (1975) described the inexpressive male as *The Male Machine*. Indeed, Fasteau's thesis is that men are not human at all, but lifeless, bloodless machines.

Because personal and emotional development was a central feature of Men's Liberation literature, it received harsh criticism. Ehrenreich (1983) and Segal (1990) state that these men were more interested in enhancing their own power than developing a critique of the inequality between men and women. These critics point out the clear limitations of these early writings. Keeping these in mind, Men's Liberation writings can nonetheless point us in directions valuable for deepening still further the relation between men and power.

Many recent studies have shown that while masculine identities appear to be strong they are also deeply vulnerable, ambiguous, and potentially undermined by technological shifts, unemployment, economic changes, and feminist challenges (Collinson and Hearn, 1994). Cockburn (1991) demonstrates the resistances that men make to equal opportunity initiatives at work. A number of historical studies have pointed out the tensions of masculinity that rose out of the radical shifts in the nature of work and the rise of feminism in turn-of-the-century America (Filene, 1986; Hantover, 1980; Kimmel, 1987). Indeed, these tensions may well be recurring in the recent spate of men retreating to the woods in order to search for their "deep masculinity" (Kimmel and Kaufman, 1994).

Collinson and Hearn (1994) argue that although there have been widespread attempts to construct clearly defined and secure identities, such attempts will likely fail. Indeed, they suggest that "given the socially constructed, multiple and shifting character of identities, these attempts may reinforce the very uncertainty and ambiguity they are intended to overcome" (Collinson and Hearn, 1994, 8). Pornography may well contribute to this ironic dynamic of desire for strength and the production of weakness. Such an example may be extracted from Ehrenreich's (1983) discussion of the sexual-sophisticate identity that *Playboy* markets to its consumers. For Ehrenreich, the bitter censure of wives and the desire for freedom from them is intrinsic to this identity. What she misses, however, is that this seemingly strong, independent masculinity is disrupted by its paradoxical placement in a magazine founded upon the desire and need for women. The sexual-sophisticate identity is still further eroded by the practice of masturbation which is, as Laumann et al. (1994) have found, a marginalized sexual practice.

Masturbation and its attendant fantasies are particularly troublesome in this context because sexual sophisticates do not need to masturbate or fantasize about women: they fuck them.

Anti-pornography feminists argue that one of the central identities men construct from pornography is that of the man who has complete control over women. But this identity is ambiguous as well, because of men's *dependence upon women* in order to feel powerful. Such issues of complete control, power, and ostensible independence feed directly into Chancer's (1992) theory of sadomasochism in everyday life. The sadomasochistic dynamic she develops can take place in the sexual arena, but also in the workplace and in everyday gender relations. The position of the sadist (which she argues is typically, but not always, the man in a heterosexual dynamic) is intrinsically paradoxical:

The sadist embodies precisely the opposite of what his or her situation on its face appears to imply. To the world and to the masochist, the sadistic persona exudes confidence and self-assurance. The sadist seems to be independent, to strut through life often mocking and contemptuous of the masochist's alleged dependency.... However, a closer look reveals this appearance to be a lie, and extreme need to be the sadist's best-guarded secret from self and others. (Chancer, 1992, p. 49).

Chancer goes on to argue that while the masochist admits dependence, the sadist's denial of dependency betrays a profound insecurity, even greater than that experienced by the masochist.

Chancer (1992) draws upon Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in order to narrate the presence of the sadomasochistic dynamic in the everyday world of gender relations. De Beauvoir expounds a distinctly sociological narrative of children's gendered entrance into patriarchal society.⁶ According to de Beauvoir, boys have to deny dependence upon their parents from their earliest moments of subjectivity; they must

always appear strong and aloof. They please their parents by appearing not to want to please them. Boys must deny their very human inner needs in order to live up to being the little men that their parents and society expects them to be. So just like the sadist, Chancer argues, the boy has learned to deny his emotional needs and never to admit his vulnerabilities. He bases his interaction with others upon macho indifference and bravado, *hiding from himself and others* his dependencies and fears. Just as the sadist's need for the masochist is on-going, the boy's needs and dependencies remain with him into manhood. Confronted later in life with mature relationships that demand intimacy and interdependence, men's incapacities in such areas are threatening and may lead to destructive behavior for themselves or those around them.⁷ However sociologically and structurally real men's power is, it is internally contradicted by what Chancer identifies as an "ideological myth of independence" (p. 49).

Similar issues of power and powerlessness are developed in direct relation to pornography by Soble (1986) and Brod (1990). As a marxist, Soble (1986) sees men divided along class lines, and so, like Connell (1995), he sees some men oppressed by other men. Unlike Connell, men's powerlessness is much more class-based for Soble. He asserts that men's powerlessness is rooted in capitalist market relations, centralization of economics and politics, and the meaningless and drudgery of work. For Soble, these conditions bring on a desire for pornography, though only as a *fantasy* of power. But he notes that such conditions do not account for the *sexual* nature of pornographic fantasies. They explain much more clearly the appeal of power fantasies fulfilled by cultural icons of masculine omnipotence such as Stallone, Schwarzenegger, or Eastwood. The *sexual* element of pornographic fantasies is generated by the change in women's status,

feminism, and the challenge to men's power in their relationships with women at home and at work. Men's movement to masturbatory fantasy, then, is at once a retreat from women and an attack. On the one hand it is an admission of defeat, a withdrawal from the real world to the fantastic. On the other hand, it is a withdrawal into a world of masculine omnipotence, where male privilege is still honored.

Harry Brod's (1990) response to Soble suggests that men who use pornography have a *contradictory* experience of power: "Pornography is *both* an expression of men's public power *and* an expression of their lack of authentic personal power" (1990, p. 134). Thus, he recognizes the lack of personal power that men experience as very real while still insisting on the facts of men's public power (to produce, distribute, and consume images of women on a massive scale). Whereas Soble's model is limited to powerless men, Brod can account for men with public power who use pornography due to a lack of a sense personal power. He develops this model via what he calls the "crisis in patriarchy" or the movement from patriarchy to fratriarchy. Patriarchal domination is seen by Brod as a period when power was enacted by individual men. Fratriarchy is seen as the current late-capitalist stage, in which men collectively dominate women, but where individual men are increasingly the objects of fratriarchal or collective male power. Thus, while many men's public power is clear, their increasingly tension-filled, dog-eat-dog relationships with other men produce feelings of fear and personal powerlessness.

By arguing that men use pornography because of a lack of personal power, both Brod and Soble make a series of assumptions about men, power, and pornography: 1) Men use pornography to fantasize only about the attainment of power over women; 2) Men are always in the dominant role in pornography; 3) Men with both personal and

public power do not use pornography (if men use pornography they must be experiencing some sort of powerlessness);⁸ 4) Pornography is always used in reference to power. But do we actually know what the viewer is fantasizing about? Female prostitutes report that the third most popular request by male customers, after intercourse and fellatio, is domination (Segal, 1990). Some men, it would appear, far from wanting to gain power through commercial sex, want to relinquish it. Though commercial sex practices are not the same as pornographic practices, the desire to relinquish power may also be a common aspect of pornographic fantasy. Furthermore, we do not know which actor or model a man identifies with in pornography, and some men may identify with images of women. Willis (1983), for example, alludes to the possibility of cross-gender/cross-power identification by women who are excited by rape fantasies. Chancer (1992) argues as a boy learns to deny his vulnerability and dependency, "women ... little by little will come to represent this displaced and alienated part of himself he may one day wish to reclaim, to somehow recapture" (1992, 133). Interpretations of pornographic images are not static, always determined by gendered experience of structural power nor by the images in pornography itself. Indeed, pornographic fantasies are saturated with agency—they are what the viewer "wants" them to be.

Brod's (1990) thesis that men's structural power does not always correspond with a personal experience of power was one of the most important recent developments in men's studies. It was Kaufman (1994), however, who discussed this contradiction at length. A central point for Kaufman is our culture's confusion of sex and gender (see also Lorber, 1994). Men in the United States expect masculinity to come automatically from physiology. But because the ideals of masculinity are difficult if not impossible to

achieve, men are frustrated by their sense of not being man “enough” (Gilmore, 1990). Men are never in complete control; men are never all-powerful; men are never entirely rational; competition is often destructive, and men are only rarely, if ever, completely independent. Further frustrating men is the barrage of unmet “feminine” needs for love, nurturance, emotions and emotional expression, deep companionship, weakness, bodily pleasure – needs they may be afraid to admit. Although these problems can bring enormous pain to men’s lives, Kaufman argues that they are a result of men’s *own construction of power*: complete control and denial of the “feminine.” He sees men’s dilemma as a cycle of power and pain: What makes men strong in turn makes men weak. This cycle is what Kaufman calls the contradiction of men’s power: men have constructed power in a way that inevitably leads to pain. In order to deal with his pain, a man will “act like a man:” toughen up, grin and bear it. Of course, acting like a man only brings more pain, thus starting the cycle again. The “end” of the cycle for Kaufman comes in men’s violence against women, violence against other men, and emotional breakdowns. Violence comes when men feel so much inside that they can no longer contain it by traditional masculine methods of self-control. Men’s fears and needs are never successfully controlled. Kaufman argues that they are always present, “spilling out” often violently into other parts of our lives.

Kaufman’s work is critical to my project. He insists that it is too simple to see men as brutes who enact power purely for their own gain. His ability to rage against male violence and sexism, and still empathically understand men’s point of view and the multiple and often contradictory ways in which men’s construction of power affects women’s and men’s lives, is a model for pro-feminist men’s research. Exploring the

dimensions of men's power and sexism that is in much pornography and men's masturbation with it will be a central concern of this research project. At the same time, the conviction that what makes pornography appealing to men is not a simple relation of power and benefit will also be explored. There are differences among men in the extent to which they adhere to hegemonic masculinity; there are differences in men's sexuality and how they use pornography.

C. PORNOGRAPHIES AS MEDIA AND CULTURE

Pornographies are a form of mass media and as such, they are a cultural production.

There have been a number of studies which have attempted to map out the content of pornography. However, content analysis can be quite subjective. The most obvious example is the issue of violence. In her review of anti-pornography feminist content analyses, Russell (1998) notes that domination usually is defined as physical or verbal "control" over the sex act, and exploitation is one person "clearly using" the other person and typically involves "inequality in age, status, occupation, and state of undress" (p. 22). But what is "controlling the sex act?" How much verbal or physical action makes it clear that "control" is taking place? What does "clearly using" another person mean? Such definitions have a legacy which dates back to the Supreme Court's difficulty in defining obscenity, summarized by Justice Potter's famously subjective phrase "I know it when I see it."

Pornographies are a media form in a media-saturated society, and lamentations on images of sex, violence, and misogyny are not limited to pornography, but include movies, rap, rock & roll, and television as well (Ericson, 1995; Gitlin, 1994; Kidd-Hewitt

and Osborne, 1995; LaMay and Dennis, 1995; Leong, 1991; Surette, 1990).

Pornography, however, has been taken much more seriously than these other media.

There is nothing equivalent to the feminist debates and legal initiatives on pornography concerning any other medium; there is nothing equivalent to two presidential commissions in two decades in the United States. A number of factors are at play in setting pornography apart: Its particularly graphic nature plays into and amplifies fears of media effects in general. The sexual nature of pornography plays to the fears of sexuality common to moralists and upholders of “traditional” values. Anti-pornography feminists are especially concerned with its production and “message” as violence against women. As such, pornography has many enemies, and accordingly gets more attention than less tabooed media. One of the central efforts of that attention is to elicit questions about the effects of pornography on society in general and women, children, and men.’

Most work on pornography does not take it seriously as a form of culture, nor are fans considered an audience (Hay et al., 1996). The earliest scholar to “read” pornography was Marcus (1964). His analysis, however, is overburdened with the psychoanalytic perspective, and thus of lesser interest here than, say, Williams (1989). Although it does not have much company in the contemporary era, Williams’ work is a most compelling cultural analysis of pornography, situating pornography at the heart of sexual conflicts and tensions in our current society. Emblematic is her reading of the 1970s pornography classic, *Deep Throat* (Damiano, 1972). In this particular film, the main character, Linda Lovelace, goes to a doctor to find out why she is having difficulty having orgasm. The doctor discovers that her physiology is different from other women, more specifically, her clitoris is located in her throat. While Williams recognizes the

service to male pleasure that this narrative enacts (Linda must “deep throat” a man in order to stimulate her clitoris), she also argues that the plot places the clitoris, and thus women’s orgasm, center stage, as well as sexualities beyond the dyadic male/female. Thus, as Masters and Johnson (1966; 1970) map sexual variety, and women and men’s orgasmic potential, *Deep Throat* “represents a phallic economy’s highly ambivalent and contradictory attempt to count beyond the number one, to recognize, as the proliferating discourses of sexuality take hold, that there can no longer be any such thing as a fixed sexuality – male, female, or otherwise – that now there are proliferating sexualities” (Williams, 1989, p. 114).

Williams’ interpretations of cultural texts in a specific genre is certainly a large aspect of cultural studies (there are feminist cultural studies on film noir, musicals, soap operas, and romance novels, to name just a few). Other works have similarly looked at cultural “representations” in media. Though none discuss representations in pornography in detail, many focus on masculinity (Cohan, 1995; Cohan and Hark, 1993; Craig, 1992; Kirkham and Thumim, 1993, 1995; Penley and Willis, 1993; P. Smith, 1989; Studlar, 1996). A short-coming of many of these types of studies is their lack of attention to the audience, which is the foundation of the current study. Audience issues have been a controversy for some time in feminist film criticism, ever since Mulvey’s (1975) seminal work on the “male gaze.” Mulvey argued that mainstream cinema was so structured by men, writers, directors, producers, photographers, and the owners of the film companies themselves, that cinema was a by-men-for-men proposition; women had no place in the industry or the audience, but only as objects of the male “gaze.” As Walters (1999)¹⁶ summarizes, the choices for a woman are: “either see yourself as men see you (as a

sexual object) or cross-identify and see yourself as the man objectifying the woman (you)” (p. 236). This sort of rock-and-a-hard-place analysis raised a number of questions and criticisms from feminist critics. One question concerned what *actual* women saw in their cinematic experience. What did women *as an audience* experience? Asking this same question of the men in the pornography audience is the centerpiece of this dissertation.

Led by Hall (1980), British cultural studies were asking similar (though not necessarily feminist) questions about audiences. Hall makes an attempt to move beyond the “lingering behaviorism” that has been so common in media research (p. 131). Thus, he suggests three possible ways in which an audience can *interact* with or read media: dominant-hegemonic readings, negotiated readings, and oppositional readings. In his study of the pornographic audience, Hardy (1998) uses Hall’s categories to understand male audience members’ interpretations of pornographic stories. As noted previously, Hall (1994) later criticized his own model as oversimplified, yet, because Hardy’s work is important here, I will discuss it on its own terms. One of the stories Hardy gave his subjects contained what he characterized as “domination.” It is characterized as such because the man in the story pushes the woman against a wall, bites her lip, turns her around, and fucks her from behind. A hegemonic reading takes place when a man receives the “ideology” of the message uncritically, on its own terms. Readers that supplied hegemonic readings of Hardy’s story suggested that women like to be dominated, and that it is a natural state of affairs. One reader made an analogy to the animal kingdom to fortify his position.

A negotiated reading is one that accepts the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions, but finds exceptions. Hall (1980) suggests that these readings are rife with contradictions. Thus, readers of Hardy's story had a difficult time reconciling what they had read with their own experiences with women. Because there were so many stories about women being "dominated" as such, there *must be* some women that enjoy it. Their own experiences told them however, that "you could probably search your whole life and not find one" (p. 147).

Hall identifies oppositional readings as those that understand quite clearly the hegemonic code that is the intended message. The reader decodes this message and recodes it with an oppositional scheme that resists the original signification. Hall's own example is a reader who, upon hearing an exposition on "national interest" equates every use of that phrase with "class interest." For Hardy "the oppositional reading sees through the text, identifying it as a discursive construction and therefore as untrustworthy, a 'sexist' misrepresentation of women" (p. 143).

Both Hall's and Hardy's accounts miss the extent to which the author's politics constructs the nature of what is hegemonic and what is oppositional. That is, the constitution of "ideology" is entirely dependent upon one's political leanings. There are many who consider pornography by its very nature to be oppositional (e.g. Bright, 1995; Bright and Juno, 1991; Califia, 1986, 1994; Kipnis, 1996; Preston, 1993), and, of course, those who consider it the very essence of patriarchal hegemony (e.g. Dworkin, 1979; MacKinnon, 1993; Russell, 1998). And what of those in the patriarchal power elite who are committed to pornography's dissolution? Hardy's effort is built on a template in which opposition to pornography equals opposition to patriarchy. I would insist,

however, that there are no clear-cut, *single* sources of power/hegemony, and that it is possible to oppose patriarchy, but not pornography.

Foucault (1980) has compellingly identified power as multifaceted. We should interrogate “not the domination of the King in his central position, ... but that of his subjects in their mutual relations: not the uniform edifice of sovereignty, but the multiple forms of subjugation that have a place and function within the social organism” (p. 96). While Foucault would certainly not deny that there are exceedingly powerful figures “at the top,” he is advising against a view in which that is the *only* recognized configuration of power. To be effective, cultural studies must be attuned to vicissitudes and complexities of the active interactions between subjects and multiple power relations.

In what has come to be called the study of “reception,” Radway (1988) attempts to develop a complex configuration when she calls for work capable of pursuing “the question of how multiple, publicly constituted discourses call to social subjects who, in turn, through complicated processes of identification, actively locate themselves within at least several of those discourses” (p. 364). Drawing on the “nomadic thought” of Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1987), Radway writes of a subjectivity that may often be experientially concrete, but is fluid as well, continually capable of creating linkages and fissures, between and among several subject-discourse configurations simultaneously.

The issues of audience and reception have been voiced by many feminist film critics for some time. The search for the “female gaze” calls for the use of sociological and ethnographic methods such as participant observation and in depth interviews with audience members (Walters, 1999). Writing about the centrality of gender, morality, and emotional dynamics in melodrama, Gledhill (1995) asserts that the concept of

representation has proved inadequate to the task of exploring these audience dynamics because it refers the reception of the work to a reality that is inevitably outside it – for example, historical materialism, feminism or psychoanalysis. There is a gap she continues, “between imaginative and representational functions;” thus it becomes “necessary to consider the provenance of fantasy and aesthetic structures in order to bring ideological analysis close to the actual pleasures of audiences” (p. 75). As Gledhill recommends, extensive exploration of the nuances, depths, and textures of men’s pornographic fantasies will play a central role in this dissertation.

Radway’s (1984) work with women readers of romance novels is exemplary of work that goes directly to the audience. The book opens with a series of quotes: two by women who read romance novels, and two by feminists who deride and ridicule both women who read romance and the novels themselves. The wide gap left by studies that lack engagement with the audience is immediately apparent and remarkable. By engaging the women on their own terms, by listening to their stories, Radway draws a rich portrait of the vital role that romance novels play in real women’s lives. She discovers the extent to which these books provide a meaningful answer to the desire these women feel for an escape, a private space away from the everyday drudgery of domestic labor and family responsibilities. These novels also provide models and fantastic images of relationships in which the heroine’s needs are responded to and met. These imaginative experiences create a rich and pleasurable alternative to the real-life scenario in which women spend most of their time meeting the needs of others, rather than their own. Listening to the audience must be a central ingredient of cultural studies, and it is the mission of this dissertation. Like romance novels, pornographies are marginalized

and stigmatized cultural forms, but they have millions of fans, and we should know why and how.

D. ENDNOTES, CHAPTER II

¹ This is a partial list of Lorber's (1994) exhaustive typology.

² See also Stein (1989) and Laumann et al. (1994).

³ The other ideological formations that Rubin (1984) develops are: the fallacy of misplaced scale, and the domino theory of sexual peril.

⁴ These are only a few examples from Rubin's categories, for the complete lists see Rubin (1984) p. 281-2.

⁵ See Stoller (1985) for a wonderful discussion of the adaptation of this term by the American Psychiatric Association.

⁶ Chancer (1992) notes that de Beauvoir was reacting against psychoanalytic analysis, which she felt reduced social phenomenon to individualistic problems.

⁷ Ashis Nandi (1983) and George Orwell (1950) write about a similar dynamic of power and powerlessness and subsequent self-destructive behavior of British colonial masculinity in India.

⁸ Though both Brod and Soble are deeply influenced by Marx, neither deals with the ruling class and the likelihood that they also use porn.

⁹ While the effects on women and children are not usually conflated in the literature, it is interesting to observe that these are the primary populations to which concern falls in the debates. Two important ideas are rooted in this, first the desire for paternalistic protection of the "weaker" populations, and the split of men into two groups, both of which are physically stronger than women and children: the protectors (moral, strong character, able to resist "earthly temptation"), and the offenders (immoral, weak character, unable to resist "earthly temptation").

¹⁰ I am grateful to Judith Lorber for this reference.

CHAPTER III. METHODS

The goal of this project is to generate in-depth data of men's experiences with pornographies. These men are the *audience* of pornographic media, not unlike the audience of women romance readers that Radway (1984) studied. The primary areas I hoped to investigate in the interviews were men's reasons for their use of pornographies, the context of their use, and their fantasies while using. To pursue these goals, I determined that in-depth interviewing with actual fans was the best method.

A scientifically generated or random sample could not be used as there is no list of potential participants from which to choose. Five studies commissioned by the 1970 Commission on Obscenity and Pornography are the only attempts to date to develop representative samples and descriptions of pornography fans. Four of the five were limited to observations at a distance. That is, the researchers lingered in the vicinity of an adult theater, recorded demographic information about those they saw entering the theater, but made *no* direct contact with the patrons. Therefore, observations were limited to physical appearance, style of dress, race/ethnicity, approximate age, if wedding rings were visible, then marital status. There is an unwritten assumption in these studies that men would be too embarrassed to talk about themselves to researchers. Nawy (1971) got around this problem by leaving surveys in the lobby of one adult theater. His study surveyed 190 men. Though his study is more detailed, the results are generally similar to those of observations studies. All these studies describe a much more homogeneous population my sample indicates.

A possible method for creating a sample was snowball sampling, in which participants suggest friends and acquaintances who I then could contact about

participation. Because pornography is such a personal topic, however, participants' suggestions may be unreliable. Furthermore, because I can only contact potential participants one at a time, generation of an entire sample would be very time consuming. A snowball sample can also become too homogenous because of the reliance on participants' friends and acquaintances. Given these difficulties, I was constrained to use a self-selected sample using public requests for participation. The advantages of public requests are that they contact large numbers and a wide variety of people at once, and that those interested in participation contact me directly. In these circumstances, however, the researcher has significantly less control over the choice of respondents. Thus, conclusions drawn from this research must be generalized with caution.

A. THE SAMPLE

Participants for the study were recruited through newspaper advertisements in two free papers in the NYC area: the Village Voice and New York Press. These papers were chosen in particular for their back page advertisements, which are very visible and often have advertisements recruiting research subjects. Because of financial constraints, respondents were drawn exclusively from the NYC metropolitan area, which further restricts the representative quality of the work.

My plan was to recruit a sample composed of 50 men and 25 couples (to equal 100 respondents): men who used pornographies (either alone or with a partner), and couples in which pornography was an aspect of their sexual life together or was an acknowledged part of one partner's sexual practices alone. Unfortunately, couples were almost impossible to recruit. I do *not* think that this is an indication that couples do not use pornography together or acknowledge that one partner enjoys it. There is ample

evidence that couples use pornography.¹ Indeed, I was contacted by several people (an approximately equal number of women and men) who expressed interest in participation with their partner. From these telephone calls, and from two of the four couples that did participate, it was clear that one member of the couple was much more motivated to participate than the other.² As a result most of those who contacted me decided not to participate. As I did not interview enough couples to merit any substantive report, all of the men referred to from this point on were interviewed alone.

The sample is composed of 64 men (see Table 1.). It is a diverse sample in some ways, but less so in others. These fans appear to be solidly middle class: mostly college graduates, working in business, making about \$40,000 a year. Most are white and in their 30s. However, because of the geographic and social location of the study, the sample is racially diverse. Fully 33 percent of the participants are of African-American or Hispanic origin. Furthermore, New York City is the center of gay life on the eastern seaboard. The bisexual and gay participants combine to make up almost 50 percent of the sample. In terms of age, the vast majority of these fans are between 20 and 40, but it is significant that almost 10 percent are over 50. The variety of men that can be seen in adult outlets throughout the city corroborates this diversity in terms of race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age.

Table 1. Demographic distribution of the 64 respondents, Ns and percentages.

Age	N	%	Racial Identification	N	%
20-29	15	23%	African-American	16	25%
30-39	32	50%	European-American	43	67%
40-49	11	17%	Hispanic	5	8%
>49	6	9%	Total	64	100%
Total	64	100%			
Education	N	%	Profession	N	%
H.S. Grad	3	5%	Art / Religion	7	11%
Some Coll. / Voc.	21	33%	Blue Collar	11	17%
College Grad	30	47%	Business	33	52%
Advanced Study	10	16%	Education	7	11%
Total	64	100%	Professions	5	8%
			Service	1	2%
			Total	64	100%
Income	N	%	Residence	N	%
<20k	9	14%	Bronx	4	6%
20-29k	14	22%	Brooklyn	8	13%
30-49k	26	41%	Manhattan	23	36%
50-75k	7	11%	Queens	10	16%
75-100k	5	8%	Staten Island	1	2%
>100k	2	3%	Long Is/Wstchr	5	8%
Total *	63	100%	NJ/CT	10	16%
			Other	3	5%
			Total	64	100%
Family's Religion	N	%	Respondent's Religion	N	%
Catholic	30	45%	Catholic	5	8%
Jewish	7	10%	Jewish	2	3%
Protestant	14	21%	Protestant	4	6%
Prot. Fund'ist	6	9%	Other	2	3%
Other	5	7%	None	51	80%
None	5	7%	Total	64	100%
Total **	67	100%			
Sexual Orientation	N	%	Relationship Status	N	%
Bisexual	8	13%	In Rel. any type or duration	40	63%
Gay	21	33%	In no Rel	24	38%
Heterosexual	35	55%	Total	64	100%
Total	64	100%			
			Bi/Gay, never married	21	32%
			In Relationship 3+ yrs	4	
			Straight, never married	23	35%
			In Relationship 3+ yrs	10	
			Married	9	14%
			Legal Domestic Partner	5	8%
			Divorced/Separated/Widowed	7	11%
			In Relationship 3+ yrs	2	
			Total ***	65	100%

* The Income total is 63 because one respondent preferred to keep this information private.

** The Family Religion total is 67 because some respondents parents were of different religions.

*** The Relationship Status total is 65 because one respondent was both widowed and married (remarried).

The Relationship Status category presented some challenges. Initially, I considered the sample to be 68 percent single. Yet, the categories married and single are heterosexist – marriage is not an option for gay, and many bisexual, men. Therefore, I split the category of single into “Straight, never married” and “Bi/Gay, never married.” This presents, at least, a less heterosexually biased representation. I also provide the number of men in relationships of three or more years to illustrate that these categories are still not descriptive enough – that is, one can be “never married” (either bi, gay, or straight) and be involved in a long-term relationship.

Fifteen percent of the sample has an income below \$20,000. Many of these participants were students working their way through school with part-time jobs, living on loans, or receiving support from their families. Thus, there were *no* truly low-income participants. A related issue is that a number of men who responded to the advertisement asked during the initial telephone contact if they were to be financially compensated for participation (though it was clear in the ad that no money was being offered). I attempted to convince these men of the societal value of the study and that they may find exploration of this highly personal topic rewarding, but without financial compensation, these attempts were futile. Had I been able to offer monetary compensation, it is likely that I would have had more participation from people with lower incomes. People of means were willing to participate without financial compensation. Many made it clear that monetary compensation was irrelevant. Without adequate funding for this research, this problem was unavoidable.

A final observation of Table 1. reveals religion as an important issue in my sample. Ninety-three percent of my sample is from a religious background, but eighty

percent of the sample is not currently religious. On the one hand, these numbers probably reflect the current American movement away from religious traditions. On the other hand, religion has had a serious impact on the sample: almost 50% of these men are from Catholic families alone. As data collection was under way, this trend caught my attention. Even as I attempted to weed out Catholics from my volunteers (by explicitly stating “non-Catholic background preferred” in the advertisements), some of the slack was taken up by men from fundamentalist Protestant families: Pentecostal and Seventh Day Adventists, for example. Religion was quickly becoming an important factor in my study.

When confronted with dramatic data like this, it is easy to draw equally dramatic conclusions. However, simplistic and deterministic inferences such as pornography fans are usually from religious backgrounds, or conversely, people from religious backgrounds are usually pornography fans, have no place here. There are certainly pornography fans who do not come from religious backgrounds, as well as people who come from these backgrounds who are not pornography fans. Regardless, the profound impact that religion has had on these men’s sexual lives cannot be ignored.

What is significant is the extent of variation among, rather than between, Catholics, Jews, and Protestants in this sample. One needs to take into account ethnic variations in the Catholic Churches, the different Protestant churches, and the types of Judaism. Furthermore, in the data analysis, I developed maps² of my respondents’ *experiences of* religion and its contexts. A critical addition to this map is the family and the extent to which it embraces religion. In this context, religion and family cannot be considered sociologically discrete; they are integral in creating individual experience. A

final addition to the map must be the pornography fan himself (gendered as such in my sample). How does he *react to, contribute to, and detract from* the context created by the institutions of religion and family (as well as others) regarding sexuality and pornography? This complex interplay is reflected in many of my participants. Some respondents from Catholic backgrounds argue that masturbation with pornography was their defiant response to their strict religious upbringing and specific repressive experiences involving pornography. Other participants from Catholic backgrounds had parents who purchased pornography at their children's bidding for sex educational purposes. For these latter men, religion was an insignificant issue, barely even raised in the interview. These examples are the extreme, but they illustrate the extent to which families vary in terms of their endorsement of religious messages about sexual practices.

There are a number of issues not addressed in Table 1. that are also of interest. My original plan was to interview dedicated, moderate, casual, and former fans of pornography. However, the vast majority of the sample is composed of dedicated fans (men who have been fans for more than five years, whose masturbation with porn varies from about once a week to once a day). Simply put, the majority of men who contacted me were dedicated fans. For these fans, there is something at stake in pornography – it was worth the risk of exposure in the interview. For fans less devoted, the risks of the interview (exposing oneself to deeply personal questions about a tabooed sexual practice) outweigh the benefits.

As noted above, controlling (or at least attempting to control) religion was a matter of adding a line to my advertisement, and produced mixed results. Controlling for frequency of masturbation with pornography would have been more difficult, as it would

have entailed asking an invasive question during the initial telephone contact, before any rapport had been developed. Participants could have been put off, and the validity of those responses would have been questionable. Furthermore, controlling for religion as well as frequency of use would have meant significant extension of the data collection phase of the study. Due to financial and time constraints, this option was untenable.

Another issue is the self-selected nature of the sample. I received calls from a few men who wanted help with what they termed their *problem* with pornography. When they found that I was not offering therapy or a source of support, they became disinclined to participate. The majority of participants then, with some notable exceptions, do not consider pornography a serious problem in their lives (one for which they would seek help). This is not to say that these men have not questioned their practices extensively, or that they have had unproblematic experiences with pornography. From the data I collected, I would suggest that the vast majority of men who do not *currently* consider pornography a problem worked hard to get there. Almost everyone (not all) whom I interviewed has experienced some conflicts over pornography, but only one man in my sample actually sought outside advice.

In a self-selected sample, the researcher has little control over who expresses interest in participation. Why did these men participate and not others? What are the possible motivating factors behind a man coming to a stranger's office to discuss the details of his personal sexual life? Is there a particular *type* of pornography fan who would participate in research such as mine, and is my sample limited to that type, or are there a variety of reasons that motivate many different kinds of fans? As dedicated fans, pornography played an important part in *all* of these men's lives, and, as with any

tabooed practice, there are limited opportunities to explore and reflect on one's feelings and experiences about engaging in pornographic practices. Based on the tenor of the interviews and on direct and indirect questions about motivations, it is clear that there are several reasons these men chose to participate beyond the unifying fact that pornography is important to them. For a few men, it was a catharsis (sometimes about pornography, sometimes about their sexual lives in general). Curiosity, probably an erotically charged curiosity, played a role for some. Others participated because they were pornography "aficionados." These men took advantage of an opportunity to talk about something they cared about deeply, and as aficionados, having read the popular literature on pornography⁴ they were interested in taking part in a pornographic discourse/research event. A couple of men were new to the city or were in the city briefly and found the interview an exciting, sexually adventurous, "New York" experience. Two men participated to proposition me.⁵ Still others considered their experiences with pornography rich and unique, and hoped to add some diversity to the project. There was even a modest number of the men who took part explicitly for socio-political reasons. These men made their feelings clear that current fears about the "effects of pornography" were unfounded and dissonant with their own experiences. Their participation in the study was to get their side of the story told.

Issues surrounding non-representative samples are common for qualitative research, but even more for studies of deeply personal topics. Barbara Katz Rothman (1986) noted that her sample of women who had had amniocentesis was non-representative. It was made up of those either "bothered enough so that they were motivated to talk about it – or were pleased enough that they wanted to share the

experience” (p. 19). Conversely, her sample excluded those for whom the experience was either unremarkable (thus they had no real reason to talk about it) or too traumatic to talk about. I believe this bias generally characterizes my sample as well. Many of the fans in my sample were bothered by their dedication to pornography, others saw terrific benefits in their devotion, most experienced a mixture of these. I already noted the few men who chose not to participate upon finding out that I was not offering help for problems with pornography. I can only speculate about the other group Rothman identifies, but it seems plausible that a number of men who enjoy pornography on a regular basis consider it unproblematic and taken for granted.

Finally, Appendix A. gives basic demographic data for each participant: Alias, Age, Racial identification, Sexual orientation, and Relationship status. However, in the text of the dissertation, respondents’ demographic profiles are not consistently identified. This is an effort to avoid the interpretation of accounts based on identity (sexual, racial, or otherwise). At the same time, this does not mean that these men are speaking as undifferentiated porn fans. Indeed, they spoke not as fans, but as men first, with all their demographic variety intact. With one possible exception, pornography was not the central aspect of any of these men’s identities. It was, as I will discuss in the following chapter, an identity “accessory.” In most contexts, these men’s pleasures with pornography were unproblematically veiled.

B. INSTRUMENT AND INTERVIEW PROCESS

Subjects who read the ad and were interested contacted me by telephone at my private office rented for the study. During this initial telephone contact, I introduced myself as a doctoral candidate doing research on men’s experiences with pornographies.

I informed the potential subject of a number of issues: the interview would take place in my Fifth Avenue office (I considered such a location essential, given the nature of the project); the interview was informal and conversational; there would be no pornography involved; he should expect it to last approximately three to four hours; he could choose to have a single, long interview or two or more short ones; I was unable to compensate him financially, the interviews would be audio-tape recorded; his confidentiality would be protected; I am a pornography fan myself, so he could rest assured that the interview would be completely non-judgmental. I provided some sample questions to give him a sense of the types of questions he would be expected to answer. Finally, I gave him the number of the Office of Sponsored Research at the University in case he had any questions about the legitimacy of the study.

The instrument for this study was a focused, semi-structured interview schedule consisting primarily of open-ended questions which differed from interview to interview depending on the respondent's issues. The interview began with a standard demographic questionnaire in order to certify race/ethnicity, partnership status, sexual orientation, residence, religion, age, income, education, and profession. The participant was also asked to provide information on his parents' income, education, and profession, to the best of his ability. The information about the income, education, and profession of the participant and his parents is this study's measurement of the participant's current and original social class.

The open-ended interview was structured as a life history of pornography use and focused upon: first experiences, feelings surrounding those experiences, current practices, frequency and variety of use along with changing patterns from the first experience to the

present day, daily circumstances which lead to pornographies use, emotional patterns (anger, self-affirmation, depression) that lead to use, moods and feelings before, during and after use, fantasies, identification with actors/models/characters, pornographic use with others. The interview was flexible enough to accommodate, and indeed encourage, somewhat protracted discussions of these topics if the subject (and the interviewer) saw fit. Thus, it was hoped that the interview would move beyond a question-and-answer session and towards a *narration* of experience. Such instances were opportunities for the researcher to probe into deeply personal areas that are difficult to develop into direct questions (these include issues of power, weakness, anger, etc.). Brannen's (1988) experience researching sensitive issues tells us that direct questions are often unproductive; allowing for or subtly probing for such information in "conversation" is much more effective.

Encouraging the subjects to make sense of their experience of pornographies by detailed reflection is the primary advantage of an in-depth, relatively unstructured interview. Reinharz (1992) notes that many feminists have embraced open-ended interviews, not only because of the access to the subject's own words, thoughts, and memories, but also as an "antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women" (p. 19). I consider this germane for men who use pornography as well, for their voices have also been silenced and/or ignored. A further advantage of the open-ended, in-depth interview is apparent when inquiring about deeply personal, potentially stigmatizing topics. A subject's understanding of his or her participation in a stigmatized practice like masturbating with pornography is often packed with contradiction, complexity, and emotionality. The open-ended interview allows for

the integration of these crucial data in a way that would be difficult with a more structured procedure.

During my initial interviews, I was witness to the enormous stigma and guilt attached to masturbation⁴ and pornography. Such a sensitive topic raises issues about interviewing strategies. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) recommend a “non-reactive” style of interviewing based on Carl Rogers’ counseling style. That is, the interviewer should not allow the respondent to know his or her (the interviewer’s) feelings about the research topic. Doing so creates the possibility that respondents would tailor their answers to the researcher’s expectations. Though a valuable perspective, this position was not appropriate for my project. During my pilot interviews, I adopted the strategy of identifying myself as a frequent and long-term pornography fan. I was careful to emphasize that I have been highly conflicted for the duration of those years, so as to leave my “position” on pornography ambiguous. However, *not* identifying myself as such would have been a mistake. My fear about the non-reactive method was that due to the guilt already present in all my initial interviews, and numerous subsequent interviews, participants would assume the worst, that non-reaction was condemnation. I found that identifying myself as a fan of pornography *visibly* relieved respondents’ initial trepidation and enabled them to talk to me openly because they sensed I was not there to censure them. The interviews were characterized by a sense of shared conflict, and thus a sense of camaraderie and rapport rather than defensiveness and calculation.

The use of self-disclosure reflects the deep influence of feminist-consciousness and methodologies on my work. “There is no intimacy without reciprocity,” Oakley (1981, p. 49) states flatly, arguing for an interview style that disrupts the separation and

distance between the researcher and subject intrinsic in the “non-reactive” style described above. If interviewers freely express feelings and share experiences, they encourage participants to do the same. Oakely’s (and any feminist’s) ability to break down hierarchy in the research process has since been questioned both implicitly and explicitly (McKee and O’Brien, 1983; Phoenix, 1994; Riessman, 1991; Stacey, 1988). Nevertheless, self-disclosure has been embraced by many feminists as a tool to enhance intimacy, activate respondents in the research process, equalize relations (at least to some degree) between researcher and researched, and allay fears surrounding sensitive research topics (Reinharz, 1992).

As a fan of pornography, I am well aware of the stigma attached to this practice. Therefore, when a subject came into my office for the interview, the entire introduction to the study was structured around attempts to quell fears, establish intimacy, rapport, and a sense of shared experience and conflict. First, I engaged the participant in small talk most often thanking and praising him for showing up. This would entail (true) stories about how difficult it was to get people to keep their appointments for this study. Often I joked about men getting nervous as they approached the building and running off. I found humor to be an effective tool for both relaxing participants, and indirectly communicating to them that as a researcher I was affable and unthreatening (see also Flood, 1997). Next, I presented the participant with a verbal run-down of the steps we would take before we actually started the interview: the consent form, a small demographic questionnaire, some background information on myself and the study. This run-down was meant to provide the participant with a sense of control over what was taking place. The consent form was printed on university letterhead. After reading it, he

was asked to sign, then I signed as well. Almost every participant watched quite intently as I signed, clearly indicating the tension in their minds about participation in my research. This form, along with the demographic questionnaire, aside from performing their obvious functions, were also intended to indicate to the participant the legitimacy of the researcher and his project. Amid the legitimate fears of being alone in a stranger's office talking about one's personal experiences with pornography, providing a sense of safety was foremost in my mind in these early steps.

After that, I talked briefly about myself: my first experiences with pornography, progression (and stasis) of taste and media, how long I have been involved with pornography, and approximately how often I masturbate with it. As noted above, I indicated that I was conflicted about the issue so as to leave my "position" unclear. I narrated the integration of these experiences into my interests in gender and sexuality, my undergraduate and graduate work, and finally, the inspiration for this work in which I realized that though pornography is highly controversial, no one had talked to men. By ending on this point, I hoped to highlight the *indispensable* role of the participant and elicit some enthusiasm for the project. I found self-disclosure to be a critical tool in founding trust and intimacy between myself and the subject. It not only fortified my claim to non-judgmentalism, but also inscribed me with a much more complex identity than "researcher." It established me as (in addition to researcher) a "fellow traveler" if you will. It created an almost instant bond, a link, enabling a common language that I think would have been difficult if not impossible to come upon otherwise. Furthermore, had I taken the more typically disinterested role of the researcher, I would have been unable to use my extensive knowledge of pornography and its culture. In essence, I

could use a *common language* among dedicated pornography fans about directors, films, authors, stars, photographers, magazines, historical periods and trends, guide books, cultural leaders (e.g. Susie Bright, Pat Califia, Al Goldstein, Larry Flint, Candida Royalle, Annie Sprinkle), fetishes, sex toys, the language for sexual positions in pornographic video (e.g. “reverse cow-girl”), controversies, political battles, and so on. Had I not been able to use this knowledge, I have little doubt that the depth of almost every interview would have been compromised (though some much more than others). Many of the men I interviewed were learned, deeply into the pornographic culture, thus my knowledge served as a set of credentials, a passport that allowed me to enter much deeper into their feelings about that world than if I were not an “insider.”

Finally, when we got to the first question in the interview, it was intentionally broad: “Can you tell me about your first experiences with pornography?” My feeling was that such a question would allow the participant to begin the process of talk and reflection that would be required throughout the interview, but about experiences that were distant, in the past, less threatening, not so close to home, so to speak. Asking a strong question such as “Why do you like porn?” too early would have been invasive and potentially threatening. By working slowly, I hoped to provide the subject with some time to get acquainted with me, the types of questions I would be asking, the interview process, and the deeply personal nature of the work we would do.

In my interviews, I made every effort to establish a genuine rapport, to relax the participants, and present an unthreatening manner in order to obtain the best and most personal interviews possible. Above, some reservations were noted about the non-representative nature of the sample. There are also reservations about the nature of

interviewing that need to be taken into account. In collecting “sexual stories” for his research, Plummer (1995) asks some cautious questions about the interview process and the construction of knowledge therein:

What brought him [here] to tell me all about [his sexual life]? How [did] he produce such stories, and how did my “tolerant” responses to him actively encourage him to tell a certain sort of story?... And to leave endless undetected absences? How much of his story was a performance of a dress rehearsal he had practiced many times in solitude before? What, then, was the relationship of my transcribed interview to his actual life? (p. 11).

Plummer raises the inescapable problem of how much we really do know about the men that have been interviewed. There are no certain answers to these concerns, but it is critical to raise them, especially in the context of sexual stories. Plummer observes that when we hear a rape victim, or an incest survivor, or a “victim of pornography” speak, their stories are assumed to be a description of some basic truth, but they have a pattern shaped by the norms of the situation and the expectations of the questioner or audience. The accounts rendered in my work should similarly be seen as “sexual stories” and as “*constructions* rather than repositories of a unitary truth.... As a result accounts have to be analyzed within the context of the interview itself” (Phoenix, 1994, p. 66, my emphasis; see also Riessman, 1993). Furthermore, the interview context is encased within larger historical and social relations in which stories are produced. Bear in mind that a number of men were motivated to participate in this work because of the current anti-pornography climate in New York City. Certainly, such contextualized motivation will produce a particular type of story. In this light, I would argue that stories about pornography collected by MacKinnon and Dworkin (1997) should be subject to the same type of analysis.⁷

Construction does not mean fiction. It would be excessive to suggest that these accounts have *no* connection to “reality” whatsoever, that they should be reduced to texts or simulacra, as Baudrillard (1994) would have it. The men I interviewed have had complex, emotional, *lived* experiences within which their pornographic practices are enmeshed. Their stories must be heard and listened to, yet it is imperative to be cautious about the conclusions we draw from these stories. These reservations are simply an effort to stem the desire to demarcate a singular truth of the pornographic via these men’s stories.

C. DATA ANALYSIS

The central focus of my data analysis was to capture subjects’ lived experience, feelings, and meanings attached to pornographic practices. The central question was, how do these men make sense of their own use of pornographies? Although this project is unprecedented thematically, it has much methodological precedent. One of the methodological foundations is Weber’s (1978) interpretive sociology based on “*Verstehen*” or *empathic understanding*. Weber argues that “we do not ‘understand’ the behavior of cells,” we merely observe and describe functional relationships (1978, 15). It is in the study of people and social action that we can understand motivation, interest, and intent; we can place social action in the context of its meaning.

Weber’s efforts to understand a person’s actions from his/her point of view is at the heart of qualitative sociology. What Glesne and Peshkin (1992) call the “interpretive tradition” includes symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), grounded theory (Charmaz, 1983; Glaser and Strauss, 1967), interpretive interactionism (Denzin, 1989) and much feminist methodology and

epistemology as well (Fonow and Cook, 1986; Harding, 1991a, b; Hawkesworth, 1989; Reinharz, 1992; D. Smith, 1987). Each of these frameworks is attentive to the social actors' articulation of their own lived experience. Accounts must unfold from the *subject's* point of view rather than from the researcher's (Marshall and Rossman, 1989). Indeed, such research is founded on "actual practices of actual individuals, including their practices of reasoning, interpreting, rendering what has happened accountable" (D. Smith, 1987). Lorber and Bandlamudi (1993) draw upon postmodern feminist theory to argue that the narrative themes emerging from their research were a means for the respondents to produce not only accounts but subjectivity. This same process is especially likely to take place within the context of taboo topics, about which there has been literally *no talking*. Thus, my interviews presented subjects with the opportunity to finally speak, and thus construct, subjectivities specifically around their pornography use.

Coding consisted of what subjects' accounts glossed over, lacked, or ignored, as well as what they stressed (Charmaz, 1983). Common themes and connections between subjects were developed. Initial stages of analysis shaped, focused, and sharpened further data collection (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). For example, as the interviews were conducted, particular themes began to emerge. Among them were the importance of pornography as an experience of nurturance; self-love; the extensive variety and intricacy of fantasy; the varieties of pornography that appeal to men; the presence and absence of double standards for women; variously concrete and amorphous hostility towards women; pornography as a method learning about sexual practices. I began to explore these themes in a more focused way in subsequent interviews. The integration of analysis and data collection further enabled me to anticipate problem areas (e.g. where

past respondents were embarrassed, acutely sensitive, or unresponsive). I was thus able to negotiate these difficulties more effectively, shifting a question's phrasing in subtle ways, for example.

At another level, the process of analysis and reflection during data collection yielded mixed results. For example, I continually paid very close attention to which questions stimulated conversation and which did not. One series of questions was based on detailing the man's practices with pornography. I began by asking about any "rituals" that they might have with pornography. This question often floundered, eliciting questions rather than responses. I decided that ritual might be too strong a word, and subsequently asked about "routine" instead. The difference was remarkable: stories (from those that had them) flowed. Another question was much more difficult to work with. The basic question was: "Why women, why do you get off on women?" (for gay men I asked about men). This often yielded answers about sexual preference rather than pornography and women. I tried: "What do you want from women?" This lead away from pornography. I tried: "what is special about the women in pornography?" This led to discussions of beauty, for example, or literal answers, "they make me come." Perhaps the question was not well formed in my own mind, perhaps it was just too general to answer, perhaps it was too difficult a question. As I reflect upon this problem now, I believe I wanted to ask: "Exactly what is appealing about watching a *woman* fuck?" This is more than a question about fantasy. I wanted it to be a question about politics, sexuality, and gender. Had I asked this question, I cannot imagine that many of my participants could have answered without extensive reflection. These types of

frustrations, however, are an unavoidable aspect of the often messy process of this kind of social research.

After the data was collected, the next stage of analysis was analytic coding. In this stage, the numerous and intricate variations of broad thematic categories were identified and coded. Finally, existing literature was used to expand the analysis and analytical categories (Charmaz, 1983).

D. MEN IN FEMINISM – WHAT’S A BOY TO DO?

Over the years, I have as a man attempted to peer through a variety of feminist lenses. I have embraced some and rejected others. As a man, and as a fan of pornography, I have been both hurt and inspired by various feminisms. For years, “feminism” (before I understood the controversy within feminism over pornography) was the source of tremendous shame on my part. The inspiration for this project was to let men speak about pornography, and, in a very real emotional sense, to let them talk back to anti-pornography feminism. I designed the study to reflect *their* experiences with pornography though, not mine, and reacting to feminism turned out to be far from the top of the agenda for the majority of the men I interviewed. Feminist methods allowed me to share information and establish a personal involvement in order to construct an interactive rather than instrumental relationship between myself and my research participants (Maynard, 1994, p. 15-6).

From the discussion of the methods in this work, it must be clear that feminism has had a profound impact on my consciousness as well as on my research. There are questions that could be raised about my use of these methods as a man doing a project on men and pornographies. Similar questions about men’s appropriations of feminist methods and concepts have been raised before, by women and by men. Segal (1990) and especially Harding (1991a, b) have been supportive of men contributing to feminism. Jardine (1987) has been skeptical, and Canaan and Griffin (1990) have been critical. Jardine (1987) suggests that men in feminism have learned the vocabulary of feminism, but do not get the syntax or enunciation, thus cannot speak the language. She further argues that in men’s writing, a blind spot is always men’s sexuality. Canaan and Griffin

(1990) are defensive about men's studies competing with feminism for scarce funding, jobs, and other resources.

Men who would support feminism with their work in men's studies are in an awkward position. After reading about the credibility problem that men's studies has in the eyes of some feminists, Morgan (1992) expresses the frustration that some pro-feminist men must feel: "Women told us we shouldn't be studying women. Fair enough. Now they tell us we shouldn't study men. What time to do the pubs open?" (p. 189). As one of the long-term leaders of men's studies in England, this is far from Morgan's position. But what do men want from feminism? Is there some masochistic pleasure in reading Harding (1991a), for example, in which she routinely refers to collective men as "the Monster"? By the same token, think of the white women and men who read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* in which whites are commonly known as "the Devil." However painful, there are profound insights to be gained by attempting to peer through another's eyes: the familiar becomes infused with a multitude of new meanings.

There are several models available to men who wish to use feminist methods. Harding (1991a) works with Collins' (1991) concept of the "outsider within" to present a starting point for men interested in doing pro-feminist research. Collins used her social location as a black woman within white male sociology to expose that discipline's taken-for-granted assumptions and blind spots. She argues that other "outsiders" can use this perspective to their and their discipline's benefit, but she also states clearly that this approach "has merit not only for actual outsiders within, but also for other sociologists as well. The approach suggested by the experiences of outsiders within is one where intellectuals learn to trust their own personal and cultural biographies as significant

sources of knowledge” (Collins, 1991, p. 53). Harding argues that feminists can construct themselves as outsiders within by embracing their “contradictory selves” and “traitorous social locations,” including black woman sociologist, lesbian literary critic, woman scientist. For Harding (1991a), “male feminist” is one such contradictory location. These contradictions open up gaps in knowledge and practice that would be invisible from within a seamless system. While many feminists are not as enthusiastic as Harding about men in feminism (Canaan and Griffin, 1990; Jardine, 1987; Maynard, 1990), pro-feminist men see potential for distinctive “contributions to [feminist] scholarship and political change that women *cannot* make” (Flood, 1997, p. 3). Prominent among these would be research in locations to which women have no access, such as all-male institutions, informal all-male spaces (male groups in bars, men’s rooms, work spaces), and the inner lives of sexuality and fatherhood (Morgan, 1992). A more qualitative access to men’s worlds is suggested by Flood (1997) who noted his ability “to slide into masculine modes of relating which facilitate personal disclosure” (p. 6). As noted above, humor worked well in this way for my project.

The “traitorous readings” that Harding (1991a) righteously and unproblematically advocates may incite painful choices for some men with which she does not contend. For example, in studying fatherhood as Morgan (1992) recommends, to what extent are we to turn our backs on (our?) fathers? Are we to treat them and their institution as monstrous, as the “enemy” on whom we can zealously inform to our “allies”? Harding’s use of the terms “monster” and “traitor” oversimplifies the case, and needlessly reifies and vilifies males, who are fathers (for example) and human beings, with weaknesses and imperfections. To be fair though, I am not suggesting here that we listen uncritically to

traditional accounts of fatherhood; father does not know best. Perhaps Harding's and Collins' explications were meant for the critique of male institutions rather than for men's personal lives, but from "men's pro-feminist standpoint" (Flood, 1997), the study of men is personal, and especially, as in my case, the study of the personal life of men.

As pro-feminist men, Flood (1997) and Schacht (1997) construct themselves as "outsiders within" to study men's sexist practices. Indeed, Schacht's unmitigated contempt for the misogynist rugby players he studied valorizes the "traitor," and he unproblematically skewers the "monsters." Schacht and Flood work as outsiders within in order to infiltrate men's culture as sort of feminist secret agents, disguised as insiders. Their work is not conducted for the community they are studying, but for feminism exclusively, for the outsiders.

My work is different. I am a long-term pornography fan. I identified deeply with many of the men I interviewed. As such I am an undisguised and actual insider. At the same time, I am an insider who steps back, who studies sexual practices, asks questions, and attempts to understand taken-for-granted knowledge in a way that the typical insider may not. Finally, I also occupy the "outsider within" position as Harding uses the phrase, because I am a pro-feminist man studying men as gendered beings, and I am committed to a feminist analysis of the sexism that was present in several interviews. Even so, the notion of a "traitorous social location," and its implication of a two-sided conflict with a clear and distinct enemy (and a clear and distinct ally for that matter) whom I will betray, is far too simplistic. The men I interviewed were not my enemies, far from it. The vast majority were rather courageous in fact, willing to speak the unspoken. They shared intimate details of their deeply personal, and sometimes secretive, lives largely because I

presented myself as *non-judgmental* and as *one of them*, in order to gain their trust. The feminist methods I used, which invite intimacy and reciprocity, increase the risk of betrayal and manipulation (Stacey, 1988). That potential genuinely troubles me. Flood (1997) reveals some ambivalence and tension as well in his rationalization of the betrayal of his subjects in order to gain “good data” for feminist struggle (p. 8). He argues, however, that he is able to set himself apart from the men he interviewed. I am not; I *am* one of those men. Indeed, one participant in my work displayed a great deal of anger at women. I have been angry at women; I have been sexist; to say otherwise would be disingenuous. I have also changed (which is not to say that I will never be sexist or angry again or racist or classist for that matter). Is it right for me to believe these men cannot change, and thus righteously betray them? I attempted to use the full range of my emotions and my life experiences in order to enter into the world of the men I interviewed. These include deep ambivalence and questions about men, pornography, *and* feminism. If one does not make a serious effort to understand the people one studies, then the work will be nothing but documenting sexism (see Schacht, 1997). This is valuable, but it tells us little about the worlds that these men inhabit, especially their *inner* worlds. And is it not their world that we need to understand?

This work is for feminism, but it is *more* for men, and specifically men who enjoy pornography. On one level, I wrote about men’s vast, multiple, and rich experiences of pornographies in a way that I hope speaks to them, in a way where they can recognize themselves and their experiences. In this sense, this is a study of and for men and pornography, which is not to say women and feminists will not find it of interest. I also wrote in a way that allows men to recognize themselves as men, self-consciously, as

gendered beings. This is feminist. Finally, I wrote about these men's sexism, so they see it, so it becomes present and obvious to them. In this way, I hope to speak not only to feminist women but to sexist and non-sexist men in a voice that is *not* alienating, but communicative and attentive. This is the only way men will change. This is for feminism *and* for men.

E. ENDNOTES, CHAPTER III

¹ Sources of evidence include surveys (*Redbook* cited in Williams, 1989), producers (Candida Royalle is the most noteworthy producer of couples videos [see Royalle, 1993], but Andrew Blake, Shane, Paul Thomas, and Jane Waters have all produced a number of films and videos aimed at couples), reviewers (*Adam Film World*, one of the best sources for reviews of adult features has extensive lists of “couples appeal” videos), and guide books specifically aimed at couples (Brent and Brent, 1997; Winks, 1998).

² On a personal note, while this issue was taking shape, my wife indicated to me that as a couple we would fit this pattern as well in that she would not have wanted to discuss our personal, sexual life with a stranger, and I certainly would have.

³ I use this metaphor intentionally because maps are not static, but often become out of date, inaccurate, and must be updated, shifted, changed with historical realignments.

⁴ See for example Bright, 1992, 1995, 1997; Butler et al., 1990; Friedman, 1993; Muller and Faris, 1996; Petkovich, 1997; and the periodicals *Adam Film World*; *Adult Video News*.

⁵ It is unclear to me if these two thought that the study was an elaborate cover for secret sexual desires on my part, but nonetheless, once they realized I was conducting a study and I was not interested in them sexually, they made little effort to participate in any serious way. Because of this, they were excluded from the sample.

⁶ See Laumann, et al. (1994) for an excellent discussion of the stigmatization of masturbation in our culture.

⁷ Unfortunately, MacKinnon and Dworkin (1997) do not grapple with these types of issues, to be fair though it is not their job to do so. They want to make a political and legal case against pornography. As political activists, the presentation of a unified truth serves their purposes. From my perspective these challenges do *not* undermine the integrity of the stories their participants have told. My criticism should be seen as navigational tools toward telling additional, untold stories about pornography.

CHAPTER IV. STRUGGLING WITH SHAME, PLEASURE, AND THE SOCIAL CONTROL OF PORNOGRAPHY AND SEXUALITIES

A. INTRODUCTION

It has been my contention that the men I interviewed “speak sex” *through* pornography. That is, through pornography men learn about sex, experience themselves sexually, search out and develop sexual fantasies and secrets, speak sexually to themselves and others by developing tastes and preferences, and attain profound sexual pleasure. However, given the deeply negative evaluations of mainstream discourses, for most of the men I interviewed, being a fan of pornography also entails a great deal of shame. This contradictory experience is manifested in Wade.

I was on a binge this last summer where I wanted to go and see every peep-show in the city, I went to probably 25 of them all over town.

<what’s the attraction to peep shows that you wanted to see every one>

I really don’t know, I was thinking about it myself. When I go in there I’m so scared I’m shaking, everyone’s looking at me, I’m doing something wrong, it’s something about my childhood, it’s the whole idea of it.

I believe that Wade is living out a tension between desire and shame. This relationship was one of the stronger common threads among the men I interviewed; it will be the focus of this chapter.

Shame begins very early in childhood. It is often used by a priest or parent to instruct a child in our society’s codes of conduct. Ideally, shame will eventually be internalized and function as a form of social control from within (Elias, 1978). In this way, sexual shame is a powerful aspect of the social control of sexualities in our society. Depending on one’s background, sexual shame can vary from extreme to mild. But it is my contention that it is so successfully internalized that only after childhood, or perhaps

even into adulthood, can we become self-conscious of it and begin to challenge it, if we so choose. This chapter will explore various manifestations of shame in my respondents, the various responses to shame, and its role in the social control of sexualities.

The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, called Shame, a historical and constructionist approach to shame is outlined, common notions (from formal research and activist observations) of shame and pornography are also developed, and the link between shame, pleasure, and pain is explored in detail. Resisting Shame, is the second section. There I will discuss men who resist shame, both covertly and overtly. The third and fourth sections are called Beyond Shame (Parts 1 and 2), and will cover experiences which point toward possible movement away from shame.

B. SHAME

Not all men have such intense shame as Wade, but in one form or another almost every man I interviewed has experienced some negative consequences from being a porn fan. Christianity is often blamed for being the source of sexual shame in our society. A preliminary argument of Foucault's (1990b) work, however, is to reveal parallel accounts of sexual shame and fear elsewhere in the Western tradition. He cites numerous medical texts from Greek antiquity which outline fears of masturbation, homosexuality, and unbridled sexuality in general, including disease, weakness, stagnation, effeminacy, and concerns about the propagation of the species. Even if Christianity and other religious traditions are not the sole source or origin, they have long been the most powerful agents of sexual shame in Western society. As argued in the previous chapter, however, it is the relationship between religion, parental socialization, and the individual that is key to understanding the dynamics of sexual shame. A critical addition to this

argument is Rubin's (1984) assertion that sexual hierarchies and shame have become so entrenched in our society that they live independently of their origins; that is, they have a life of their own. Therefore, *regardless of their religious background*, the vast majority of children in our society are socialized into sexual shame, though in widely varying degrees.

As Rubin suggests, shame is not static. In his work *The Civilizing Process* Norbert Elias (1978) establishes the historical and constructed nature of shame in Western civilization. Of particular interest is his notion of the "shame frontier" or the "standard of shame." For Elias, the general trend in Western civilization is towards more privatization, shamefulness, and control of bodily functions such as sleeping, nose-blowing, farting, belching, and sexuality among others. Though he makes clear that there are numerous periods in which controls are temporarily loosened, for Elias, the "shame frontier" is ever encroaching.

Regarding sexual shame specifically, Elias (1978) compares a 16th century text by Erasmus for school boys¹ of nobility with the negative reactions to that text by Von Raumer, a Victorian educator well-known in his time. Erasmus' text counsels boys on issues including adultery, wooing a girl's affections, and negotiations with prostitutes. Though he was rebuked by the Catholic Church for these writings, Elias argues that Erasmus represented "the standard of behavior of [upper-class] secular society" (p. 172).

Von Raumer's outrage is in accord with our society's current sexual mores: "How could such a book be introduced in countless schools? What had boys to do with these satyrs? ... Erasmus here paints fleshy lust in the basest way and then adds something which is supposed to edify" (quoted in Elias, 1978, p. 170). Elias is particularly sensitive

to the quandary that sexual shame creates. Here Elias comments on Von Raumer's advice to mothers on how to address sexual curiosity and questions from their daughters.

The primary concern [for Von Raumer] is the necessity of instilling "modesty" (i.e., feelings of shame, fear, embarrassment, and guilt) or, more precisely, behavior conforming to the social standard. And one feels how infinitely difficult it is for the educator himself to overcome the resistance of the shame and embarrassment which surround this sphere for him. One detects something of the deep confusion in which this social development has placed the individual; the only advice that the educator is able to give mothers is to avoid contact with these things whenever possible. What is involved here is not the lack of insight or the inhibition of a particular person; it is a social, not an individual problem.

Von Raumer himself sees in a sense that this area of life ought not to be surrounded with an aura of secrecy "which is liable to arouse curiosity." But as this has become a "secret" area in his society, he cannot escape the necessity of secrecy in his own precepts: "A mother ... ought only once to say seriously: 'It would not be good for you to know such a thing....'" (Elias, p. 181, ellipses in original).

This state of affairs continues today. It is taken for granted that speaking to children about sex is an extremely delicate and difficult task. But as these examples illustrate, at different periods in Western history it was taken for granted that children (at least boys) knew about sex, that they would inevitably have sex, and that they should be prepared for it. Indeed, Erasmus' work was extremely popular going through numerous translations and 130 editions (Elias, 1978).

In the private contexts of masturbation with pornography, one of the central issues of shame socialization is at work. As noted earlier, Elias sees ever increasing privatization at the heart of sexual shame. But in those private places, one is not free from shame. All societal agents of socialization (parents and extended families, churches, schools, media, the state, the military) have the ultimate aim of instilling *self-control*. Ideally, external controls will become less necessary as the child grows and learns the ways of life in our society. Shame and manner are not simply about external

appearance and deportment, but are perhaps most of all about internal monitoring and the experience of self. As Elias points out, this is what Freud had in mind in his concept of the “superego.” In this way we see that the actual “personality structure” of the individual has been transformed. Prohibitions “are turned so completely into habits that we cannot resist them even when alone, in the intimate sphere” (p. 190, see also Nathanson, 1987).

The strength of sexual shame in private space can be illustrated by a tragic-comic example from my sample. I asked Woody if he had a routine when he masturbates with porn:

No, but I don't like the cat watching me, I don't know why. I know the cat's not watching me have sex [masturbate], but, the cat has to be at least facing the other way. I have no idea, because the cat will just stare at you anyway, the cat's not feeling sh-shh-shame [he stutters] or judging me. It doesn't want to get involved, it's just like, looking somewhere. But, I feel very uncomfortable. I know it's not real, but I mean, I have to put a pillow between us or something.

In this example, shame is not debilitating, have pillow will masturbate. And he is right in so far as the cat is not feeling shame, but *he* clearly is. Just as Elias argues, Woody has so completely learned our codes of conduct, that his shaming mechanisms are entirely beyond his conscious control. Yet, the absurdity of the scene, of which Woody is painfully aware, is remarkable. He seems to reject the initial shame about masturbating with pornography, he definitely rejects the notion that the cat is capable of shaming him, yet somehow “his” voice cannot defeat the voices of the “others.” Like so many of us, Woody's inner world is constituted by competing voices, shaming and counter-shaming, never stopping.

Shame not only invades the private world, but also relations in public. In his work on stigma, Goffman (1963) distinguishes between discredited and discreditable

stigmas. The former can be readily identified: a seriously scarred face, an amputation, or a stutter. The latter can be kept secret: having a criminal record, using illicit drugs, being gay, being a pornography fan. In Goffman's terms, the men I interviewed are continually managing information, "to tell or not to tell ... to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where" (p. 42). Although such tensions exist, the fans I interviewed are not as conflicted as deeply as Goffman's subjects. Being a pornography fan can be important to one's identity, but to those in my sample, it is an identity "accessory," not something these men worried about in every social encounter. As such, it is a stigma that becomes significant on a "need to know" basis. There was a great deal of concern among the heterosexual men (and a few bisexual and gay men) about how their significant others would interpret their enjoyment of pornography. It is in close relationships (romantic or platonic) where issues of silence and stigma come to the fore. Many of the men I interviewed were "in the closet" with intimates about their life as a fan.

Bart, a devoted fan, provides an example of how tensions build about telling and lying. At the time of our interviews, he had just started to date someone. He says, "if she called when I was watching a Traci Lords film,² I would feel weird." In the next interview he informed me that his girlfriend had told him that she and a few girlfriends had once rented some porn and were turned on by it. But because she had limited experience with it (at least that's what she told him), he played along, telling her he'd seen "a couple" of videos. Bart explained this to me by saying that they still didn't know each other that well (only two months), and that he "didn't want to scare her away."

In the introduction to this work I suggested that porn fans have a paradoxical culture in which there is a common language, but it is rarely shared. Stigma and silence are defining characteristics of this culture. There were men who were completely silent as adults, though they had friends they traded with when they were young. Other participants were open with their partners, but not with friends and colleagues at work. Several men worked as teachers or in religious institutions and felt that their jobs would be compromised if information about their pornographic activities got out. Others had a few male friends with whom they traded and talked porn, but were silent with their partners. Some men were open with their partners only about their interest in straight porn or softcore, but concealed their taste for gay, fetish, or hardcore. One man had been open with partners in the past, but was not open with his current lover. Some men were open with friends and lovers, but described deep shame in porn shops. Some men remained “in the closet” about porn, even though their partners had expressed interest in straying from the sexual norm.

For most men, however, even if porn is an identity accessory, decisions about telling and not telling, remaining silent or speaking, are present and on-going in these men’s lives. As Goffman (1963) notes, once the decision to conceal has been made, “the stigma and the effort to conceal it ... become ‘fixed’ as part of personal identity” (p. 65). This is true in varying degrees for almost everyone in my sample. For those men that remained in the closet to their partners (both gay and straight), the reasons were often couched in protective language: “I don’t want her/him to think they’re not attractive to me” was common. Many men that assumed their partners simply wouldn’t understand why they want to masturbate with porn if they have a lover. When asked what they do if

porn comes up in conversation at work or at a party, most of my respondents indicated that it would depend on the context of the conversation and the people involved. That is, most don't want to be a pornography spokesman if the conversation has a hostile tone. Openness depended upon the other. If a partner was open to porn, my participants (with a single exception) would be open with them. If not, generally the participant would remain in the closet. These porn fans seem to accept that some people will simply not get it, but are generally eager to be open with those that they feel will not judge them with stigmatizing assumptions.³

The peep-show house⁴ provides a single, convenient venue to preview, purchase, view, and masturbate with pornography, but it also exposes the porn fan to public shame. To use Goffman's (1963) terminology, the moment one proceeds to enter a sex shop, one's stigma transforms from discreditable to discredited. Given its convenience and its public nature, the peep-show is at once attractive and repellent to the porn fan. For this reason alone the peep-show is a compelling venue in which to begin our discussion of stigma. In addition, many researchers have been drawn to peep-shows for the simple reason that men who enjoy porn are accessible there. Consequently, we can reflect on findings from past research and observations, much of which is very concerned with shame, and contrast it with findings from my interviews.

Sex shops are unique locales in which porn fans must manage a public presentation. Fans in these public settings have been observed, but never interviewed (Bright and Juno, 1991; English, 1980; Friedman, 1993; Kovel, 1990; Nawy, 1971; Tewksbury, 1990). There is consensus among these vastly different observers.⁵ English (1980) noted men's "uncomfortable demeanor" (p. 43), and Friedman (1993) described

the “insanely silent” atmosphere (p. 198). Tewksbury (1990) observed that conversation in a porn shop would be an “admission (to both self and others) that one is truly present.” Silence then, becomes an attempt by men to shield themselves from their actions, their surroundings, and our society’s definition of the situation. But because discomfort is so pervasive in most men’s porn shops,⁶ this shield appears to be ineffective.

There is little doubt that shame is a central aspect of many men’s experiences with pornography, especially in public places. However, the lack of variation, the uniformity of the social science description above, gives one pause. Is the researcher’s own discomfort playing a role in their characterization of the porn shop atmosphere? Is silence necessarily indicative of shame? General interest book and video stores are silent, but no one assumes shame is the reason. That is, are these observers conflating people not speaking with people silencing themselves? Some of my participants have gone to peep-shows for 15 years. No doubt they too are silent when in the shops, but are they experiencing shame, or are they simply taking local codes of conduct for granted? Still another possibility is that in sex shops straight men are uncomfortable due to the common practices of anonymous gay and bisexual sex taking place in some shops. The fundamental problem with the observations above is their assumption that they can successfully access patrons’ invisible, emotional experience via their visible, external appearance.

Bright (Bright and Juno, 1991) brings us a step closer to some men’s experience when she describes their silence as a kind of “Faustian bargain.” Men can have all the porn they want as long as they “agree to keep their mouth shut, and accept guilt and

shame" (p. 206). She establishes an important link between shame and pleasure. The terms of the Faustian bargain are manifest in Remi:

I'm split down the middle ... when I went to [a porn shop] I hated myself for going, felt guilty, anxious, worried that somebody would see me, felt I shouldn't be doing this, and I absolutely loved it.

[we both laugh]

I'm serious..., I loved looking at the magazines, and at the other people, wondering who they were, wondering what they were feeling, a whole constellation of things. It's very exciting, [but] ... I go through a predictable rhythm whereas it's very exciting, it's a lot of fun, it's interesting, and then for me there's a reaction to it, a whiplash, I'll masturbate and afterwards I'll feel depressed.

Remi seems almost overwhelmed by the experience. His use of the word "whiplash" to describe his experience after orgasm is a graphic portrayal of the effect of the revelation of his actions. His depression results from feeling "both victorious and defeated. To put it in simplistic Freudian terms, the part of me that wants pleasure, will feel victorious, and, the part of me that's judging myself will be furious." It's almost as if his system cannot take the stress, and its only response is depression, to shut down. Though dealing with the devil is trying, like Wade above, Remi continues to patronize sex shops.

Remi's experience is not simply about shame, it is tightly sutured to pleasure. He "loved it," it's "exciting," "interesting," and "a lot of fun." And what of his humor? Remi can laugh at himself. He sees how silly his predicament is, even as he feels intense guilt. Bright's observations are shrewd, but as a leading advocate of "sexual liberation," she has little patience for Remi's contradictions. For Bright, one should not have to make a deal with the Devil to enjoy porn.

There is the question, however, of the degree to which the deal with the Devil is precisely what makes porn exciting. If we remove taboo from sexuality and pornography, will it continue to entice us? As Van Raumer suggested when he noted that secrecy is “liable to arouse curiosity,” one of the great ironies of the social control of sexualities is that the stronger the controls are, the more irresistible sexuality becomes.⁷ A number of my respondents were explicit about pornography and the sexual thrill of transgression.

Oscar: The guilt makes the sex better, you know, because it’s forbidden.

Graham: I enjoyed going to the theaters because of that kinda perverted feeling, jerking-off in the theater, kinda not caring, you went in there knowing that you’re really not supposed to do it.

Bart: If you hide something, and tell somebody this is wrong, that makes people want to look at it. I think probably if I wasn’t brought up in an atmosphere like that I probably wouldn’t have consumed as much pornography as I have in my life.

Davis (1983) has argued the same point: “Those who desire to wash the dirt from sex ... should realize that they are polishing away the very impurities that make it worth doing” (p. 246, see also Simon, 1996). These sentiments clearly speak to many men’s experiences with porn. Yet, Davis does not recognize that shame can cause suffering as well as pleasure. Remi’s narrative is one of deep personal turmoil; Graham’s voice was trembling throughout the interview. As a 12 year old boy Oscar suffered “a tremendous, an *enormous* amount of guilt. I really liked to masturbate, and each time I did, it was a mortal sin.” These men are both enticed by and repelled by the forbidden, but they have the strength to resist the social controls on sexualities at least to the extent that they are porn fans. It is imperative to keep in mind the multitudes that feel powerless in the face of these controls, that feel like they must limit themselves sexually, those for whom

pleasure does not outweigh the shame of sexuality. The link between pleasure and shame should be problematized rather than romanticized, complicated rather than simplified. My respondent Remi presents us with a valuable and extreme example of the shame/pleasure dynamic.

Remi is excited by a variety of porn, everything from *s/m* to *Playboy* and *Victoria's Secret* catalogues. Most important in terms of his experience of shame, however, is his thrill to “fantasies of Nazi soldiers torturing naked women.”* It should be emphasized though, that Remi’s experience of shame spans his pornographic practices in general, and is not limited to Nazi fantasies.

Fantasies of Nazis torturing naked women might bring shame to many faces, but Remi is Jewish, and has a deep devotion to his faith, history, and culture. Furthermore, some of his relatives were killed in the Holocaust, others were refugees. The Holocaust, therefore, is tightly meshed into his biography. Remi’s shame about his pleasure with mainstream pornography is clear, yet these fantasies take that shame one step further. Rather than simply being about sexual “drives” (he often employs Freudian language), he tells me, “This is disgusting, I shouldn’t be fantasizing about Nazis torturing naked women!” Thus, in addition to his existing shame about pornography, Remi seems to choose images he can feel most shameful about, almost deliberately leading himself down the path to shame. When asked what he thinks this does for him, he is surprisingly clear:

I was brought up to be intellectual, competitive intellectually, to do well in school, to be a good boy, to have good values, and to a very large extent I’ve internalized that. And I believe it, I believe it myself, it’s not just internalized. On the other hand, I think there’s a part of everybody that wants to be bad. I remember a friend who had just gotten married, and a couple of months later he began to have an affair. He came from an orthodox Jewish family, and he was a marathon

runner as a kid, sort of a kid-celebrity. He was always performing, and good, and excelling at this and that, and he said how much he enjoyed being bad. And that really resonated with me, personally. It's the same with me, I really do enjoy being bad, maybe it's that kid inside me that's rebelling against my parents in a way that's pretty safe.

What is perhaps most interesting is his clarity in the face of his self-judgment, which labels these fantasies “disgusting.” Indeed, it is tempting to judge Remi solely on the fact that he fantasizes about Nazi torture. However, when we see the *meanings* of the text, our understanding of its significance may change. Like so many of us, Remi is working through early (and, by his own account, ongoing) conflicts with his parents in his adulthood. Here he points to the “good boy” and the “bad boy,” and later he describes their engagement as the “guerrilla wars of consciousness” and the “psychic civil war.” Remi’s war goes something like this: the bad boy rebels against his parents/good boy self by masturbating with “disgusting” pornography, and the good boy/parents – horrified by the disgusting means by which revenge is taken (and possibly by the desire for rebellion itself) – punishes the bad boy by instigating shame and disgust. This description, however, omits the sexual thrill that is so integral to Remi’s experience. Remi makes it clear that he gets great pleasure out of pushing away his “good” moral self, in his words, “being bad.” We can see motivation for this desire by the key words in the story about his friend: “orthodox,” “marathon,” “kid-celebrity,” “performing,” “good,” “excelling.” Anyone familiar with men’s studies recognizes a masculine quality to these words (though in these days of middle-class careerism, women are not immune to these pressures). These are qualities which might be considered the performance aspect of what Connell (1995) has characterized as hegemonic masculinity. Brannon and David (1979) suggested similar phrases to Remi’s in their description of masculinity:

Be a Big Wheel: masculinity as triumph in every undertaking: sport, work, etc.

No Sissy Stuff: masculinity as non-feminine.

Be a Sturdy Oak: masculinity as unwavering, confident, and cool in crisis.

Give 'em Hell: masculinity as ruthlessly competitive.

For Remi and his friend, deliberate defiance of morality provides the spice missing from a life of self-control, being on stage, giving 110 percent. Remi enjoys defiant sexuality, a devil-may-care sexuality. For someone who spent his life following the rules and doing everything just-so, indulging a kind of morally traitorous selfishness can bring enormous pleasure.

With all Remi's talk of warfare, his remark that this is a "pretty safe" way of rebelling, reminds us that we are discussing pornographic *fantasy*. He says himself later in the interview that he feels the "the pleasure of the surreptitious" in his fantasy life. "Nobody knows, and a lot of people wouldn't suspect." His parents, therefore, are entirely unaware of these fantasies; it's all in his head. At the same time, the fantasy itself causes shame. Remi says he has taken to heart much of what his parents taught him: "I believe it myself." He is devoutly religious, and has worked on Holocaust-related projects. As a result, the bad boy's assault strikes not only his parents' values, but his own as well. He cannot wound his parents without simultaneously sustaining shame and self-loathing. At the same time, his conviction that masturbating with Nazi imagery is wrong is exactly what makes it so exciting. In this sense, the essential ingredient in his pornographic practice is the tight dyadic relationship between shame and pleasure which are interdependent, mutually determining. As Lynn Chancer (1992) has pointed out in her study of sadomasochistic practices in everyday life, such dynamics are much more commonplace than many would care to recognize.

Shame is a powerful tool in the arsenal of the social control of sexualities. The source of pleasure *and* suffering in the shame/pleasure dynamic is the tension between accepting the prohibitions against sexuality (I shouldn't be doing this!) and defying them (I'm gonna do it even though, or precisely because, I'm not supposed to!). The following sections will address various means of resistance to shame and social control. This resistance points towards the potential of overcoming shame because it begins to question rather than accept our society's sexual prohibitions.

C. RESISTING SHAME

In an article quite unsympathetic to pornographic practice, Kovel asks: "Can one imagine any genuine [political] resistance, any critical capacity whatsoever, germinating in the sex shops?" (1990, p. 164). I will argue that there are two types of resistance in evidence in my interviews. Both are about resistance to shame: One is internal and invisible, the other is flagrantly demonstrative, visible, and has clear political implications.

In contrast to Remi, Buddy admits having deep shame, but uses Marx Brothers humor to work his way around these feelings: "I would never join a club that would have me for a member!" Buddy adds an ironic twist to this classic humor because, of course, he *is* a member of the club to which he (in some ways) does not want to belong. Like Remi, Buddy can laugh at himself, but his take on his own shame is quite different. Buddy prides himself on "being very open-faced, and not showing shame. I've had a lot of comment on that and I think I've met some people [in the sex shops]⁹ because I really pay attention to that. Even if I feel shame, I don't express it. I've made the choice to be here, and so have you." Thus, note the profoundly different ways in which people

negotiate shame. For example, both Buddy and Remi feel deep shame, both resist it as well, but in different ways. If Remi didn't resist his shame at some level, he wouldn't allow himself to masturbate with his chosen imagery. Buddy feels shame, but won't "express it." He refuses to grant shame legitimacy, and yet, seems powerless to stop it. His only remaining strategy is to hide it, not show it.

There is a palpable sense of resisting shame in Lester. An important addition is his emphasis on his own change over time. His relationship to shame is not static, but changes with his sense of self and identity.

When I was a teenager I was uncomfortable, but these days I feel fine. I walk back and forth, look at the tapes, no problem. I have no problem walking in, there could be a crowd of people outside, I don't care if they see me go in. I'm a grown man I have my own responsibilities, my own money. I take care of myself, and I'm having safe sex. So I don't feel bad at all, and I don't think anyone else should either. I don't even mind if the owners get to know my name. I like the service, they'll make special orders for me, and I can get the videos that I want.

Lester refers to himself as a "grown man," and he insists he has "no problem" going into a porn shop, that he's accountable to no one for his taste for pornography. His images of mobility ("I walk back and forth") and responsibility (both economically and in terms of safe sex) indicate his feelings of agency and power. Interestingly, as much as he insists that he has nothing to feel bad about, the confrontation with shame and stigma is apparent. The "crowd of people outside" indicate that this stigmatizing moment doesn't change, only feelings about it change. And indeed, Lester is defiant. He directly contradicts Tewkesbury's (1990) assumption that men want to mask their identity. He wants to establish a relationship with the owners so he can get better service. In establishing such a relationship, Lester must speak about his tastes and preferences. He must request titles, many of which are very graphically worded. To order titles, to *speak*

titles, like “Fuck Sluts 3” or “Bitches in Heat” (to use particularly graphic examples) is not for the faint of heart, even in a porn store!

One point that came up repeatedly in my interviews is the act of entering or exiting the sex shop, crossing the threshold, and therefore being seen by others outside the shop. This act is commonly experienced as a stigmatizing moment, the moment of presentation of self as porn fan. If one is in the closet, this is what might be called an “outing” moment. For Darryl, this is a peak moment of resistance. He insists that he has nothing to be ashamed of. Darryl draws quite a dramatic distinction between the moment of publicly entering the store, and the moment just after having entered.

From the onset, these places are very loud, with the lights, they hit you head-on, so all inhibitions have to be left out. With every progressing step you’re taken deeper and deeper in, it’s like somebody takes a hose and pssssssshhhhhh!!!! and then turns off the hose, you’re cleansed. Everything’s openly displayed on the shelf, nothing is hidden. As soon as I walk through the threshold, I’m comfortable, aahhh!!, sigh of relief. You know why? To a certain degree I leave all the hypocrisy outside on the street. All these people look at you and say “you’re a dirty this and that, you’re a criminal, you cheat on the government, you cheat on your wife, you steal from your company.” I walk in proudly I don’t hide, I walk straight in, and I say the hell with you, man. In here people are, I don’t want to say real, but, people aren’t scared, people aren’t hypocritical, they’re saying “I like porn, I want to watch it, I want to purchase it.” People put this moral value on everything, but nobody out there is, to quote the bible “let ye without sin cast the first stone”

There are a number of issues that Darryl’s speech raises. Aside from the powerful religious imagery, for the first time we see not just resistance, but anger. In addition, he brings up images of freedom, dignity, and truth. Freedom because “everything’s openly displayed.” Dignity because he walks in “proudly.” Truth because there is no “hypocrisy.” They are all summarized, however, in his sigh of relief as he crosses that threshold, “aahhh!!” It is my contention that his relief refers us back to Williams (1989) and Foucault (1990a), and is a form of “speaking sex.” It speaks directly to the

compulsion to speak one's secrets, one's truths. For Williams, pornography speaks sex to our society. I would argue that the people who enjoy porn, especially to the extent that Darryl and many men in my sample do, embrace and identify that speech as their own. This is not the sanctioned and shameful sexual speech of the confessional, however, nor of any other mainstream sexual discourse.

Concepts such as freedom, dignity, and truth typically direct us toward notions of "sexual liberation." Although pornography may facilitate people's exploration of sexual issues, identities, practices, pleasures, knowledge, and possibilities, it is not likely to provide a concrete path to a some form of permanent liberation. Furthermore, it may not do any of these things for many people, nor is it likely to be an effective means of self-exploration if used to the exclusion of other means.

Up to this point, the discussion of resisting shame has been about men who have a radically different internal experience from that which they project externally. Thus, for those who are only observing men in peep-shows, this internal resistance is impossible to recognize. Bright (Bright and Juno, 1991) gives us a possibility of an affable and more overt resistance when she complains about the unwritten rules of men's porn houses:¹⁰ "'No laughing, no giggling, no gossiping' – and that's just no *fun!*" (p. 205). Bright wants a social, giggling, sexy intimacy seemingly impossible for the loners in a men's porn shop. However, this defiant, external, *social* expression of fun, play, and pleasure is exactly what my respondent Bart does. His is a complex picture, however. When he goes to the peeps alone he obeys the rule of silent utilitarianism; he's in his shell like so many others. Indeed, Bart often feels a great deal of shame about porn. He says that he hates buying porn in a bodega when "cute girls are hanging around. It's like I've got a

big L on my forehead for Loser.” But he also goes to the peeps and theaters with a friend. When they go together, they speak directly to Bright’s plea.

We would go to Show World, get into the [circular stages¹¹] on opposite sides and wave at each other, laugh and point at other guys, “Hey check him out.” I’m sure we annoyed a lot of people. We used to go to this place with all these shit eating videos and piss videos, and we’d laugh at the titles, we’d yell across the store: “Hey look at this, *Poo Poo Platter*.” We were annoying to the raincoat crowd [he mimics trying to hide]. But if you view it out of context, as an outsider, you see it as absurd and ridiculous....

There’s very little humor in it, I think most of that goes back to the way that people are, people in the U.S. are, about sex, so uptight about it. This friend of mine, both his parents are from Europe, maybe that helped. He was amazingly blasé about the whole thing. He saw the absurdity in it, and he helped me see it too. More people should....

Bart’s story brings to mind Garfinkel (1967), who intentionally breached accepted codes of conduct in order to interpret and analyze the micro-level normative/moral rules that govern everyday life. As Bart says: “we were doing everything wrong.” Thus, with his friend, Bart breaks out of his silent shell, and, in his own words, “takes it apart” and “demystifies it,” through loud and obnoxious humor. His demystification of porn and the behavior of its fans does not make porn a joke for him. He masturbates with pornography regularly, follows many stars, gets periodicals, has gone to see stars dance, and gotten autographs. Thus, he can see porn as an insider, as a fan, but he can also step outside it, laugh at it, hold it at bay, and criticize it.

The social scene that Bright (Bright and Juno, 1991) pictures is perhaps not as raucous as Bart’s, but their mutual emphasis on laughter is key. What does laughter accomplish in a setting so silent and so serious? In his book *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin (1984) develops a picture of the bawdy humor of Rabelais, its reflection in the folk humor of medieval carnival and festival, and how it served to relieve tensions of encroaching Christian asceticism and social control. Much of Rabelais’ humor is of the

“lower stratum of the body” (p. 21), a style Bakhtin describes as “grotesque realism.”

Bakhtin writes: “The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, and abstract” (p. 19). Kipnis (1996) uses this model to great effect in her analysis of *Hustler* magazine and its relentless attacks on Jerry Falwell (among others). She suggests that *Hustler*'s fascination with the lower stratum of the body is Rabelaisian: “assholes, monstrous and gigantic sexual organs, body odors ..., anal sex, and anything that exudes from the body: piss, shit, semen, menstrual blood...” (p. 132-3). Bart's humor is right in line with these observations.

Even more important than the content of his humor is, as Bright (Bright and Juno, 1991) suggests, the humor itself.¹² Foucault (1990a) says that our society speaks sex through the discourses of religion, medicine, psychology, and the state. Similarly, Bakhtin (1984) argues that seriousness was the mandated tone of these discourses in the middle ages. “Laughter was eliminated from religious cult, from feudal and state ceremonials, etiquette, and from all the genres of high speculation. An intolerant, one-sided tone of seriousness is characteristic of official medieval culture” (p. 73). But this does not mean that there was an untroubling split between official culture and the popular culture of carnival, where laughter and bawdy humor were sanctioned. According to Bakhtin, there were on-going conflicts about the allowance and nature of carnival culture. Thus, officials were not satisfied with excluding laughter from the official culture alone, but wanted to impose their somberness universally. “Only permanent seriousness, remorse and sorrow for one's sins befit the Christian” (Bakhtin, p. 73). The extent of shame in men's porn shops, the uniformity of the men's silence in the face of Bart's humor, and Bart's own shame, all point to the relevance of these issues today. Bakhtin's

argument is that humor, especially bawdy humor, is a weapon of Rabelais' and of common people to temporarily depose the mighty. By laughing in the face of the porn fans' codes of conduct, Bart defied a broad history of official culture that has told us just how we can speak sex. As Bart says: "we committed the ultimate sin, we didn't take it seriously, we were loud, we were having fun."

At the same time though, Rabelais and *Hustler* aimed their barbs at the mighty, the spiritual, those who would put themselves above common people. Who does Bart's humor bring down though? What does it accomplish? Clearly, he has no power to affect the mighty. Is he, as he says himself, just "upsetting the raincoat crowd"? The theater audience is the first target of Bart's humor. And their refusal to rise to the occasion, in Bart's words, made them "even better targets." Their efforts to impose the seriousness of sexual speaking, the somberness of the sexual scene, indicates the depth of their socialization and their acceptance of these tones. In their silence, they endorse their own somberness, shame, and remorse.

Bart's humor doesn't hit specific people in high places, but it does defy (albeit without being heard) the official culture and by extension its representatives – the Jerry Falwells, the Rudi Guilianis, who uphold the long tradition that would silence or use serious tones for sexual speaking. But as Bakhtin (1984) argues, "Laughter liberates not only from external censorship, but first of all from the great interior censor" (p. 94). As the external censors, both audience members and the representatives of official culture, act on Bart, he responds defiantly by laughing out loud, and as they maintain their disapproving silence he laughs ever harder again! He can defy the external censors, but he has little effect on them. However, his laughter also speaks to him internally.

contesting the “interior censor” which is, in essence, the internalization of official culture, sociologically speaking, effective socialization. Laughing in the face of official culture, its representatives, and adherents, is a challenge to conformity, subordination, and to their power and righteousness. It is resistance, however temporary. Bart can challenge their admonitions, at least having some relief from those embedded in him.

There is a still another target (though again unheard) of Bart’s humor. As he describes it:

There was this one time when we went to this gigantic movie theater, obviously built at the turn of the century, beautiful balcony, most beautiful theater I’ve ever seen, and there’s just a bunch of guys sitting there watching porno of all things! Staring like mental patients at the screen, it’s just ridiculous. And lets face it, everybody goes because penis worship is the big thing, and everything centers around the pop-shot. So that’s obviously the finale, so we figure, ok, that’s the grand finale, we’ll stand up and start applauding “woo woo!” And the fact that no one else shares in the joke makes it even funnier. The fact that these people sit there all shocked and horrified makes us do it more, they’re even better targets.

When Bart and his friends stand and applaud, whistling and hooting during the money shot, they are defiling the sacred in pornography. The money shot is the culmination of virtually every scene in gay and straight mainstream pornography (aside from so-called “girl/girl” scenes). The only people to question its prominence have been some of the women (though not all) who make video pornography, Candida Royalle and Gloria Leonard most prominently. For Williams (1989) it is one of the defining features of contemporary pornography and a central means by which it speaks sex. To laugh at the money shot defiles the definitive conventions of the form, thus the product itself, the male producers, and its male-centered pleasure principle. Bart’s observation that “penis worship is the big thing, and everything centers around the pop-shot,” was a very common observation among my participants – the dimwitted predictability and numbingly repetitive nature of much of men’s pornography.

Yet, Bart should not be seen as a completely clear-headed critic of the mores of pornographic practices in our society. My sense is that much of his humor is shame-based and may reflect some deep self-hatred. His scornful humor and attacks are aimed at other fans, but they are people like him. To draw a comparison, homophobic attacks often originate in the attackers' hatred of their own homosexual feelings. Bart's derisive, arrogant humor may reflect contempt for the self, therefore, as much as contempt for the other (or the other's ways). On the other hand, laughter works differently from violent attack, it has different potential. Laughter such as Bart's can negate the aspects of the self, but can also be derisive in a light-hearted way, freeing oneself to some extent from the seriousness required by the ideology of original sin.

Resistance to shame points to the possibility of moving beyond shame. Although I do not want to imply by this that all the men in my sample would necessarily abandon shame, were that a choice, I will argue in the following section that this may be taking place in a number of different ways, including sexual information, gay culture, and the care of the self.

D. BEYOND SHAME? PART I: LEARNING FROM PORNOGRAPHY

There are two types of learning that I will discuss here. First is using pornography as a source of sexual information. Second, for gay men specifically, learning about gay sexual culture from pornography. Sexuality and gay sexual culture have silence in common, and pornography speaks loudly about both.

1. Sexual information.

I asked, "Why do you use porn?" A common reason men gave was that they learn from it. Learning from porn came in a variety of forms. The most obvious thing to

learn from porn is the mechanics of doing sex, and this was a common response. Perhaps less obvious, others included developing sexual openness by exposure to a wide variety of sexual practices. A few men developed a racial openness by seeing interracial sex. Learning about oneself was a significant experience for many men. Finally, a number of gay men reported learning about gay culture through pornography.

The public discourse on pornography and sexual learning is split in a number of ways. The social-psychologists are concerned with answering the basic question itself: Do men learn from pornography? Anti-pornography feminists, however, insist that men learn a great deal from pornography. Morgan (1980), for example, argues that men learn one thing from pornography: how to rape (see also Beneke, 1982). For these feminists, men learn by example to hate women, to brutalize women, and that women like it, that sexual inequality is right, that enacting even violent fantasies with women is fun, and that women like enacting any and all scenarios from porn (Dworkin, 1974, 1979; MacKinnon, 1987, 1993; Russell, 1998; Stoltenberg, 1989).

Other feminists have argued that pornography provides many benefits (McElroy, 1995; Tisdale, 1994). But they are writing for and about women, not men. Steinberg (1990), however, recognizes the learning potential of pornography when he writes, "Porn films ... offer real learn-by-watching information (the information we should all receive as emerging adults, but don't) on all kinds of sexual practices – as long as we bring a critical eye to tell the fake from the real (there's plenty of both), and the friendly from the nasty (also both well-represented)" (p. 57). His emphasis on maintaining a critical eye contrasts with MacKinnon's view of sex and thought as being antithetical. More

importantly though, his sense that people need real and basic sexual information is right in line with the concerns of the men I interviewed.

Before we discuss what these men gleaned from pornography, it is important to understand the context in which they came to pornography. When many of these men were boys, their sexual ignorance was profound. For example, several men describe the fear that they “broke something” the first time they had orgasm. Nate who was 16 or 17 at the time, described his experience:

The first time I came it scared the hell out of me, I thought I had broken something. I didn't do anything for a week or two, then I figured it was ok. The next time when I did it, I prepared the room, and put on some clean underwear just in case I was going to die.

The fact that Nate thought something was broken is bad enough, but that he thought he might *die* because of orgasm or masturbation is astonishing. Though some did have sex education classes, not a single person in my sample said they were useful. As Lester puts it, “Sex Ed taught the birds and the bees, but not how to please a partner.” Certainly not all teenage boys who look at or read pornography are trying to discover how to please a partner. For other boys, sexual information was less about girls than it was about their relationships with other boys. Ray says, “I would learn things from the magazines that I would tell my friends in the street. I was king of the mountain.” But I would argue that many boys (and girls for that matter) go to porn with an intense sexual curiosity. After all, our society provides a great deal of sexual titillation but scant, if any, useful sexual information. Clay describes how, when he was a boy, reading in particular was helpful because it gave him a some clues about possible sexual scenarios that might take place between a couple.

Reading the stories [in *Penthouse*], although they're apocryphal, they were very exciting to someone who was trying to unravel the mystery of sex. How do

people actually do it? How do they meet each other? How do they decide what they're gonna do? How does it end, you know? It was very important to read at least some explanation of how it could happen.

From his testimony, Clay is not interested in the facts of sex or its mechanics. For Clay, the "mystery of sex" is more complex. He wants to know how people "meet" and "decide" a course of sexual action. These are relationship questions. He wants to know about the process of a sexual *encounter*. His other questions round out his concerns by forming a full narrative of a sexual encounter. How do people "actually do it." then finally "How does it end?" Clay is searching for a sexual story that he has not been told, and probably never will be told. All he has is questions, but for him and many others, his only source of information is pornography.

Kelly also cited pornography's sexual information as its most valuable asset. He says:

A lot of men are like 'wham bam thank you ma'am, you know, as long as I get my nut off, fuck you.' But if you look at porn as a learning experience, it can teach you how to, as they say, make love to woman, because anyone can stick their dick in and fuck away.

<So what did you get out of it?>

A lot of guys want to go right to the sex, but with foreplay you can get that woman to want to rape the living shit out of you. Start kissing her neck and ears, French kissing, go towards her nipples, but don't touch them, glide over them, quickly, don't suck on them right away or anything. When you start on the nipples, play with them with your tongue, suck on it a little, then go away from it for a little, then go back, that kinda pace. When you get down to her crotch, lick her outer lips, suck on them, kiss them, but her cunt lips, her inner lips, don't even touch them, at least not yet, you can breathe on her pussy, a hot breath'll send a shiver up her spine. Then you can start gently rubbing her clit just with your tongue, some girls say when they're shaved they feel a lot more because the hair stops some of the feeling. So if she's shaved you can rub where the hair used to be while you're licking her clit. Then I gently rub my cock on her clit and pussy lips, then slowly put just the head in. Each time I go in a little further, and a little further. I used to do this to my ex, and she was begging "fuck the shit out of me!" "fuck the shit out of me!"

<You got this from porn?>

Yea, watching guys as well as girls going down on the woman, just watching how they do what they do. You got to have a good eye, don't think of it as jerk-off material, you look at it, like, "Sam's Home Repair Video"

<Sort of a "how-to" sex vid>

Yea,

<But so much porn is just "wham bam thank you ma'am" type movies.>

Say you have a four hour tape there's one thing that might stand out. Over years of watching how the women or the guys touch a woman, I look at that and see how they do that, to try to make the woman feel like she's the center of attention, like she's special.

There are a number of interesting issues in this story. First, his story may lead some to believe that this is a typically pornographic masculine sexuality (Brod, 1990; Stoltenberg, 1989). That is, all technique and mechanical performance, void of the uniqueness of the other, no listening or communication. There are clear elements of sexual braggadocio and the masculine authoritative voice. However, he says throughout the interview that he's a "family-oriented guy" and once that "sex is there, but it takes a back seat to the relationship." He also informed me that he and his long time girlfriend had recently broken up. In this context, his use of the phrase "home repair video" is quite meaningful. This seems to be a narrative by someone who gets intense pleasure out of giving pleasure.

As such, Kelly does not use the term "rape" to denote brutality. Rape for him is about being overpowered, to be sure, not by violent attack, however, but by the complete control of out-of-control ecstasy. It is about shifting a perhaps ambivalent sexual encounter into complete intention. This porn-rape formula is the converse of the anti-pornography feminist formula of rape and pornography. That is, he clearly wants to

“rape the living shit out of” the woman he’s with, but rather than learning how to rape from pornography, he has learned to tease the woman so effectively that she wants to “rape” him.

It is difficult to know if learning how to be a good lover is a rationalization that Kelly makes for himself, or if it is for the benefit of the researcher. This same rationale is used by Radway’s (1984) romance novel readers as well. Radway argued that pleasure is not a valued aspect of our culture, and her women, experiencing guilt about their reading habits, resort to a more socially acceptable way of spending time: education. It is tempting to argue that Kelly’s “real” voice is missing because he’s speaking via the discourse of education: an acceptable means by which we can speak about sex (that is, it is a subset of official discourse on sexuality). For example, he never says explicitly, “I like porn for the sex” or “because it makes me come,” though many others in my sample do. At the same time, however, how much more explicit could he be? He goes on at some length about *exactly* what he likes: sex. Thus, under the guise of education, he has license to speak in a completely explicit voice. Via the voice of education Kelly speaks sex with unmatched enthusiasm. Via socially accepted discourse he is “allowed” to say all he wants about his sexual pleasure. Also of interest is that this is not “really” the voice of sex education. He has co-opted this discourse to his own speech, indeed, his sex education is not only productive, it is sex-positive and very pleasurable.

To summarize, it is clear here, and throughout this dissertation, that men learn a great deal from pornography. Thus, the question is not whether or not men learn, but: *what* do they learn? These men’s private fantasies, their desires for interpersonal sex, and their actual sexual practices are influenced by pornography. Furthermore, many fans

want to, and do, enact scenarios they see in porn with their partners. However, the evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates that these influences are not harmful, men are not learning brutality or sexism from pornography. They appear to be learning basic information, variations, and possibilities for private fantasies and mutually pleasurable sexual encounters.

There is not a simple answer to this question, however. The issue of sexism and pornography will be discussed in detail in Chapter VI of this dissertation. In the following section, I will outline ways that specifically gay men learned from porn.

2. Gay Men's Culture.

In some ways the bisexual, gay, and straight men that I interviewed were not that different from each other. In much of this chapter I have integrated these men's voices rather seamlessly. It has not been evident so far when someone is gay, straight, or bisexual, unless specifically noted. As one might expect, however, there are significant differences between these disparate groups as well as similarities. One of the primary differences is that a number of gay and bisexual men noted that gay pornography is an unrecognized document of gay men's history. Mario emphasized again and again this aspect of porn in his life. Asked to give examples he says:

You can look at porn from all sorts of different levels. The social aspect is really interesting to me, a lot of these films show you different venues in which to meet people, in both sexual or non-sexual roles. It showed me a lot about what kinds of clubs are out there for different people. I look at it like a documentary, you can learn from it. This is a whole life-style that's documented on film. Yes, you may have two guys fucking, but what else is happening?, what's happening before?, what's happening after?, what type of language are they using? You can get more out of it, it's not just sexual.

I have films that go back 20 years, and you can see a difference in the culture. Those movies were either always in bathhouses, or dungeons, or warehouses, this and that. Now films are, like, on the beach! Since Stonewall, gay society has moved up a few notches. You see gay men that are not looked at as sex fiends,

bums, alcoholics, or drug addicts, but you see them as people in society now, and these films make reference to that. There's a lot of things you learn from these films.

Mario sees a social history of gay culture in pornography – the progress that gay society has made, and its reflection in gay porn. He wants to emphasize that porn is not *only* sexual, but a documentary of gay life that has spanned decades. On the one hand, it documents the everyday life of gay men as well as a “whole life-style:” gay men’s language, their attitude and manner, dress styles, cities and neighborhoods they live in, the types of clubs they frequent. Furthermore, there is a broad history of gay life in America that Mario points to as well. This is the history of the gay community, its coming out, and legitimization. Gay porn documents the transition from being represented as social outcasts to “people in society.”

In his study of gay male video porn, John Burger (1995) takes up this point explicitly. Drawing on the work of the Popular Memory Group, Burger posits gay porn as a form of popular culture which produces history outside of, and beyond the limits of, typical academic history writing. Gay porn functions as history in two ways: first, it resituates gay men into social contexts in which they have always been, but only invisibly – he cites the California Gold Rush and the U.S. Armed Forces. Second, and apropos of Mario’s observations, gay videos “also document current gay-specific social conditions, such as bar life, nightclubs, bath houses, and so on” (Burger, 1995, p. 34). Burger is clear that such history writing is inadvertent, an unintended consequence of pornographic production. He assumes that many viewers are probably unaware of this history, yet, cautiously, he hypothesizes that some viewers may well be aware of an “indirect history lesson” in gay video (p. 34). Mario proves him right.

Pornography is certainly not the only source of information on gay history and culture. Neither Burger (1995) or Mario is suggesting otherwise. But both these men argue one of the central themes of this dissertation, that there is more to pornography than sex. Evan has a similar understanding of the importance of gay porn to gay social life. However, nicely complementing Mario and Burger, he emphasizes the importance of the sex itself. Evan says:

Before this revolution in gay porn, I don't think we knew how to be with each other. Porn has set the standard and the dynamic of a whole culture. Pre-Stonewall we had only models of straight society, but now porn is mainstream and wide spread, now people can see how two men make love, the image of that has created a whole other level of how gay men interact with each other in their culture. The more creative and exploratory these videos become it reflects back onto everyone's idea as to what's the norm of making love to a man.

Like Mario, Evan speaks of porn as an integral part of gay culture. In Evan's words, porn gives gay men a model of "how to be with each other," for Evan it provides a sexual model, for Mario it provides a social model (obviously within a sexual context). These models help the gay community make its own rules and to distinguish itself from rules of straight society. Indeed, Evan implies that the creative and exploratory nature of porn will continue to influence and shift the norms of gay men's love making. This is a formidable power. Porn can "set the standard ... of a whole culture." The veracity of this assertion is not at issue here, but what it indicates about the power of porn in Evan's life. The significance of representing gay sexuality and gay society openly cannot be overstated. These men's feelings point toward a central issue in many gay men's experience of porn: porn as an affirmation of gay sexuality (Clark, 1990). As Evan says, porn is the only model of men making love in this society. For gay men to see gay porn is to see an endorsement homosexual desire, possibly for the first time. These men provide a clear example of potential movement away from shame in their understanding

of porn as an affirmative power in their lives. The affirmation of one's sexual being is important for everyone in a sex-phobic society, bisexual, gay, and straight (though these three are far from equal). This theme, and its relative, pleasure for the sake of pleasure, will be developed in the following section for more than just the gay men in my sample.

E. BEYOND SHAME? PART 2. THE CARE OF THE SELF

This chapter has mapped various aspects of the social control of sexualities and pornography, including: shame, resistance to shame, and possible movement away from shame, especially through sexual learning. In this section, we will explore more evidence of movement beyond shame through what I call the Care of the Self.

According to our society's current conceptual framework, movement away from shame would probably lead towards sexual "freedom." However, just as shame is complicated by pleasure and suffering, freedom is also complicated. Simon and Gagnon (1986) write:

The puritan tradition created, as it were, a road map where the dimensions of self that were to be excluded from the everyday self or were denied full expression could rally, enriching the erotic and being enriched by the erotic, which is then to be experienced as having a domain, a license of its own" (p. 108-9).

Exploration of these "dimensions of self" might elicit shame for some, but one might also feel sexually free. In both cases, shame and freedom, pleasure is about defiance of control, yet there is an important distinction to be made. The pleasure in shame is sexual excitement specifically because sex is bad, not allowed. As argued previously, for one to feel shame one must intrinsically accept to some degree our society's hierarchies of good and bad sex. The pleasure of feeling sexually free is also a response to social control, *but* it is an engagement with sexuality which emphasizes its rightness rather than its wrongness. In a nutshell, freedom says: "sex is good, so I like

it;” shame says: “sex is bad, so I like it.” In sexual freedom one enjoys a sexuality which *appears* authentic, but it is imperative to acknowledge how constructed that authenticity is, how it, just like shame, is sutured to the social control of sexuality. To put it another way, how much is the pleasure of sexuality about the pleasure of being free to feel sexual, to have the “license” to which Simon and Gagnon (1986) refer? Once again, pleasure is amplified due to the social control of pleasure.

Thus, shame and sexual freedom are *not* mutually exclusive; they are both present in much of our sexual experience. One can easily slip back and forth between them, even within the same sexual episode. Even Remi, in the throes of his most shameful Nazi fantasy, is clearly giving himself license and freedom to feel things which are disallowed. Nevertheless, the men in this section appear to emphasize sexual freedom and care of the self rather than sexual shame and the self-loathing that can accompany it. The section begins by discussing affirmation of the sexual self and ends with a discussion of self-love.

1. Affirmation of the Sexual Self

Clark (1990) argued from personal experience that gay men often experience gay porn as an affirmation of their sexuality. Affirmation is a private experience, a personal acknowledgment of one’s sexuality; like coming out, a public declaration, it is an on-going process (Sedgwick, 1990). I asked gay and bisexual men to respond to a quote from Clark’s article, in which he described his first experience seeing gay porn:¹³

I think I remember that first [gay porn magazine I saw]: [one picture was of] two men embracing on a dock, no genitals visible, one man with one eye partially open, looking at the viewer. There were stories and real-life fantasies and occurrences, all for my pleasure. It, and my masturbation viewing it, was an *affirmation* of my gay sexuality (Clark, 1990, p. 281).

There were a number of different reactions to this statement, on the negative extreme Thor said, "Porn never did that for me, I never needed it to feel good about being gay." He was always sexually active and completely out since early in high school. Adolescence is a difficult time for many gay men (see Monette, 1992). Buster tells a different story, more in line with Clark's (1990) experience:

Definitely, pornography definitely affirmed my gayness. I'll tell you my heart gets caught in my throat when I think about having gone through life and seeing nothing, and then seeing two men kissing on "Tales of the City," and to see that Ikea commercial with two men collecting furniture together, or my first gay parade, getting together and saying we are here. I live for even the slightest suggestion that I am valid, that I am not the only one.

For anyone who feels sexuality is central to his or her identity, bisexual, gay, or straight, affirmation is vital. The phrase, "I'm a very sexual person," was commonplace in my interviews regardless of sexual preference. Pornography may or may not be a common thread for "very sexual people" in our society, but for the men I interviewed it was critical. As Gale, a straight man, says about pornography's sexually affirmative power:

Everyone has apprehensions about sex, being open about sex. Pornography has given me the freedom to accept my desires, to accept the fact that it's ok, it's ok to be a sexual being. For 90 percent of the time I'm alive, I'm a sexual being, and that's fine. Before I had sexual experiences, [porn] initiated me into sexuality. I didn't have an easy time, I didn't have a terrible time either, but I in no way acknowledged my desire.

Pornography speaks to sexual people because it is stories about sexual people. It portrays sexual people in complete and uninhibited rapture, entirely without shame or destructive consequence. Queen (1997) writes that: "using pornography ... is above all a way of *acknowledging desire*. It's a way of thinking about sex, a way of asserting to oneself that sex is good – or if that is going too far, that one wants it anyway" (p. 144-5, my emphasis). She also calls attention to the need to "honor desire" (p. 145). What

models do we have which honor desire? We live in a society of contradiction about sexuality. It is about titillation and silence, speaking and admonition, thrill and consequent shame. I would never suggest that pornography transcends these contradictions, indeed, it is part and parcel of them, solidly on one side of the dichotomy of repression and liberation. In this sense, pornography services traditional constructions of sexuality. Though far from perfect, it can affirm the pleasures of the sexual and the legitimacy of being sexual for those that chose to indulge it. As such, it may help some of these people move beyond sexual shame.

So far in this discussion we have only spoken of being sexual in the abstract. In the following section we will examine some of the sexual practices of these men when they masturbate with pornography.

2. Self love

In this chapter I have contrasted the typical portrayal of furtive and shameful porn use with what I believe are radically different images. In this section I will discuss two aspects of what I have come to call self-love with pornography. One is about escape from everyday life, the other is about masturbation.

a. Escape and "Private Time for Me"

In Radway's (1984) work on romance novel readers, one of the primary reasons that women gave for their pleasure with romance was escape. Radway argued that these women's lives were unfulfilled, and that their personal needs were not met in their relationships. The women she interviewed, whether they worked outside the home or not, took care of their husband's and children's needs before their own. Her primary informant noted that there was a time when, if asked what she did all day, she could list

only tasks that she did for others. Reading romance novels allowed these women to withdraw into a private world where they could, at least through fantasy, attend to their own needs. Radway says that romance novels transport readers to a place that is “*different* from ordinary existence. Not only is it a relaxing release from the tensions of everyday problems and responsibilities, but it creates a time or space within which a woman can be entirely on her own, preoccupied with her personal needs, desires, and pleasure” (p. 61). Because many of her women read religiously everyday, Radway argues that the psychological needs that romance novels meet are strong indeed.

Note the remarkably similar phrasing used by my participants (bisexual, gay, and straight) to explain why they enjoyed pornography.

August: You’re in your own sanctuary, your own space, both mentally and physically. I make that time for myself.

Gale: It’s my private moment, and with my private moment I can make it last as long as I want. I don’t want to call it meditative, but it is, in some way, it’s just letting that movie take me.

Evan: How often can I really say that I have time and space in my day just for me? With porn, that’s when it’s really just for me, and I have to cherish and honor that time, because it’s my time, and no one else is going to tell me how to use it, or how to be, or how to think or anything, it’s just for me.

Kendall: It’s more than just sitting down and watching a porno, it’s my time, ok, this is just me, you know what I mean?

Clay: It allows me for a certain period of time to live unfettered by whatever it is I feel that’s constraining me at the time, whether it’s work, social convention, or my relationship situation at that point. It’s an opportunity to create a world that works really well for me.

Buster: It’s a treat, you know, and a retreat, away from everything else. I won’t pick up the phones, I won’t answer the door, whatever, it’s my time, it’s my way of dealing with who I am. I haven’t always liked who I was, like when I was young, the confusion of not knowing whether I was gay or straight. But I like who I am now, so this is just a total release of pleasure and excitement for *me*.

Some readers may ask: What needs do men have to meet, if women are taking care of them? But as noted, these men are bisexual, gay, and straight, and many are not in relationships. But more important, in today's strict and unforgiving work environment, in which men *and* women work more and more hours every year (Schor, 1991), there is a simple desire to escape, to have some respite from the rat-race of modern capitalism. Pornography allows men to attend to their needs through fantasy, just as Radway's women do with stories of romance.

The image of women curling up with a book or taking a bubble bath to escape is commonplace. Images of men's escape, however, typically involve wilderness achievement (scaling peaks, for example), or expensive automobiles careening around country roads with smiling men behind the wheel, or SUVs splashing through puddles in the outback. The *men outside/women inside* pattern is a typical (re)production of public/private gender divisions. The pornography fans above, however, are speaking a language of private, domestic tenderness, and an embodied, sensual self-love and nurturance that is worlds apart from the public performance of most masculinities. These are men's voices that we simply do not hear, and as will become increasingly clear, this is not an uncommon experience among the fans I interviewed.

My respondent Quoyle, who runs a small business by himself, provides us with a working class perspective on this issue.

I'd have to say that my day is not an easy day, and this is a kind of relaxation, just like the way a lot of people would come home and open up a beer and watch TV. One thing that I notice about sex and pornography is that it gives me a chance to turn off my brain, forget things, get the routine off your mind, get into a different dimension.

As a working class man struggling economically, Quoye brings to mind the quiet desperation of the working-class American families in Rubin's (1976) *Worlds of Pain*. The anger and frustration in her interviews are present in Quoye as well. If Kimmel (1996) is right that work is tied tightly to masculine identity, where does that leave Quoye and men like him? Rubin did not explore sex outside the heterosexual bedroom. The men she interviewed said they attained a sense of creativity and mastery through non-sexual physical activities: repair projects around the house, fixing cars. One man reported to her that such activity takes the poison out of his system. For Quoye, a bisexual man who lives by himself, masturbation has become a basic part of his leisure time activity. It allows him an experience more akin to Radway's readers, the ability to "get into a different dimension." Quoye's experience is imaginative, but because of its sexual nature, his pleasure is *embodied* rather than just imagined.

Both Rubin (1976) and Cancian (1987) argue that sex is a primary way in which men express love to their partners, rather than the typically "feminized love" which emphasizes verbal communication. If sex is a critical part of many men's *emotional* lives, and possibly one of the central ways in which they express love to others, it is also a form of *self-love*. A single man, Quoye nurtures himself with sex through pornography. But why do men in relationships need nurturance from pornography? The same question can be asked of Radway's readers. Radway found that they read romance novels because their marriages do not provide the nurturance they desire and need. Presumably, many men experience the same lack in their relationships, and go to pornography.

However, dissatisfaction is not the only reason men in long-term relationships enjoy pornography. Self-love, masturbation, fantasy, and escape, practiced alone, provide special types of nurturance that *no one else* can provide. Masturbation is a sexual space in which one need not worry about another's needs. There are no negotiations or need to perform, according to numerous men in my sample. Patt, professional, upper-middle class, and married, provides us with an example.

So if I touch myself, and I'm reading about this great lady giving a guy a great massage, and sucking his cock, then, you know, I can see myself in that spot, doing massage, and I can see myself getting it and being touched. It's so necessary.

<So what's the most important aspect of your enjoyment of porn and fantasy?>

I think the escape. It's a momentary escape, might only be fifteen minutes, but it's an escape, and I'm healthier because of it.

In his interview, Patt emphasized his need for touch, nurturing, and nourishment. He was angry at society's obsession with work and its domination over everyday life. Were his relationship able to provide the escape and the sensual pleasure that he craves, Patt might be less frustrated. Unfortunately, his relationship with his wife is limited sexually, physically, and emotionally. Pornography provides him with an escape from his personal and professional life. Fantasy is the place, as it is for Radway's women readers, where he can be himself, do what he wants to do, live the way he wants to live, and meet his physical, sexual, and emotional needs.

The common themes between romance readers and porn fans are quite apropos for Patt and his wife: Each night as they go to bed, she reads romance novels and he reads porn. Both in their own worlds, both uncommunicative to the other about what they need, both creating private space for themselves, excluding the other. Patt says: "I'm living vicariously in my porn like she is in her romance novels. Crazy isn't it?"

Escape is only one aspect of self-love, however. One of the central differences between Radway's women and my respondents is that the fantasy entered into is not simply narrative imagination but is *embodied* in sexual practice through masturbation. In the following section, I will discuss some of the masturbation practices that my men engaged in.

b. Pornography is the theory, masturbation is the practice.

One of the most striking things about the pornographies discourse is the silence about masturbation. As Zilbergeld (1992) notes, it has been only 30 years since the American Medical Association dropped its opposition to masturbation, and tensions continue today. Jocelyn Elders was fired from her post as Surgeon General of the United States in 1994 for her suggestion that children should be taught about masturbation in school. In the recent comprehensive sex survey conducted by Laumann et al. (1994), questions on masturbation (among other things¹⁴) were reserved for a self-administered questionnaire (the humor in this was lost on the authors), so as to reduce tension and get more reliable data. Men don't always masturbate when they look at or read pornography, and pornography does more for men than sexually stimulate them, but it is a fundamental aspect of men's pornographic experience.

Haldeman (1996), Hite (1981), and Rhodes (1992) comprise the few explicit discussions of men's masturbation practices. Hite's is probably the most detailed report of what men actually do when they masturbate. Unfortunately, she treats masturbation and pornography as discrete categories; there is little discussion of the linkage of sexual pleasure to pornography. Haldeman believes masturbation has potential to challenge hegemonic definitions of masculinity. Through masturbation men can create a space to

listen to their bodies, which he contends is fundamentally different from all other men's bodily activity. He rejects masturbation with pornography, however, as reinforcing hegemonic and sexist definitions of masculinity. Rhodes is to my knowledge the only example of a man who has written a detailed description of himself masturbating with pornography. He begins by saying that when he masturbates, it's difficult to capture the experience in words. But then he says, "I realized where I am when I'm stimulating myself. I'm in my body, bodily" (p. 102). He writes eloquently of being "drunk on images," "stroking myself up to the edge of ejaculation and dropping back down" only to repeat the cycle again and again, of his concert with the couple on screen, "their cries are my cries, their pleasure is my pleasure" (p. 102-3).

My respondents deeply enjoyed the sensual, erotic, languid pleasure of their bodies, a sexual experience that is absent not only from discussions of pornography, but also from models of men's corporeal pleasures in general. These tend to focus on display, endurance, and pushing the body to almost masochistic edges, as in sports (Haldeman, 1996; Messner, 1992; P. Smith, 1989). Stereotypically, cock monopolizes men's sexual pleasure. But in masturbation though certainly central, cock is not the only part of the male body that elicits pleasure (Haldeman, 1996; Hite, 1981; Rhodes, 1992). Robin learned from sexual method videos to treat himself like his "own love-making partner." He uses masturbation with pornography as an opportunity to "let me get in touch with my own body and what I like."

There are parts of my body that never came into sexual play before, at least not much, like my nipples, my ass, and my balls, even my arms, they're coming into play. Before, I just wanted to get my rocks off, but I learned that all these other parts of my body can be as much of a turn-on as playing with the shaft itself. I also like to come on myself, to feel myself come, if I hit myself in the neck or in the chest that's great. Continuing to jack-off and having the come as the

lubricant, I like that feeling a lot. The actual experience of coming is a very physical one, it's very sensual. I've even, a couple of times, positioned myself up against the wall, so I could come in my own mouth. I can't believe I'm telling someone this. But it was nice, to taste my own come, and to fantasize that maybe it was someone else's. On many occasions, I've played with my asshole, not all the time, but I'll be honest if I could reach it, I'd lick myself down there.

Through pornography, Robin became aware of the erotic potential of his own body, and others' bodies. He said that he always spent an "inordinate amount of time kissing my wife's nipples, sucking her tits," but he never thought of stimulating his own tits until he saw it done in gay pornography and his methods videos. Robin enjoys straight, gay and bisexual porn, but the latter two have widely expanded his repertoire of bodily pleasures. In these videos, men's bodily pleasure is the focus, especially, of course, in gay video. In mainstream straight porn, the male body is often, but not always, limited in its pleasures (rarely moving away from the cock, rarely being passive/receptive). The focus is predominantly on women's bodies and their pleasures, except for the come-shot. Women's bodies seem to "naturally" have multiple erogenous zones. The time that Robin takes for himself, this private world that he creates in masturbation and pornography, disrupts the phallo-centric constructions of men's pleasure. In his own words, before he used to "just want to get [his] rocks off," but now he's exploring, taking time, playing, enjoying, and in terms of pornography, interacting with its images to find things that appeal to him and his body's pleasure.

With the pleasure he takes in his come it is no wonder that Robin embraces porn. As Steinberg (1990) writes: "Pornography is the only arena ... that does not find sperm disgusting, that shows pictures of men ejaculating in slow motion, even as other films emphasize the beauty of birds flying or dolphins leaping" (p. 57).¹⁵ The image of Robin positioning himself upside down against the wall, masturbating, completely naked,

pornography rolling, cock poised over his face and mouth, anticipating his own orgasm, this is the spirit and image of uninhibited private space for shameless, sexual self-love via pornography. This is a space where Robin can give to himself what he needs. As a sensuous man, Robin is acutely aware of our society's taboos against the body, and he notes again and again how men and women are restrained from touching themselves during the working day. He talks about how his shirt will "brush up against my nipples and stimulate them" at work, and "even after I shit, sometimes, I wipe myself, the first couple of times is to clean up, but that third and fourth time is to get a thrill." He describes some of his days as little more than pent-up desire, thus, "when I am finally able to release it, I do it with a vengeance."

For highly sexual people like Robin, the corporeal pleasures of mainstream society, e.g. sport, may not be rewarding enough. Such pleasures are often oriented toward challenging and pushing the body rather than luxuriating in it and attending to it. In private masturbation in particular, with or without pornography, one can be attuned to the body and its pleasures (Haldeman, 1996; Zilbergeld, 1992). In what he calls "body-reflexive practices," Connell (1995) argues that the body can even achieve an "agency" (p. 61). He uses the example of a straight man in his sample, Don, who played with receiving anal stimulation from his girlfriend. Don's sudden experience and realization of intense pleasure, his "body's response," Connell argues, "had a directing influence on Don's sexual conduct" (p. 61). Connell continues: "This is not simply a matter of social meanings and categories being imposed on Don's body, though these meanings and categories are vital to what happens" (p. 62). Robin's ability to be playful and experimental with masturbation and pornography, to listen to his body's pleasures, is a

key aspect of the shameless nurturing and self-loving quality that masturbation and pornography can provide.

F. CONCLUSION

A number of important issues were raised in this chapter: learning from pornography, shame, and movement beyond shame. As stated, it is the centerpiece of the anti-pornography feminist argument that men learn violence against women from pornography. In this chapter, it was clear that fans learned about at least two things: sexuality (*getting sexual information, learning how to do sex*) and gay men's history and culture. The learning presented here was beneficial to these fans, and, from their accounts, did not appear to be harmful to women or men. This discussion will continue in Chapter VI, which takes up issues concerning sexism and hostility towards women. In each chapter of this dissertation, however, it will be apparent that men learn a tremendous amount from pornography in radically different ways.

More subtle types of learning were in evidence here as well. The affirmation of the sexual self, or learning the importance of one's sexuality took place for many men. In escape and giving oneself deep pleasure through masturbation with pornography, one inevitably learns about oneself – sexual tastes, one's body, the need for private time, the pleasures of the self. This kind of learning does not take place for every fan, but it was the case for many of my respondents. In the discussion of what fans learn from pornography, then, all the layers and type of learning must be accounted for.

Shame was the central theme of this chapter. In the arsenal of the social control of sexuality and pornography, shame is a primary weapon. Its power is ironic and complex. Irony is embodied in the fashionable argument that shame makes sex better.

For some of my respondents this is true, yet for these men, shame was also a source of great suffering. Furthermore, it is imperative to remember that shame is an extremely effective means of social control. These porn fans resisted shame, but there are multitudes who have vacant sex lives due to the power of shame.

As such, it is important to avoid romanticizing shame. Davis (1983), for example, argues that without taboo we would be no more interested in sex than animals. This argument displays little understanding of human society and culture. We have all sorts of physical and sensual pleasures without taboo: music, dance, food, massage, bathing, spas, sport. Do animals have cream sauces and fine wine, or donuts and coffee? Though it is impossible to know, sex without shame would likely be surrounded by elaborate traditions and practices just like these other sensual pleasures.

Movement beyond shame and away from the potential suffering it can cause is tricky. Sexual “freedom” is typically understood as the opposite of shame and taboo. Yet, the pleasure of freedom is predicated on, and structured by, the social control of sexualities, and thus, not true freedom at all. As Foucault (1990a) has argued, there is nothing outside power. Furthermore, as we have seen, shame can be the source of great pleasure, and can play an important role in defiance of sexual controls, even as it is a tool of those controls.

Nevertheless, there does appear to be evidence of movement towards a sexuality with pornography which emphasizes pleasure with less suffering than is caused by shame. These pleasures included the affirmation of the sexual self, escape and personal sexual time for self-love and nurturance, as well as sensual, elaborate, and playful masturbation.

Shame is an issue that deserves serious and nuanced treatment, especially regarding pornography and sexualities. Its power and presence was palpable in many of my interviews. The following chapter addresses an equally central issue in the discussion of pornography: fantasy. Its emphasis on the pleasure of pornography expands on those issues developed here.

G. ENDNOTES, CHAPTER IV

¹ The book is dedicated to the eight-year-old son of the publisher.

² Traci Lords made headlines for being underage in some of her first films. Her performances are now censored from these works, (note for example the odd vacancies in *The Grafenberg Spot*, 1985). The fact that Lords was of legal age soon thereafter, and her latter films remain uncensored, indicates that her early films hardly deserve the “child pornography” label with which they were attacked. Nevertheless, the implication in Bart’s narrative is that not only is he into pornography, but *child* pornography.

³ This is reflected in the response to my call for subjects. I received over 200 telephone calls in three days from a single ad in a popular NY newspaper.

⁴ The terms peep-show, peep-show house, porn shop, sex shop, are used synonymously.

⁵ Bright is a sex activist; English is a feminist activist/scholar; Friedman is a journalist; Kovel, Nawy, and Tewksbury are sociologists, popular, quantitative, and qualitative, respectively.

⁶ This phrase “men’s porn shops” does not mean that these shops are exclusively gendered. Women can, and do, go to these shops. The difference is that porn shops owned by women have a completely different emotional atmosphere, there is much less shame. There are exceptions, however. Gay men’s sex shops have a different feel from straight men’s, and the small chain of stores called “The Pleasure Chest” which appeals to all sexual orientations has made a serious effort to move away from the shame factor by having an enthusiastic and talkative sales staff.

⁷ This formula has limits, however. The taboo against child pornography, for example, is quite effective. It was the one marginalized pornography that not a single respondent admitted to seeing, and the one at which all but one respondent expressed disgust. My respondent Mickey said that he had had a very sexual childhood and would be interested in seeing child pornography if it were consensual.

⁸ It should be noted here that pornography that exploits images of Naziism is available, but very difficult to obtain. The images that Remi describes masturbating with are actually not pornography in the typical sense (though under my definition it is), but are R-rated, “sexploitation” films such as *Ilse*, *She Wolf of the SS*.

⁹ Buddy is a gay man who sometimes has anonymous sex in peep-show houses. Otherwise, meeting people in sex shops is quite rare.

¹⁰ In order to get some perspective on Bright’s comments, compare the atmosphere in sex shops owned and operated by women (in New York, Eve’s Garden and Toys in Babeland). Enthusiastic and talkative sales staff are readily available.

¹¹ These are porn world innovations in which a circular stage is surrounded by peep booths, on the outside it resembles an enclosed merry-go-round. Girls are on the stage in the center of the merry-go-round, dancing. Guys are in their individual booths surrounding the stage, beating. Because the stage is circular, fans can look across it and see other fans in other booths. This is what is important for Bart's narrative. I don't know of a fan term for these stages, Bart's words were awkward, so I chose "circular stages." This is a worker's term provided by my friend, former ShowWorld performer, "Delilah."

¹² As noted in the method section, laughter was a critical tool in the interviews to relax participants and indicate clearly that I am not ashamed, in fear of, or remorseful about sex, masturbation, or pornography, and that this will not be "that kind" of conversation.

¹³ Bisexual men were difficult in this section because I had quotes from gay writers and from straight writers. I gave bisexual men a quote depending on which form of porn they frequented most.

¹⁴ Income, number of sexual partners (couched in concerns about AIDS), abortion, sexual force, drug use.

¹⁵ See also Annie Sprinkle's *Sluts and Goddesses* video which features the pleasures of menstrual blood.

CHAPTER V. FLUIDITY AND BLURRED BOUNDARIES IN MEN'S FANTASIES WITH PORNOGRAPHY

A. INTRODUCTION

In her review of the anti-pornography feminist film *Not A Love Story*, Susan Barrowclough (1982) contends that there are three questionable assumptions about fantasy and the male viewer of pornography. Two of these are relevant to this chapter. First is the assumption that the male viewer's fantasy "is one and the same as the pornographic fantasy;" second, "There is one undifferentiated male viewer: all men react the same way, and all identify with the male point of view" (p. 32). While the second is self-explanatory, Barrowclough expands on the first by suggesting that the viewer's fantasies are probably rather vague and abstract. She asks, "Does the pornographer have it in his [sic] power to step into this hazy domain and colonize it?" (p. 32). Thus, rather than a literal and direct link between pornography and fantasy, Barrowclough suggests that there might be some distance between the two. She allows for interpretive and imaginative agency in viewers' fantasies with pornography. The literalism that Barrowclough criticizes crops up in different ways in much of the discourse on pornography. Lynne Segal's (1993) review of the social psychological research points to the "failure of these experiments even to consider the complex question of the relationship between fantasy and reality, between psychic arousal and behavior" (p. 13). Carol Vance's (1990) deconstruction of the Meese Commission hearings (as opposed to the published report) emphasizes that the "frame was always a literal one." She continues: "The idea that sexual images could be used and remain on a fantasy level was foreign to the commission" (p. 50-1). In

response to this problem, Judith Butler (1997) calls for “a feminist reading of pornography that resists the literalization of this imaginary scene” (p. 69).

This chapter, therefore, is not a cataloguing of fantasies, but a cultural and political interpretation of some men’s fantasies, based on the current climate and the state of discourse on pornography.

As a group, the men in my sample traverse numerous boundaries, but individual men also blur multiple boundaries within themselves. Their identities in fantasy constantly shift and fluctuate. In this way, the uniform male fantasy point of view assumed by much discourse on pornography is interrogated from two sides: men’s fantasies vary enormously as a group, and also, each man’s fantasies vary enormously. Thus, drawing on Butler (1990), I hope to “articulate the convergence of multiple sexual discourses at the site of ‘identity’ in order to render that category ... permanently problematic” (p. 128). By documenting fluid, creative, and interpretive processes of fantasy rather than concrete and literalistic ones, my research provides data that contests both the literalization of fantasy and a supposed homogeneous male point of view.

The implications are much broader than a response to anti-porn discourse. I will argue that pornographic practice and the fantasies that men produce hold unique potential to disrupt and destabilize fans’ understandings of their own gendered-sexed statuses. In Butler’s (1990) thought, the post-structuralist theme of repetition of performance is central.¹ The tenuous, constructed nature of gender requires *repeated* performance. Butler writes:

The abiding gendered self [is] structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional *discontinuity*, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this ‘ground.’ The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary

relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction” (p. 141).

This is a particularly interesting argument in the context of pornographic practice which is repeated again and again by its very nature. For example, if straight men sometimes take the position of the woman in their pornographic fantasies, the repetition intrinsic to pornographic practice constitutes not “occasional discontinuity,” as Butler would have it, but rather, *regular* discontinuity. Rather than the “possibility of a failure to repeat,” pornographic practice can become a time in which repetition of gendered performance can fail regularly, and even intentionally. Thus, fantasizing with pornography can become an opportunity to transgress and traverse boundaries, and indeed, that transgression is a source of profound pleasure for many men in my sample.

By no means am I suggesting, however, that staring at pornography will always lead to transgression of gender identity. It can just as easily tie into the *stabilization* of gender. This idea will be developed in the following chapter. In these instances, pornographic practices play an integral role in the repetition of gendered performances and contribute to the illusion of ordered and constant identity. The fantasies I will explore in this chapter purposefully do not.

When discussing sexual fantasy, it is important to avoid reification, as if it were isolated and unique to itself. Sexual fantasy must be placed in the broader context of desire in everyday life. The impetus for this contextualization comes from my participants. I was often surprised at the responses to my question, “what do you fantasize about?”:

August: “My career goals, where I’d like to be.”

Otto: “I build houses in my head sometimes, plans for the future. They’re fantasies because they’re never gonna happen, but it’s still fun to play around.”

Mario: "I fantasize a lot, my career is on an upswing and I think about the dream position or what would happen 'if.'"

Kelly: "I fantasize sexually a lot, but not as much as I do about boats or cars, or like space travel, thinking about a family."

Since I asked this question halfway into the interviews, I didn't feel the need to clarify it in terms of *pornographic* fantasy. It is possible that these men were reluctant to talk about sexual fantasies, but by this time they had already discussed deeply personal material with me. It was surprising that this question would elicit such a reversal. Like many of us, the men in my sample frequently daydream, but as pornography fans they might make a link between commonplace daydreaming, fantasy, and desire (sexual and non-sexual) that others may not. As one might expect, the daydreams above reflect each man's daily life and personal history. August dreams about his career in the arts, Mario about his movement up the middle-management ladder. Otto has recently become a father, and dreams of a house where his family life might unfold. Kelly's imagination shifts between sex, materialism, space travel, and family. Just as their personal histories lead them to daydream in specific and different ways, these men bring their own meanings and desires to pornographic fantasies. Sexual fantasies can be just as light-hearted as daydreams, but like interpretations of night dreaming, it is critical to allow for the unpredictable, disorienting, and disturbing in sexual fantasy. Pornographic fantasy dances delicately between the individual's everyday life, the imaginative unconscious, and the pornographic text itself.

The association of sexual fantasy with day and night dreaming raises a fundamental issue: the common distinction between fantasy and reality. This distinction must be problematized. The most common frame for this issue in discussions of pornography is "real" action derived from "unreal" fantasy. Robin Morgan's (1980) litany, "Pornog-

raphy is the theory, rape is the practice” might be seen as a summary of this dichotomy. Implicit in this model is the danger of acting on one’s desires, although fantasizing alone may be harmless. (Morgan would not agree with the latter.) In the United States, however, some fantasies *are* considered actions. Laura Kipnis (1996) documents the case of Daniel Thomas DePew, whose fantasies *alone*, of having sex with children, earned him a 30-year prison term.

Furthermore, as documented throughout this dissertation, fantasies have profound consequences in people’s lives. Fantasies are experiential and situational; they *impact* people. They can serve as a refuge, a relaxing, private, and safe place in which to escape, or as an affirmation of one’s sexuality, or a space for self-love. The current chapter will conclude with examples of how the fluidity of gendered categories in fantasy influence these men’s (real?) lives.

The concept of “reality” is as problematic as “fantasy.” Reality is generated out of complex networks of shared, social meanings regarding “what is,” that is, the ontological and epistemological characteristics of the world. As Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) so simply phrase it, “What is ‘real’ to a Tibetan monk may not be ‘real’ to an American business man” (p. 3).

In the following section I will address the actual process of fantasy, that is, the process by which men “interact” with pornography via fantasy.

B. ENTERING THE PORNOGRAPHIC NARRATIVE

The phenomenology of fantasizing with pornography, the actual processes of entering into the pornographic narrative, remain unaddressed in discourse on pornography.

Sonny's detailed description allows for a close analysis of some key elements of the experience of fantasy. He says:

I like to get into it, I can't just go in [to a peep-show], watch, jack-off. I like to get into that person, and even though she's with someone, I'll become that someone, where it's me and [her] not her and that person. When she goes to touch the man, I'll start to touch myself then. I get into it like that, I'll get a better feeling than just doin' it, just goin' for it [just jerking-off fast]. So I sort of interact with what she's doing.

<Do you always place yourself in the shoes of the guy?>

Uh, I black out the guy, same thing maybe. When they're making the video, they have the girl look into the camera. They probably tell her: "make expressions to the camera." They know they're making it for video, that's the purpose, so that's a big turn-on because she's looking at you. That's where it's easy, I'm lookin' at her like we're eye to eye, and we're in a lock. I found out in the past that I liked close-ups. They had a close-up of the lady blowin' a guy, and her eyes were bam!, right there, then I could get in, she's looking at the camera, you know just saying: "Wouldn't you like this to be you?" If her face is sort of far, I can't connect with the person. I'm there to act like the person is with me, so I always like the close-up shot.

A key component of Sonny's entry into the narrative is the interaction of the actress with the camera. He points to two specific techniques used by performers and directors to create the fantasy: close-ups and eye-contact with the camera/audience. These production techniques are effective because they present him with images of physical proximity and personal interaction that allow him to "act like the person is with me" and to "connect with the person." In addition, Sonny adds a physical dimension to the fantasy of proximity by acting as if his own masturbation is her touch: "When she goes to touch the man, I'll start to touch myself then." Masturbation is, of course, central to pornographic practice. But many men I interviewed heighten their pleasure in the narrative by stimulating various parts of their bodies: legs, chest, arms, balls, and ass. This physical self-stimulation, in conjunction with the psychic self-stimulation of fantasy, effectively creates a powerful mind-body link; the excitation of one builds on that of the other.

Thus, fantasy and physical stimulation are integral to a fan's entry into the pornographic narrative or what we might call the mind-body gestalt of pornographic pleasure.

While the director intensifies the action with close-ups, the emotional, intimate content that Sonny projects onto these production techniques is his own. The techniques themselves provide no such content. Other men who identified with the male point of view didn't project intimacy onto the images they viewed. Bond says, "No emotional stuff for me," and Bart told me, "It's just a physical act." The denial of emotional content, however, does not indicate a lack of fantasy. These two men often fantasized about physical/sexual access to women who would otherwise be inaccessible.

Physical touch, preference for close-ups and eye-contact all create the illusion of proximity, which is analytically distinct from the *vicarious* experience of identification. In the latter, a fan watches the woman and man fuck, and experiences pleasure *through* his feelings of "likeness" with the male performer. Sonny's fantasy does not involve the guy at all; he takes his place. Both identification and erasing the guy were common in my sample.

Sonny might be seen as a literalist's dream. He articulates the intentionality of specific images, and how they inspire *what he believes to be* intended fantasies. When the woman actor looks into the camera, he fantasizes eye contact with her. Her "expressions to the camera" create a fantasy of her desire. On one hand, some might argue that Sonny uses these images in a literal way. On the other hand, contrary to the literalist position, he clearly interprets them, and adds emotional content to them. Sonny does take the straight male point of view, for which the video was produced, but so do Bart and Bond. Content projected onto images can vary widely, even from similarly situated indi-

viduals. The question is then: To what extent do other men in my sample interpret images, and what are the variations of those interpretations? The balance of this chapter will explore this question.

C. FLUIDITY AND PORNOGRAPHIC FANTASY

This section will address the ways in which the men I interviewed create a personal text from a pornographic text. Ultimately, these men create fantasies which recreate or reform pornography. Such an understanding might bring to mind the notion of agency. However, much of the processes that I describe in this chapter are not instigated by intention the way agency is typically understood. Many of the men, when asked to describe their fantasizing process, used phrases like “let it take me” and “let go.” However, it is not the pornography that takes them, but a combination of their imaginations *and* the pornography.

The concept of fluidity is important in the context of the pornography debates because of the insistence that there is a one-way flow of information, from the pornography to the fan. However, I will emphasize not simply the converse, but rather that there is not a singular channel nor direction of flow, but vast deltas of meaning potential between fan and pornography, some streams drying up, others rushing forth, some diffusing onto the fertile imaginative plane between the two only to spring up later.

This discussion is divided into four sections: the fluidity of images, the fluidity of body and self, the fluidity of sexual orientations, and the fluidity of gender identifications.

1. Fluidity of Images.

Andrea Dworkin (1979) looks at pornography and sees “Dachau brought into the bedroom and celebrated” (p. 69). Susie Bright (1997) says, “I masturbated to the Meese Report until I passed out” (p. 77). This is what I mean by the “fluidity of images.” The meaning and interpretation of pornographic codes are deeply contested and indeterminate. This section will focus on men’s accounts of their influences on pornographic imagery in fantasy, and thus the difficulty in determining a concrete understanding of the pornographic text.

There were a number of men in my sample, bisexual, gay, and straight, that read pornography (though not to the exclusion of other media). They claimed that reading pornography provided a more imaginative experience than pictures or video. A familiar sentiment among them was that they could, in Bart’s words, “cast the story.” As Daniel says, “My imagination can run wild, it’s not limited, I can think of [the characters] looking any way I want.” The limits that Daniel refers to are those of photographs and video, in which we are presented with an actual individual and are therefore less able to influence their appearance imaginatively.

When Otto speaks of the changes that he makes to stories he says he “personalizes” them. Like Daniel and Bart above, sometimes he focuses on appearance. He goes on to say, however, that one of the most common ways he personalizes pornography (both prose and video) is to insert his wife into a domination scene between two women. He says: “The dominant woman is my wife and the submissive woman is a present that my wife has given me.” Far more than casting characters based on appearance, Otto’s account shifts us to inserting subjectivities into performers, and thus rewriting a charac-

ter's intention, motivation, and relationship to the fan completely. P.J. echoes these deeper interactions with pornographic narrative when he says, "I'm an editor, a story enhancer, I make a good story better."

P.J. is of particular interest here because he's seen first hand the different ways fans can approach the pornographic text. As a gay man, pornography affirms his contested sexual identity. Thus, he wants to share the porn he loves with the men he loves. There are intrinsic difficulties, however:

I'm always saying "look at this picture or read this story, this story really defines who and what I am." Well, when they read it, they don't go necessarily to where I go when I read it. Pornography is like a screening, a special coded invitation, because it's really great when you find someone that will read the story and will see the same thing that I see.

P.J. articulates the highly personal and interpretative nature of pornographic "code," a common theme in writings on pornography and the erotic. Drawing on Stuart Hall's work, Simon Hardy (1998) documents three distinct readings of a mainstream pornographic story by his sample of 24 men: dominant-hegemonic readings, negotiated readings, and oppositional readings. Contested meanings are intrinsic to Robin Gorsline's (1996) "homoeroticized gaze toward, and response to, visual images of Jesus" (p. 126). Jenkins' (1992) characterizes the readers and writers of slash fiction (which rewrites male homosocial relationships on popular television as homosexual relationships) not as "mindless consumers," but as "active producers and manipulators of meaning" (p. 23).²

The reader-response school of literary criticism (see Holland, 1975; Slatoff, 1970; and Tompkins, 1980³) has debated these issues for some time. Holland (1975) conducted a study of reader-response in which he had readers report their interpretations of a story by William Faulkner. He found that each reader "has no trouble at all using the story to

get the fantasy content he wants” (p. 121). Elsewhere he writes, “Any individual shapes the materials the literary work offers him [sic] ... to give him what he characteristically both wishes and fears” (Holland, 1980, p. 125). A clear implication of reader-response criticism is the indeterminacy of meaning, and thus the fluidity of images.⁴ Holland (1980) argues, however, that he is not making an argument for relativity of meaning. For him, it is simply a “statement of fact” that “interpretation is a function of identity” (p. 124).

To Holland’s (1975; 1980) persuasive argument, I would add two points. First, identity is never isolated from its context. We are all situated in society, language, and history. People are “free” to interpret images only within their social and historically specific settings. In the context of any pornographic interpretation, other culturally available sexual (and non-sexual) scripts, texts, and narratives (themselves interpretable) come into play. Second, while I agree that relativity of meaning is a fact of identity, I do not believe that this drowns political interpretation in a well of meaninglessness. It is my contention that asserting indeterminacy and multiplicity of meanings emphasizes the *power* and layered impact of images. As Chancer (1998) argues “it would be ludicrous to deny the simultaneously ideological and material sway of images and representations” (p. 75). Thus, it is critical to be able to assert that an image is sexist, for example, but also recognize that that may not be *all* it is. For example, observe the following list of seven widely varied fantasies from my research participants (two bisexual, two gay, three straight). I ask the reader to imagine the pornographies these men were watching during these fantasies, and the number of different responses that are possible depending on the identity of the viewer.

Leon: I like Ashlyn Gere⁵ because I want someone who absolutely loves sex, who can reciprocate, who's not afraid of anything, and genuinely enjoys it. Her attitude and enthusiasm about sex is definitely the ultimate.

Mickey: I've found myself getting off on watching people who are like 300 pounds, it's quite stimulating. I've always had a fantasy of fucking a 300 pound woman.

Graham: I like the Taboo series.⁶ You know it's not true, and you're not really interested in having sex with your sister or your mother, but you like seeing a situation where the mother and sister are that good looking, and I think it's kind of a perverted way of going about masturbating.

Thor: There's something wonderful about dirty porn, there's nothing like it: "I hear your drain is stuck, well, I've got the plunger you need."

Evan: I usually fantasize about being in control of another man. Playing different roles or characters, scenes like coach/student, cop/criminal, master/slave, cowboy/Indian. You know, have rope and gun, will travel.

Quoye: My fantasies are simple, like being able to wrap my lips around a big hard cock and just suck on that and feel great.

Bond: Sometimes I'll say to myself [when I'm watching porn], "If I could get my hands on you, give me one hour with you, I'll give you what you really want, you bitch!"

The combination of different pornographies and different individuals produce radically different fantasies. Imagine how anti-porn feminists would read these fantasies, the pornographies, and men that produced them. How would the anti-porn right wing? How would sexual liberationists or First Amendment advocates read them? How would a homophobic person react to Quoye or Evan? How would a cultural elitist see Thor? What would a "family values" advocate think of Leon or Graham? How would each of these men react to the pornographies and fantasies of the others? How do you read them? Are you repulsed, hurt, angry, bored, liberal, embracing difference, turned-on, all, some, or none of the above?

To grapple with the meanings of pornography, we must grapple with the variety of imaginations, identities, and preferences of its fans, critics, producers, and advocates as well. The meanings of these images shift and flow with the identities of those who see them. As reader-response critic Wolfgang Iser (1980) argues:

The fact that completely different readers can be differentially affected by the “reality” of a particular text is ample evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process that is far and above mere perception of that which is written. The literary text activates our faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it presents. The product of this creativity is what we might call the virtual dimension of the text.... This virtual dimension is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination (p. 54).

Iser’s interactive, creative process of text and imagination coming together, his “virtual dimension,” is pornographic fantasy. My respondent Nate eloquently provides us with evidence of his own creative process in the virtual dimension of fantasy. He states:

I don’t know if anybody just looks at the pictures and gets off on them. I certainly have to construct more than just the picture, it’s like the picture is just one face of the wall, and I wind up having to construct the other three and build a setting, so that’s where my fun is, in building a whole scenario.

The three-dimensional space Nate creates from his two-dimensional image tells us in graphic terms the extent of Nate’s construction of his fantasies from pornography. The pornography provides a starting point, but the fantasy is by and large *his own* (albeit, within his social frame). In this light, I present an example which indicates how some men create fantasies so elaborate that they seem entirely unrelated to the image itself.

Remi is describing an image that he likes from *Playboy* magazine.

One of my fantasies is women being forced to strip and service men, so there’s this photo of a woman with a hose, she’s only wearing a pair of red panties or a bikini bottom, and she’s standing with this very, uncharacteristic expression for *Playboy*, it’s an angry, hurt, upset expression. My fantasy was that this woman was working at a beach club for Nazi soldiers. She’s a beautiful, captured Russian nurse, and she’s been forced to go down on all these soldiers. When she’s finished there’s sperm all over the place, and she has this hose because she’s been

ordered to clean it up. So I build this whole fantasy, but it sort of fits the image she's carrying, angry, like she's just been raped or something. So I'll turn ordinary things into s&m things in my mind.

It's important to be clear that *Playboy* is the softest-core pornographic magazine on the market; Nazi regalia would be far beyond the pale for this magazine. Thus, Remi has constructed a rich and complicated personal narrative that is only marginally connected, if at all, to the *Playboy* image. That said, his narrative raises a number of complex issues which should not be ignored.

As a Jewish man with Holocaust victims and survivors in his family, Remi is using socio-historical images and symbols of power, control, and degradation that have impacted our world and his family *materially*. As such, they have especially deep meaning for Remi. Finally, in the context of the pornography debates, Remi's fantasies raise issues about hostility towards women and the relation of "fantasy and reality."

It's impossible to know what kind of facial expression Remi sees as "angry, hurt, upset." Here we have to accept his judgment, but he's right to say this is uncharacteristic for *Playboy*. His jump from her being "upset" to her looking "like she's just been raped" is the work of his imagination; it is his fantasy about the cause of her facial expression. From the moment he says she's "working" to where she has to "clean it up" is pure fantasy. This pure fantasy segment is where he stops describing the picture and starts describing the story he constructs around it.

It is important to note that Remi is well aware of the hostility towards women in his fantasies, and articulates a complex and richly fluid picture. He says:

If somebody said to me "if you had the chance, would you want to do that to a woman?" The answer is absolutely not, I have no desire to hurt a woman. On the other hand, without hurting her I would love to take a woman, humiliate a woman, strip her, hang her up so that men could just see, and I think I would love to be that woman, to the extent that I have an exhibitionist side, like I wish I had a

good enough body to be a man who could act in porno films. The crazy thing is I identify with both, the man who has the woman under his control, but I also identify with a woman who's exhibiting herself.

And later in the interview when asked what does fantasy do for him, he says:

It gets me away from the ordinariness of life, makes me a hero of some sort. I have fantasies of, being tortured, or torturing, withstanding. I guess if I'm torturing, it's not so much heroics, but power and control, so it probably makes me more in control, forceful, dominant than I am in real life. Part of it is a desire to get noticed, I think as a middle-aged, average looking guy, I'm invisible to a lot of women. Part of it may have to do with frustration maybe anger. I don't feel in control of, I don't feel very powerful in terms of relationships, so my fantasies either have me in control or have me as the kind of center of attention.

This brief excerpt is complex. On one level he says he has "no desire to hurt a woman," but at the same time he'd like to "humiliate," "strip," and "hang her up" so men could see her. Remi is violent and hostile towards women in his fantasies. When we talked about rape, he said, "The whole thought horrifies me." As for most of us, there is a vast chasm between fantasies and action. That said, the picture he paints of his relationship to women is clearly multifaceted. These layered and contradictory emotions lay the groundwork for his passionate, swirling fantasies.

Remi is passionate, but also troubled. Elsewhere in the interview he talks about his long periods of celibacy, loneliness, depression, and his conflicts about spending his time fantasizing about women (with and without pornography) rather than developing relationships. He says that he feels "frustration, maybe anger." His desire for women and his inability to have relationships with them seemed to cause him tremendous pain, in addition to frustration and anger.

Remi's troubles are evident in two key phrases in the excerpt above: "I'm invisible to a lot of women" and what he describes as his "desire to get noticed." His invisibility is in sharp contrast to women's visibility in pornography and everyday life (advertis-

ing, television, magazine covers, their physicality on the street [he commented numerous times about women's summer clothing styles for example]). Furthermore, the women he pays attention to are specifically young and attractive (*Playboy* and *Victoria's Secret* come up frequently), as opposed to his own "middle-aged, average looking" appearance.

The hostility surrounding his themes of beauty, visibility, and invisibility leads me to believe that revenge is one possible motivation for these fantasies.⁷ Rather than be captured and tortured by women's beauty (and *his own desires*), Remi instead captures, tortures, and controls women (and *his desires*) himself. Drawing on Robert Stoller's work, Nancy Hartsock (1983) has identified this process as a "dynamic of reversal/revenge." As she explains, this "allows anxiety to take the form of pleasure, that is, a reversal in the positions of the actors in order to convert the trauma into revenge" (p. 169). Hartsock's model is correct on one level, but at the same time it is too concrete and can't account for Remi's identification with both positions, his fluid slippage between torturer and tortured. The picture is even more complex, however.

First, Remi seems willingly seduced and captured by what we might call "women's magnetic powers" (which are both visual and emotional, and, most importantly, are socially constructed and rooted in *his* desires for the visual/emotional pleasure they give him [that is, these are his fantasies and have more to do with his projections onto women, than with women per se]). Second, he is resentful of women's power over him, and as the torturer, wants to humiliate and degrade them. Third, he identifies with women and their powers, envying them, and as the tortured wants to be visible and noticed himself, the "center of attention," in his words. Fourth, as the tortured s/he resists, or as he puts it, "withstand[s]" and becomes "a hero." This reveals his uncertainty about

his ability *and* desire to control “women’s powers.” After all, they are formidable, but he also desires them himself, desires women with them, and thus does not want them controlled. Fifth, not only does he identify with the woman, but insists again and again in his own interpretation that he has “strong exhibitionist tendencies.” His exhibitionism, his desire to be the woman stripped and hung up for men to see, is connected to the female body, its magnetism, and visibility that he desires/resents/envies. Finally, just as he says “I would love to be that woman,” he adds his wish to have “a good enough body to be a man who could act in porno films.” Thus, he fluidly slips from body to body to body (ideal female, ideal male, and his own self-consciously inadequate male body). It is imperative to recognize that Remi enacts *all* these positions at once: the desirable woman/man; the tortured and controlled woman/man; the torturing and controlling woman/man; and finally, the desiring man.

Though the machinations of Remi’s fantasies are complex, they do not exist independently of his social world. Women operate symbolically for Remi because they are symbolic in his society in a way that men are not. Women are sex and beauty symbols, *and* symbols of purity and cleanliness. The symbolic virgin is never a young man. In her article “The Traffic in Women,” Gayle Rubin (1975), drawing on the work of Lévi-Strauss, discusses the kinship relations of traditional societies in which women were the most precious gift of all. The gift of a daughter in exogamy, for example, created not only social and economic ties, but eventually kinship ties as well. Rubin argues: “If men have been sexual subjects – exchangers – and women sexual semi-objects – gifts – for much of human history, then many customs, clichés, and personality traits seem to make a great deal of sense (among others, the curious custom by which a father gives away the

bride)" (p. 176). "Women as symbol" easily slip into the individual psychologies of men like Remi and others to represent a fluidity of images.

Literal interpretation of pornographic images ignores the creative processes and the imaginative agency at work when men fantasize with pornography. The purpose of this argument is not to simply establish that interpretive agency exists, however. The real interest is in what men do with this agency. *Where do they go* in their fantasies with pornography? The balance of this paper will attend to this question.

2. Fluidity of Body and Self.

In the section above on entering the pornographic narrative, Sonny said that he would "black out the guy" in a fantasy and replace him. What exactly does this mean? Felix provides a wonderful example of how fantasy transports some of the men I interviewed. He says:

I caught myself once, I was really into it, and that was me [in the video], it was like daydreaming and watching at the same time. I got so into it I said, "Go Felix!" It was like *for real!* My dreaming and my daydreaming scare me sometimes because it seems so real.

When he says, "like daydreaming and watching at the same time," Felix is describing a dualistic state of consciousness. As he watches, his position is on the outside, the inevitable place of the porn fan. Yet, as he fantasizes (or daydreams), he's inside the pornography, fucking the woman. His comparison of sexual fantasy and daydreaming to night dreaming recalls Freud's (1965) comparisons in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.⁸ For Freud, all three fall under the rubric of wish fulfillment. The biggest difference between sexual fantasy, day and night dreaming is intention. Both day and night dreaming involve a passivity, sleeping or simply drifting. Sexual fantasy is an intentional, self-

induced, dream-like state. It should be emphasized, however, that though the state itself is intentional, the *content* can be unpredictable, just like day and night dreaming.

And as noted, Felix is experiencing a dualistic consciousness: one self watches the other self fuck. At the same time, he is so unself-conscious, so enthralled by his dynamic participation in the pornographic narrative, that one self calls out to the other: "Go Felix!" His verbalization brings him back to normal consciousness, to "catch" himself in his fantasy. Felix is not unique in my sample. Sean provides even more detail.

It's almost like I leave my body and I'm looking at myself in the magazine with the woman. I really *see* myself in the magazine as one of the characters or models. And I'm not thinking of myself in my bedroom, or holding a magazine looking at myself. It's like I lose my identity as the watcher, I forget about that all together.

It's almost like there's two other 'me's. There's the one in the magazine, and the other me is sort of in the middle, and I'm, my body more or less, is still watching, but I'm not really attached to the others of me.

<What's the one in the middle, I don't get it?>

That's the one doing the watching. As I'm masturbating I'm not, I forget about thought all together, that thought, process I guess, gets transformed, leaves my body also. There's the thought process that leaves my body, and also the physical part of me.

Both Felix and Sean use phrases that are difficult to clarify. Felix: "that was me [in the video];" Sean: "I leave my body." Sean's speech in particular is packed with phrases that defy commonsense and depart completely from the common views of masturbation, pornography, and fantasy: "I really *see* myself in the magazine." "I lose my identity as the watcher." "There's two other 'me's.'" "I'm not really attached to the others of me." Looking again to dream research, we can find similar imagery. The comparison is fruitful to show us that these experiences are not aberrations, nor are they unique to sexual fantasy. Sexual fantasy is simply one means of accessing these curious, dream-

like processes in a conscious state. Apropos of Felix's and Sean's fantasies, Raymond Rainville (1988) identifies "dreams of multiple self-representation." He quotes one of his research subjects:

I was in this dream three times and no matter which of me I was, I could still see the other two. The three of us were walking to school. On my right was me in a football jersey..., I was taller and bigger than the other two. On my left was me as I was in junior high school, [I had on a] T-shirt with a goofy saying. I couldn't really see me in the middle, but that was who I was most of the time. When I was inside the one on the right, I knew they were looking up to me and I liked it.... When I was inside the one on the left, ... I felt sad and wanted to go back home... (p. 81-2).

In waking life, this dreamer had just made the high school football team. Rainville (1988) sees his dream as representing three different parts of the self, chronologically and emotionally: the older, the younger, and the current self. Thus, the dream is an attempt to evaluate or take stock of this life/identity shift via different images of self.

The difference between this dream and Sean's fantasy is that the dream characters represent discreet periods of the boy's life represented simultaneously, but Sean's fantasy is *simultaneous* multiple selves and discontinuities. Furthermore, rather than being instigated by a change in his life-history, Sean says he has been fantasizing this way for 20 years.

Rather than a singular "male point of view," we see multiple selves, occupying *both sides* of numerous binaries, thus destabilizing them (see Lorber, 1996, 1999). Indeterminacy is the key and ironically unifying ingredient in these fantasies. Their fluidity provides us with a great wealth of knowledge about some men's profoundly varied and uncategorizable inner lives and desires.

August is a married man, with one child. He identified himself as heterosexual, but during the interview he discussed extensive and almost exclusively homosexual expe-

riences in college. Though he doesn't have sex with men today, his pornographic preferences have always been gay. No part of his sexual life is hidden from his wife. August's fantasies differ from Felix and Sean's in a number of significant ways. First, August's professional life as an actor comes into play in his fantasies. For example, he does not project his current self into the video, but adopts the role of one of the video's characters. Second, there are no simultaneous selves like Felix and Sean. August occupies one identity per session ("session" being the common shorthand for an interlude with pornography and masturbation), but often adopts another identity in the next.

I've been really into *Military Issue*⁹ lately. I could be Bernie, the guy who's making the video. Once I saw one where there were two sailors jerking-off, but it took 10 minutes for the camera guy to realize that the second guy wasn't even on screen. So I can say to myself, ok, maybe I'm the guy who's not in the scene, or, maybe I'm the guy who's fucking the woman that Jimmy [the sailor-performer] is watching on the TV. I've done all those.

August plays multiple characters in his fantasies, even characters that don't necessarily exist in the video. Of the man in the porn that Jimmy is watching, August says: "Since all you ever hear is a woman moaning [the television is turned away from the camera], she could just be jerking-off. We never really know." Nevertheless, "I can put myself behind those noises [her moans]." To explain his fantasy style, August draws on his acting experience and provides an effective metaphor of an individual with multiple identities.

I'm in a "what if" situation. What if I was a sailor, what if I had grown up next to Jimmy, and we left our home town at the same time, I might be there with him [in the video]. But I guess that's me, the actor, filling in the story to make it a little more vivid. It's like I've summoned up August the sailor, friend of Jimmy. And yea, I've always wanted to jerk him off."

As an actor, it is August's *job* to "summon" up different configurations of himself, different standpoints, indeed, different selves inside of himself in order to capture a

character. His skills at work and in fantasy are so closely entwined that in the following passage he's talking about fantasy, but it's almost as if he's talking about acting. "What I do is be anyone, within certain parameters that someone gives me. I try to crack that character somehow."

His everyday life is filled with equally amorphous and numerous identities. Because of the way "I tend to look and tend to dress and act and am"¹⁸ a number of identities are imposed on him in his neighborhood in downtown Manhattan. If he's with his daughter, he says people must think: "Oh there's your typical downtown father and daughter." If he's alone, he's been called "faggot;" when he's with his wife they've been called "dykes." And he insists: "It's all me. I'm all those things; they're all in there, I guess." Though dyke is not an identity he plays in his fantasies (as far as I know), August does play straight and gay men of various ages and backgrounds.

Both his acting metaphor in sexual fantasy and his unwitting performances on the street effectively tie into what Judith Butler (1990) has identified as the "performative" nature of gender. For example, she argues that drag performance "implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender" (p. 137, emphasis removed). She goes on to argue that exterior gestures, signs, and enactments, "create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core" (p. 136) that conceals the rampant discontinuities in heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts. Visible performances signify invisible, seamless individual identity, and also maintain clear and ordered heterosexist categories and boundaries in the social world. I propose that sexual fantasy is a means to investigate the concealed, invisible spaces of identity, and allows us to demonstrate *empirically* the discontinuities that Butler theorizes. Illusory "interior essence," she argues is "an effect and function of

... the *public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body*" (p. 136, my emphasis). While the variable successes of these regulatory politics are unclear, my interviews reveal that fantasy is not easily controlled, that there are many men whose fantasies do not conform to the confines of the heterosexist system.

Butler's (1990) argument pivots on the public performance of drag. Fantasy with pornography, however, is often a private practice. Although both practices are marginalized, the private nature of pornographic practice makes it a less publicly assertive site for destabilizing practices. It is nonetheless a potentially disruptive force of identity.

August is exceptional because both his visible and invisible selves are fluid and multiple. The majority of the men in my sample presented themselves unambiguously as either gay or straight (there are no clear "performatives" for bisexual men [Steinman, 2000]), but they crossed and blurred boundaries of sexual orientation and gender identification in fantasy. August points us towards multiple and fractured identities at play in men's fantasies with pornography. Sean gives us an example of a man with little internal coherence (in terms of fantasy at least). Sean *is* the binary; rather than taking one side, he totters on the tension of the binary relationship itself. If we accept Freud's understanding of sexual fantasies as wish fulfillment, then the fantasies in this chapter allow us to see desire encapsulated in gender *variation*, rather than gender conformity. Sean and August both fantasize and desire another time, place, personality, way of life, to see another side, to take another's point of view. I should emphasize, however, that to desire something is not necessarily to hope for its realization.

Although they do not identify it as such, the fluidity of the body and self point to some of the possibilities for, and reconfiguration of, masculine sexualities and of mascu-

linity itself. The following two sections will develop these themes more specifically in terms of sexual orientation and gender identification in fantasy.

3. Fluidity of Sexual Orientation:

In his book *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins (1992) documents a genre of original fiction known as “slash,” which provides a wonderful example of the fluidity of fantasized (or attributed) sexual orientation. According to Jenkins, slash is written, published, and read almost exclusively by women fans of television, bi, gay, and straight. Slash authors appropriate, or “poach,”¹¹ the homosocial relationships of male characters in popular television programs and rewrite them as homosexual relationships. For example, in the subgenre of slash known as K/S or Kirk/Spock, Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock of *Star Trek* are rewritten as deeply intimate and often explicitly sexual lovers.¹² Slash illustrates not only the profound influences that fans can have on texts, but, also the ability of fans to loosen the grip of traditional configurations of gender and sexual orientation via the texts of popular culture.

Jenkins (1992) is only one of many commentators on slash (see Lamb and Veith, 1986; Penley, 1997; and Russ, 1985). Russ (1985) argues that slash is women’s pornography, and unlike pornography aimed at men, it emphasizes character, emotion, and monogamy. For Russ, as well as Lamb and Veith (1986), the appropriation of the homosocial relationship is evidence of women’s desire to maintain freedom and an adventurous spirit within an *equal* relationship. According to these authors, television’s subordinate female characters do not provide compelling role models for slash fans. Jenkins (1992) sees slash fans of all sexual orientations frustrated with the conventional masculinity of their TV heroes. For him, slash is an effort to write intimacy into the lives of these male

characters. It extrapolates on the one meaningful relationship these characters have (female lovers come and go with each weekly episode, and anything remotely sexual between men is forbidden), and exposes the erotics of male homosocial desire.

There is a remarkable similarity between slash and pornography that observers of slash miss. Scenes which depict two women together as “lesbians” or “bisexual” women are a staple of popular “straight” pornography. Thus, just as straight, bi, and gay women fantasize about “bisexual men” in slash, straight, bi, and possibly gay¹³ men fantasize about “lesbians” and “bisexual” women in porn. Indeed, of the five “straight” women porn fans that I interviewed,¹⁴ two watched gay *male* porn.

Linda Williams (1989) suggests that one of the fundamental issues at stake in straight pornography is the desire to know the other. It is significant, for example, that when I asked my male participants about their fantasies when they watched two women together, one of the common answers I received was about the desire to know what women do with each other (in order to become a better lover). Of the two women that liked gay male porn, one gave this response with regard to men’s sexual responses.¹⁵ Thus, gender is not the only “other” at play in porn and slash, sexual orientation is too. Through an analysis of slash texts that allow “readers to experience both men’s growing desire [for each other] and to participate within their erotic fantasies” (Jenkins, 1992, p. 199), Jenkins implies that they give fans the ability to experience and thus to identify with homosexual desire, be they bisexual, lesbian, or straight. In this section, I will explore the permutations of the fluidity of sexual orientation for fans of pornography.

My respondent Graham is a straight, divorced man in his late 20s. Generally he watches straight video, but also is turned on by intersexes, and explores these feelings

with intersex porn (he uses the term “hermaphrodite”). He is uncomfortable with his interest in intersexes, and describes it as his “own personal, you know, sexual perversion.” Although this issue confuses his sense of identity, “I don’t really know where to place it,” he develops a marvelous interpretation in the following passage.

I wouldn’t say it’s a man with a vagina, to me it’s a woman with a dick. So, it almost seems like it’s a person with the best of both worlds, they can go either way. As a guy, there’s a part of me that wonders what it would be like to be a woman, experience a woman’s orgasm, experience, you know, having someone going in me, instead of me going in someone else. It’s a natural curiosity. If I’m really gonna be honest with you, I’d say maybe it’s being able to experience what it would be like to be with another man, without actually having to be with a man. Like not labeling yourself as gay or anything, but just, being the sexual person I think I am, it’s always a curiosity. With the hermaphrodites, I think, I could have this beautiful woman, and she has a vagina, so I can have all my male fantasies and then I can just go a little overboard and have something else, and it would be completely concealed in this beautiful woman.

True to the theme of fluidity, at the simplest level Graham’s interpretation of his fantasies flows smoothly from thinking what it would be like to be a woman to what it would be like to be with a man. The fact that “straight” men (and women) have homoerotic fantasies is nothing new (Laumann et al., 1994), but, to my knowledge, there has been no empirical observation of pornography’s role in those fantasies. If we take the fluidity of images seriously, then any porn can facilitate homoerotic fantasies. However, the transgender/intersex genre more overtly accommodates gender/sexual orientation/body fluidity. As Graham says, here are people with the “best of both worlds, they can go either way.” The ambiguity in these phrases is rich indeed. For example, given the flow from trans-sex curiosity to sexual orientation curiosity, it’s unclear to which set of worlds his phrases “both worlds” and “either way” refer? Or, do they refer to both? In fact, a close look at this passage will tell us that the words “both” or “either” don’t account for the complexity of the situation he has described.

The most prominent aspect of the passage is Graham's own interpretation of intersex porn as a mask for his homoerotic desires. However, this gets played out both in his desire to fuck an intersex, and in his desire to know "what it would be like to be a woman." In the context of his homoerotic desire, his fantasies of being penetrated, of "having someone going in me," take on homoerotic meaning as well. In other words, within the heterosexist matrix, fantasizing being in a woman's body allows him to imagine being with a man.¹⁶

These fantasies are not exclusively homoerotic, though. They are also transgendered. For instance, Graham does not limit his fantasy of being a woman to the physical experience of penetration. He would also like to experience a "woman's orgasm." This emphasizes not so much the experience of being with a man, but the internal experience of being a woman. As such, when he says that he wonders what it would be like have "someone going in me," a fantasy of heterosexual vaginal penetration is as much a possibility as homosexual anal penetration. Several other men in my sample, all straight, expressed similar trans-sex/trans-gendered curiosities without homosexual overtones.

The subtexts of Graham's intersex fantasies are important, but what of the fantasy itself? Intersexes do not play a purely symbolic role in his fantasies. Graham says he is turned on by these videos precisely because s/he "can go either way." Thus, the potential, the multiplicity, that an intersex holds by being an intersex is a turn-on in and of itself. Still another layer of ambiguity comes into play when Graham suggests that he wants to have sex with a man, but not label himself as "gay or anything." Although there may be some tones of homophobia here, having sex with men would not make him, in his eyes, a "gay man."

Bisexual porn is another genre that overtly facilitates fluidity and blurring of boundaries. Robin is in his early 40s, he's married and heterosexual, with two children. He tells a story about switching through the channels in a peep-show booth.¹⁷ His reaction to what he saw took him by surprise.

I'd usually by-pass the gay stuff, because I wasn't really interested. I started watching a bi movie, but I didn't realize that's what it was. Suddenly, one guy started going down on another guy. I remember him saying, "What the fuck are you doing? Hey, but don't stop, I kinda like it." And my reaction was the same, and I couldn't even switch the channel at that point, there was something really, really hot about that scene. I'll never forget that. That was when I started watching gay and bi movies.

Initiation into male-male sex is a common theme in gay and bisexual videos.

Many stories involve personal conflict about homo- or bisexuality. Robin likes these videos because, he says, "I can relate to it." Robin's words show how tightly he is situated to the narrative: "my reaction was the same" and "I couldn't even switch the channel." He had a few homosexual experiences when he was in college, but at that time didn't feel that it was right for him. However, later in the interview he tells me, "Now I'm not sure if that's true." He feels it's unfortunate that he can't act on these desires (beyond fantasizing about them), or even tell his wife about them. "She'd freak out," he tells me. Under the circumstances, pornographic fantasy gives Robin the opportunity to enjoy his bi- and homosexual desires the only way he safely can. He says:

Hell, I'm in my 40s, and married, and there's really not a lot I can do about it now, except jerk-off and fantasize about what it would have been like to be exclusively gay. [But] I'm not sure I'd be happy that way either, you know, I think I'm, I guess my river really does flow both ways.

Here Robin tentatively articulates his bisexuality. He said throughout the interview that he never speaks about these issues to anyone. He has, however, created a space with pornography which allows him to articulate, through practice if not words, these de-

sires. Laumann et al. (1994) found that autoerotic activity is an “imaginative tutelage in a diversity of sexual scripts.... The individual who develops a more elaborate sexual script through sexual fantasy, masturbation, and the use of erotica/pornography is also more likely to enact a more diverse set of practices” (p. 137). In their analysis, “diversity of sexual scripts” includes only fellatio, cunnilingus, and anal sex. However, there is no reason to assume that a fluidity between heterosexual and homosexual desire couldn’t be part of that same diversity.

Once Robin’s sexual orientation became more fluid, he made the video performers more fluid as well. For example, he now watches bisexual, gay, and straight porn. If he’s watching straight porn, he can sometimes identify with the man and other times identify with the woman or, more accurately, the woman’s place. He says:

Usually when I’m watching straight movies I’m the guy, fucking the girl. There will be a lot of times though when I want to know what it might be like to do something with him. If the guy’s particularly attractive, I’d wonder what it might be like to give myself up like that, spread my legs, to get fucked by that straight actor as opposed to a gay actor. I don’t think of myself as a woman, I’m thinking I’m getting fucked in the ass, not in a cunt that I don’t have.

Note how the sexual orientation of the male performer shifts from being a straight actor that Robin can identify with, to a “straight” actor who will fuck Robin’s ass. In the latter scenario, the woman disappears, and Robin inserts himself into the scene with the guy, as himself. He says later that when he’s watching gay porn he can identify with either the top or the bottom, but prefers the bottom because “in my marriage I’m always the aggressor and I kind of like taking the submissive role.” Thus, as he becomes more fluid sexually, pornography itself becomes more fluid.

4. Fluidity of Gender Identification:

Drawing on Lamb and Veith's (1986) earlier analysis of slash, Jenkins (1992) argues that slash creates a "utopian space where gender and sexual identity is fluid and the barriers between self and other can be readily transcended" (p. 215-6). Though Jenkins is writing about the text and its male characters rather than the fans, the implication is that the pleasure for the fans is in their identification with the men and their transcendence of self and other. There is, then, a dual transcendence: first between the characters, and second, between female reader/writer and male characters in fantasy. For some of the men in my sample, a similar fluidity of boundaries is apparent in their identification with women. An interesting twist in my work, however, is that it is not only straight men who identify with women, but gay men do too.

A number of gay men in my sample watch straight porn to see straight men in sexual situations. Max presents another permutation when he makes it clear that he doesn't erase the woman as Robin does. Max says, "I'm gay, but I'm not blind, some of the women are really hot." Buddy is a gay man who also gets pleasure out of straight porn, gangbangs¹⁸ in particular. Here he describes the appeal of this specific genre.

One woman and eleven guys, that really intrigues me. It's not just that there's men, because you can buy gay videos with 11 guys who like each other, but the fact that they all only like her, you know what I mean, they're not interested in each other. They're all interested in her. That total attention, it's almost like she's being worshipped by these guys.

Because his focus is on the woman's position, it seems that Buddy identifies with her. He differs from Robin, who erases her, and Max, who is attracted to her (although attraction does not preclude identification). Buddy identifies with the woman's position because she is the center of attention in a group of horny men. Thus, one reason some gay men identify with women in pornography and elsewhere is that women are the center

of (straight) men's attention, an enviable position for many gay men. As Quoyle, a bisexual man, makes clear, "All a girl has to do is smile, and a guy's ready to do anything. I could turn myself inside out for certain guys, and they wouldn't notice me."

It is not only gay men who identify with women in pornography. Many straight men in my sample do as well. Oscar is a straight, married man. In a discussion of *The Story of O*, he talks about his identification with O and her surrender.¹⁹ He says:

Surrender is very appealing.

<Do you identify with the surrender or with the [he cuts me off]>

Yes I do, I identify with the woman, and I think I identify with the women in those gangbang movies too. Yea, I'm not just looking at the film, I mean I'm putting myself in the position of this woman, really. I'd say that's probably what I'm/yea, not the man.

In addition to identifying with O's surrender, Oscar says he identifies with the women in gangbangs. He says that he likes a woman in porn to be "put through her paces" and to see "a group of men dominating a woman."²⁰ There are two things (at least) taking place here; both pivot on the fact that he takes *her* position and not the man's. First, like Graham who used an intersex to mask his homoerotic desire, it appears Oscar uses his identification with the woman for the same purpose. In this sense, he identifies with women being "forced" to have sex with men. This interpretation is based on Oscar's own discussion of his sexual changes that he brought up several times. As he got older and more comfortable with his sexuality, he became more interested in men.

Secondly, and apart from homoerotic desire, Oscar puts himself in the position of the submissive woman, or more accurately, the woman he fantasizes as submissive. If there's no woman to identify with, Oscar is the submissive player in his fantasies. He says, "as far as fantasy goes, I'm a submissive not a dominant, a bottom not a top." Later

he adds that even in his non-fantasy sex life he is versatile, but prefers to be the “receiver” as he puts it. Thus, Oscar identifies with O because she’s a submissive, not because she’s a woman. The identification is trans-power rather than trans-gender (though gender should not be discounted). For example, Oscar goes on to describe his pleasure in an Anne Rice story in which “a male slave is [brought into an Army camp] and forced to service all the soldiers.” He says clearly, “I identified with this slave.”

Thus, gender appears to be of less interest than power. At the same time, however, precisely because power is more central, Oscar’s stories highlight the fluidity of gender identification. In the scenarios he has described so far men have been in power, but this does not tell the whole story. As he says himself, “Whether it’s with males or females, I am very rarely ever dominant in my fantasies, [for example], I might be forced to go into a bathroom and assist a woman with her toilet.” The only combination Oscar does not describe is identification with a woman being dominated by another woman. Thus, who’s dominating whom seems to be of little concern. He just wants to fantasize a domination scene in which he can fluidly identify with whoever is submissive.

Stu is a straight man in his late 20s, who watches straight porn. He’s concerned with gender in porn much more than Oscar. He states unequivocally that men in straight porn are entirely uninteresting. He continues: “[and that’s] true in most of life, too, men don’t share emotional things very much, men don’t have much to say about stuff that’s very personal.” His relationships with women, on the other hand, are at a “different level of intensity.” Thus, when Stu watches porn he’s entirely focused on the woman.

When a woman’s having an orgasm, that really resonates in me. It gets me more turned on, and I come. I guess it’s very similar to experiencing emotions in a regular movie, but it doesn’t work that way with the male characters [in porn]. As you know, you have to have the come-shot, but when that happens I couldn’t care

less, I find that in no way interesting. So I guess in a way I'm identifying with the female characters. I never thought of it that way.

A number of straight men in my sample also said that male performers in pornography were unimportant to them, that they concentrated on the women only. These men were not identifying with the woman as a woman, however, they were enjoying women's sexual performance, or more colloquially, getting off on the women. As we'll see in a moment, Stu gets off on the women, too, but he also differs from these other men in his emphasis on the woman's emotional state, his experience of emotion through women in porn, and in the link he makes between identification in porn and in mainstream film.

Stu says that he's interested in finding porn in which the woman looks "excited. I'm looking for her to be feeling good or have an actual orgasm." Like Rhodes (1992), Stu makes an effort to find porn in which women come.²¹ Shortly after this, he explains, "I find women in porn attractive" when "they seem to really enjoy sex, [and when] they're very energetically, aggressively involved." This emphasis on sexual attraction lets us see an enmeshment of his identification with, and his attraction to, the woman's sexual subjectivity. So, there are two fantasies intertwining here. One in which he experiences his own emotional/sexual pleasure through the female performer (identification), and another in which he is attracted to her sexual subjectivity/pleasure/performance.

His description, "energetic and aggressively involved," could very well be used for himself. He made an effort to impress upon me his energetic and aggressive involvement in the New York sex industry scene (parties he's attended, people in the industry he's become acquainted with or met). In this attraction/identification equation, then, Stu might be looking for a performer who mirrors himself. In terms of the fluidity

of gender identification, he seems to see himself in the women he describes more than he sees himself in other men.

Like Stu, most of the straight men that identified with women in porn preferred women to men in general. Lester says: "I have more women friends than men anyway, I identify with women period." There is a pleasure in women here that is more than skin deep. Nate brings this theme one step further. When asked what he wants when he masturbates with porn, he says:

I guess I want to get into a fantasy, of being, either being with this woman or being the woman herself.

<Why do you want to be the woman?>

Because they seem to be having a great time, they're sexy, they're beautiful. I guess the women that I like are strong and confident, not necessarily just strong in the physical sense, but emotionally. I never really saw them as bimbos, I saw them as women who had their own lives, their own homes, cars. This [posing for *Playboy*] was just something else that they did, it wasn't like they just sat around the house waiting for the dick to come home. They weren't subservient, they came here for sex and then they're gonna go do what they're gonna do.

Fantasizing about *being* the woman is markedly different from Stu's vicarious pleasure *through* the woman. In keeping with the theme of fluidity of images developed earlier, Nate embellishes this image of "sexy" and "beautiful" *Playboy* models with a list of personal characteristics that make up his fantasy: they're "having a great time" they're emotionally "strong," and independent having their "own lives" and possessions. In this light, not only does Nate identify with the women, but he rejects the man (albeit a fantasized man, *Playboy* almost always photographs women alone). Like Stu, Nate is not particularly interested in the men in pornography, but he adds a novel twist. Indeed, not unlike anti-pornography feminist readings of women in pornography, Nate reduces the *man*

to his genitals, discarding him as “the dick,” presumably all he’s good for, and apparently not worth waiting for.

Nate identifies with and wants to be (in his fantasies) all these things, sexy, beautiful, emotionally strong, independent, having his own life. To be sexy and beautiful are not typically expressed desires for a heterosexual man in our society. Initially, Nate’s story brings to mind the men above who identified with women for homoerotic reasons, to attract men. However, he was very open, sexually experimental, and had no homoerotic hues to the stories he told. Nate also plays with cross-dressing. Drawing on her vast experience with men who cross-dress, Veronica Vera (1997) states that only recently men have been able “to take on the role of desired sex object.... But it is really the female image that is the one we have been encouraged to think of as the object of desire, [thus], when a man feels sexy, he might identify that feeling as feminine” (p. 165-6). Similarly, via Butler (1990) we can argue that if a heterosexual man feels sexy and beautiful, there are few performatives available to him other than those of the feminine. But Nate adds still more permutations. When he’s cross-dressing, and it’s working, he says he sees Prince in the mirror, when it’s not working, he sees Benny Hill. Both are *men*, one, a hot androgyne pop star, the other, a comic buffoon who often cross-dresses in his skits. When asked to characterize his fantasy self as opposed to his real self, three male movie stars come to his mind: “Sean Connery, Cary Grant, and Fred Astaire.” These three are the height of Hollywood debonair, the heterosexual *male* sex symbol.

I think the critical issue is Prince’s highly sexual androgyny and its ability to span all of Nate’s fantasies. Prince is at once the pin-up model, the male sex symbol, the debonair. He is one of the few men that could be described as Nate does the *Playboy*

models: sexy, beautiful, emotionally strong, independent, having his own life. Without a doubt, Prince embodies multiplicity, ambiguity, and fluidity, as does Nate himself. His fantasies span a heterosexual landscape that includes the predictably buxom, all-American *Playboy* “bunny,” the current incarnation of pop star androgyny, and debonair male sex symbols of classic cinema.

Thus, both gay men and straight men in my sample can identify with women, as does cultural critic John Dollimore in a conversation with Marjorie Garber (1995).²² Dollimore distinguishes between his pleasures with gay pornography in which he fantasizes about getting “fucked by that man as another man,” and his experiences with straight porn in which: “I want to be fucked by that man as a woman my desire is going very strongly through the woman. To put it simply, there are times when I want the vagina. I’m not just wanting to position myself in the position of the woman as a man” (Garber, 1995, p. 162).

D. CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the notion of fluidity in pornographic fantasy. It argued that fluidity was an integral and consistent aspect of fantasy for many of the men in my sample. It traced the presence of fluidity in pornographic imagery, as well as three separate kinds of fantasies: those of the self and body, sexual orientation, and finally, sexual identification. The importance of fluidity in fantasy is manifold. At once it undermines both the literalistic interpretation of pornographic imagery as well as the assumption that fantasy is enacted from a uniform (straight) male point of view. Furthermore, the fluidity has the potential to impact men’s gendered-sexed statuses. The flexibility these men demonstrated in their fantasies of sexual orientation and sexual identification in particu-

lar, is important both in terms of a radical reconstitution of the understanding of what men actually *do* with pornography, but also in the context of the proliferation of queer theory – much of which argues for a reinterpretation of the binaries which make up our sexual categories (see Butler, 1990; Lorber, 1996, 1999; Seidman, 1997; Stein and Plummer, 1996; Warner, 1993, 1999).

As I argued earlier, fantasy has consequences. Some of these men's understandings of themselves were clearly influenced by their fantasies with pornography. Of course, in what ways men were influenced and the extent of the influence either in themselves, or beyond fantasy, remains unclear. It is imperative to remember that the reason these fantasies flourish is because they are tremendously pleasurable. In turn, the pleasure of these transgressions tells us of the strain that these men are placing on the system of sexual binaries. The immediate impact of fantasy can only be on the self, yet through fantasy with pornography the fan has the potential to see his (or her) self as non-uniform, multiple, diverse, and profuse. Desires and fantasies of sexual and gender fluidity show fans the potential for more than simple binaries, and potentially more fluid ways of being. However, because these fantasies and sex-gender play are often hidden and not acted out in "real" life, it is questionable as to how socially transgressive they are. Like private cross-dressing, who knows that these men are violating conventional sex-gender norms?

Broadly, this chapter was about the potential destabilization of our current constructions of gender and sexuality. Keeping with the endeavor to present of complex picture of men's experiences with pornography, the following chapter takes the opposite point of view: the solidification of gender and sexual stereotypes through pornography.

E. ENDNOTES, CHAPTER V

¹ See for example Derrida (1991). I am grateful to Don Kulick for this insight.

² For similar arguments in a non-erotic, cultural studies context, see Ang, 1985, 1996; Bourdieu, 1984; Grossberg, 1988; Seiter et al., 1989.

³ I am grateful to Robert Scholes for these references.

⁴ A number of media studies from and of different societies make this point clear, for reviews and original research see Ang, 1985; Leibes and Katz, 1989; Morely, 1989. In our own context, a commonsense example is the contested art of Robert Mapplethorpe (see Danto, 1996).

⁵ Ashlyn Gere was one of the premiere stars of mainstream straight porn from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s.

⁶ The Taboo series of videos celebrates incest. It is very popular, mainstream, and fictional to the point of being silly. For example, there are only so many performers in mainstream porn at any one time. Thus, any fan has seen these same performers fucking in any number of other movies. The plot, therefore, is just convention. Graham suspends disbelief to enter into the plot, as I'm sure many do, but I also suspect that many fans simply enjoy these movies for the performances of their favorite stars.

⁷ I must emphasize here that I am making no truth claims with my interpretations. They are derived from texts produced by only two interviews of approximately two hours each. Thus, these interpretations are based on *texts* (the interview transcripts) rather than Remi himself.

⁸ In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud reports a patient's dream that has remarkably similar elements to Felix's fantasy. In the dream the patient is attending a play, and Freud reports, "At one moment he was audience, at another actor" (p. 319). Regrettably, this was a small part of a larger dream, and this particular aspect of it escaped Freud's attention.

⁹ *Military Issue* is a popular gay video series. As with much porn today, it is very minimalist. Each scene consists of a young man in a military uniform casually chatting in an apartment with the director who usually stands off-camera. The director offers the performer a beer or two while they chat, and after a few minutes the performer undresses casually. The majority of the video consists of the young man naked on a bed, watching what appears to be straight porn (a woman's moans are audible), and masturbating to orgasm. Each scene is about 20 minutes to half an hour.

¹⁰ August is rotund, has very long hair, wears relaxed fit clothing, and numerous dangling earrings.

¹¹ Jenkins credits Michel de Certeau (1984) for this term and general model.

¹² It is important to note that slash authors do not attribute gay identities to their characters. Because all the characters have extensive heterosexual experience, and their new relationship is unprecedented, slash characters are “bisexual.”

¹³ Though I have no evidence of gay men fantasizing about “lesbians,” I think it unwise to discount the possibility.

¹⁴ The original design of the study was to interview men and couples. Recruitment was difficult and the couples aspect of the study had to be abandoned. However, I was able to interview three straight couples. In addition, two straight women volunteered to be interviewed alone. Though they were not currently involved with anyone, but enjoyed porn by themselves and in relationships.

¹⁵ I generally received one of four answers, from the men, none of which were mutually exclusive: 1) As noted, some men wanted to know what women do with each other; 2) Others said because they are not attracted to men, watching two women is better than one woman and one man; 3) Another group of men have fantasies of having sex with two women; and, 4) The last group said they identified with one or both of the women’s characters. The other woman concurred with the second answer.

¹⁶ This is reminiscent of the men Annie Woodhouse refers to as “punters.” Men “who don’t want to go to bed with a man, but don’t want to go to bed with a real woman either.” So they go to bed with men dressed as women (1989, 31).

¹⁷ Peep-show booths usually have all varieties of porn available. The standard booth has 64 channels and many shops show gay, straight, bisexual, lesbian, transgender, s/m, bondage, amateur, professional, and many other varieties of porn.

¹⁸ The gangbang genre is often misunderstood as a representation of gang rape. The typical gangbang is 5-8 guys and one girl. The guys politely wait their turn to fuck, suck, or get sucked by the girl, one at a time, sometimes two or three at a time. The scenes progress in a very orderly and predictable fashion. I have never seen any force, coercion, or pain in a gangbang. Of the many I have seen only one had an introductory scene that set up a gang rape narrative. It was clearly fictional, and once the sex scene started it was no different from any other gangbang.

¹⁹ *The Story of O* is one of the most famous pornographic texts. It is a dominance and submission story in which the protagonist, O, agrees to become the sexual slave of her lover. It is important to point out that in sadomasochistic or dominance & submission pornography, it is just as common to see women dominating men as it is to see men dominating women.

²⁰ It should be noted that gangbangs are decidedly *not* dominance and submission scenes, though, as Oscar demonstrates, a sex scene involving one woman and five or more men is ripe for such an interpretation if the viewer so chooses.

²¹ Though probably most women's orgasms in pornography are faked, there are some videos in which women come. Most obvious are those videos that focus on women's ejaculation. There are a number of series devoted to this, see *Rainwoman*, and the individual videos *Seymore's Squirters*. Although the plot of the early film *The Grafenberg Spot* highlights female ejaculation, the orgasms are false.

²² I am grateful to Judith Lorber for this reference.

CHAPTER VI. PORNOGRAPHY AND THE STABILIZATION OF SEXIST SCRIPTS

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on how pornography can tie into and contribute to the stabilization and solidification of gender dichotomies and sexism. Though my work contrasts with the anti-pornography feminists (Lederer and Delgado, 1995; MacKinnon and Dworkin, 1997; Russell, 1998), a central feature of this chapter will be to address some of their concerns.¹ Nevertheless, it should be clear that this chapter will not be an endorsement of their positions. For example, I disagree strongly with their tendency to deploy “causal models” of the “effects of pornography.” Throughout this dissertation I have emphasized that pornography is always embedded in a rich social context. As such, nothing can be attributed solely to pornography. Diana Russell (1992; 1993; 1998), in contrast, sees pornography as a direct cause of rape. She argues that there are five possible causes of rape: male sex-role socialization, sexual abuse in childhood, portrayal of women in the mass media, peer pressure, and pornography (1998, p. 121). According to Russell, these factors operate *discretely*, rather than in concert. “Pornography can be a sufficient (though not a necessary) condition for males to desire to rape,” and “pornography can induce a desire to rape women in males who previously had no such desire” (1998, p. 122). Nowhere does she discuss the other factors that she lists; her focus is on pornography alone (for a detailed critique of her claims of causality, see Hardy, 1998). In contrast, I emphasize how pornography *can tie into* existing sexist structures and ideologies, *contribute* to, and thus, stabilize them. The major themes in this chapter are: beauty, the sexual double standard, hostility towards women focusing primarily on what these men perceive to be women’s sexual power to attract and then deny or grant sex, and fi-

nally, rape fantasies and rape. As will become clear, each of these themes engenders a great deal of hostility towards women expressed through pornography.

An additional, and particularly important, dispute, is anti-pornography feminists' portrayal of women as powerless victims of men's violence. When many (though not all) of the men in my sample spoke about gender and power, they tended to emphasize *women's* power and denied, ignored, or were unaware of their own. Not surprisingly, in the context of our society (and an interview on pornography), these men characterized women's power as *sexual* power.

Some men described women's power in terms of raw physical desire:

Lester: The power of the pussy is extremely strong.

Zack: Women are the keepers of the pussy.

Teddie: Men know women have the pussy, and the pussy is good.

Others focused more on what they perceived to be women's power in the dating game.

Leon: Women totally have the upper hand, men spend lavish amounts of money and act ridiculous [in order to get sex].

Kelly: It's easier for a woman to get a guy than it is for a guy to get a woman, every guy knows that.

Bart: Let's face it, they have the ultimate power, they have the power of "yes" or "no."

Still others focused on what they perceived to be men's helplessness in the face of a beautiful woman:

Darryl: Sex is powerful, a beautiful woman waves her bosom in front of a man, he'll sell his farm and his kids to get that.

Woody: [Women] have a certain power over men, drop dead gorgeous girls will always make men stammer, stutter, and blubber.

Nate: I'm one of those guys that turns into a babbling jerk if I'm talking to a beautiful woman, so more than once I've opened a conversation by saying: "Excuse me if I babble like an idiot guy for a second."

The straight men in my sample almost all agree that stereotypically attractive women have substantial sexual power. Moreover, the reactions to this sexual power were clearly varied. The quotes above depict men feeling admiration, resentment, anger, appreciation, envy, or various combinations and permutations of these. These diverse responses indicate that power is nuanced; it's not a zero-sum game. That is, women's power does *not* necessitate men's powerlessness. However, as is evident above, men don't always experience themselves as powerful (see also Kimmel, 1990c; Kaufman, 1994), even if they (though not a cohesive group²) indisputably have structural power in the United States. These delicate and nuanced relations of power are at the center of this chapter.

B. DOUBLE STANDARDS

1. Pornography and Beauty

Pornography can tie into sexist scripts in a number of common-sense ways. One is to reinforce our society's standards of beauty for women. For example, Teddie told me: "I was looking at these magazines, so the girls in school didn't really make it." Dana, who no longer masturbates with pornography (but is not anti-porn), was explicit about beauty standards. Initially, he lamented that pornography made him "value prettiness" more than he might have, and that it "slowed me down in recognizing value in women who weren't really picture perfect." Dana backs away from this causal argument though, insisting that these feelings "are not entirely attributable to pornography." He suggests that our society has a broad "ethic" which structures this mind-set. His analysis refers to consumer culture: "For example, it's hard for me to be with a woman and not be looking over her shoulder and thinking: 'Well, that other woman's a little prettier than

this one.' You know, you're thinking of the person as a commodity." The nature of the commodity is evanescence. As Dana suggests, evanescent beauty is not limited to porn. The faces in fashion magazines and advertising change as fast as those in pornography. Naomi Wolf (1991) lists pornography among other popular industries shaping contemporary beauty standards for women: the diet, cosmetics, plastic surgery, and pornography industries. Other factors that Wolf does not mention are the fashion, fitness, and entertainment (television, cinema) industries.

If Dana is aware and critical of pornography's role in creating standards of beauty, then Wesley appears to take those standards seriously. Speaking metaphorically, he tells us: "I judge my books by the covers, I won't read a book if it has a lousy cover. Beauty's definitely a big issue." Beauty is not the only issue, however. Wesley says he wants the "total package.... I want 'em to have it all, I want 'em to be that *Playboy* model, with the education, the BA, the MBA." On one level, the fact that Wesley's fantasy women have diplomas is contrary to the typical image of pornography fans. On another level, these fantasies tell us about what seem to be high expectations for the women in his life. As if speaking to his girlfriend, he tells me about his frustration with her: "Yea, you're good looking, but damn, you could be better looking. Like, look at this picture."³ Wesley makes the link between his ideal girlfriend and *Playboy*. This link is not inextricable, however. Indeed, Wesley provides an excellent example of what Dana called the social "ethic" at work here. According to Wesley, both he and his girlfriend are serious devotees of fitness culture. They both adhere to workout regimens, exercise with fitness videos and television programs, and read fitness magazines. As such, though

Playboy seems to influence Wesley's expectations for his girlfriend, it is far from the only influence.

The confluence of pornography and beauty is not only complicated by multiple social factors, but also by the fact that many men in my sample did *not* subscribe to our society's current standards of beauty. Many spoke repeatedly about the uniformity of women's bodies in pornography (and elsewhere) and the appeal of more realistic women.

Mickey: I don't like so-called beautiful women that look like Pamela Anderson, that's not my type, my ex-wife was a hefty woman, nice hefty Mexican momma. I like the girl next door, not the girl, but the woman next door in her 30s or 40s or even 50s, just your average person getting her brains fucked out and really enjoying it.

Roscoe: I love amateur videos, I love regular people, I don't really want to see a [porn] star, I'm more excited by an everyday woman, a little wrinkle here, a little flab there, not the prettiest woman, just someone who's happy.

Rubin: *Playboy* and *Penthouse* are too clean, let me see a pimple!

It is not only these porn fans that subvert mainstream beauty standards. Laura Kipnis (1996) has shown how some pornography also disrupts these standards. She documents, for example, how fat appears "in an array of magazines and videos featuring extremely large naked women in sexual situations (by large I mean between maybe 200 to 500 pounds), with titles like *Plumpers and Big Women*, *Jumbo Jezebel*, *Life in the Fat Lane*, *Love's Savage Cupcake*" (p. 94).⁴ Though this genre is not mainstream, it is commonly available. These images alone, however, do not necessarily undermine conventional beauty standards. It is men's interpretation of the images that is important. Some men may well regard these aberrant images like a freak show, or as comic, thus reinforcing the mainstream view. The accounts above, however, indicate that all men do *not* subscribe to our society's ideals of beauty. They, and others, may well be attracted to fat women.

Thus, it is clear from my interviews that pornography *can* solidify sexist beauty standards for some men. However, it is equally clear that one must maintain a critical eye for the vicissitudes of pornography itself, its fans, and its participation in producing a rich socio-cultural complex.

2. The Sexual Double Standard

In a simple chart, Leora Tanenbaum (1999) lists two positive words for sexually active women, and 28 that are negative. In the next column, she lists 12 positive words for sexually active men, and three that are negative. Though the subjective judgments of such lists are always debatable, her point remains that the sexual double standard is very much alive: sexually active women are reviled while sexually active men are admired. Sue Lees (1989) argues that the double standard is a “deterrent to non-conformity” (p. 24) and a “form of control that steers girls into ‘acceptable’ forms of sexual and social behavior” (p. 26). All the girls she interviewed agreed that there was only one way a girl could redeem herself from the slut label: “get a steady boyfriend” (p. 26). Both the enforcement of monogamous heterosexuality for girls and the positive assessment of boys’ sexual activity lend great advantage to boys. Although sexuality is also problematic for teenage boys, there is a radical disjuncture between issues that girls and boys face.

The findings of Sharon Thompson (1995) and Janet Holland et al. (1996) tell us that the sexual double standard has shifted in varying ways for some teenage girls and boys. Thompson uncovered “local and individual sex and gender subsystems” of sexual practice, rather than a consensus among girls about what acts reflect in what ways on their reputations. Holland et al. found similar variations among boys and girls. These

authors did not dispute that the double standard continued to be a powerful force in girls' lives, but they appeared optimistic about the potential for change.

In her study of convicted rapists, Diana Scully (1990) found "pedestal values" to be the most rigid of the values she measured. She writes: "It is men with the most rigid demands for female virtue who are the best candidates for hostility because they cannot accept women as fully human, with the same rights of choice that men enjoy" (p. 81).

In this section, I will discuss how pornography interacts with the sexual double standard and the various understandings of the double standard that arose in my interviews. It is important to note that I never asked directly about this issue; it arose of its own accord. This in itself is evidence of its relevance to our society's sexual discourse.

Kendall is a bisexual man. In the context of a discussion about what makes fantasy with pornography appealing, he says:

In pornography with women I like to take them [women] some place that I don't usually go with them, in other words, I'd never ask my girlfriend to get fucked by ten guys at the same time, but I totally get off on it with pornography. Basically, I put women on a pedestal, and this allows me to drop them off of it, but not to the point where they're degraded.

<What are they?>

They're, they're more like men. The women that I've come in contact with, they're always very loving and caring, and the sex is great with them, but it needs to go along with the loving, caring relationship, and this [his fantasy with pornography] is more like the love and all that doesn't need to be there. It's about sex, *fucking*. Yea. But it's purely fantasy, because if you came back to reality, I don't think I'd really want to have sex with a woman that's just a big fucking whore bag, like I'm really attracted to intelligence, and a mind, and self-respect and all of those things.

Kendall's opposition of the "pedestal" and the "whore" is the exact language of the madonna/whore double standard. For him, one of the benefits of pornography is to take women off the pedestal. Pornography's portrayal of women as sexual *subjects* with

appetites for all types of sexuality has been recognized by many anti-censorship feminists (see Ellis, et al., 1986; Strossen, 1995; Tisdale, 1992; Webster, 1986). But, it seems women can be sexual subjects *in this way* only in his fantasies. When he comes “back to reality,” they emerge as “big fucking whore bag[s],” who lack “intelligence, ... a mind, and self-respect.” To what extent, then, does pornography shore up Kendall’s double standards, or, by contrast (or simultaneously), provide positive images of women as sexual subjects?

In Kendall’s narrative, the nature of the double standard is that men’s status remains stable as women’s shifts from being “more like men” to being “big fucking whore bag[s].” Because men fuck just as voraciously as women, the implication is that men’s status is *always* that of big fucking whore bag (in practice, if not in name). This is relevant to Kendall, because, as it turns out, he sees himself as one in his fantasies with porn. As the interview progresses he talks about more of his fantasies with pornography. A video he likes in particular is one which has “three guys,” and “one guy’s giving all three guys blowjobs.” He says his fantasy is: “To be the guy, and have three guys shoot their loads in my mouth. *That* turns me on.” I suggest that he’s fantasizing about getting gangbanged. He’s somewhat taken aback, but does agree: “I guess so, I’m having the loads shot in my mouth, so yea, that’s something I’ve always wanted to do.” He goes on to reflect on these fantasies and the nature of power in gangbang:

When I fantasize about being gangbanged like that (which I didn’t realize I was doing), it’s not really lowering myself, it’s just another thing [another way of having sex]. When I think about it, it’s not like they have power over me, or that they’re making me do it. It’s actually like I have the power, because I’m the one that they need.

<Can you reflect on that in terms of the woman being gangbanged? Do you see her as lower, or with power?>

I guess I saw her as lower, because, I tend to think that women, you know that thing you think that women just don't want that, that it would be lowering her to do that? And to be very honest with you, most women would probably feel the same way, but they really shouldn't. But it's pounded into their heads that they're dirty little girls all the time. You know that bullshit, girls, all the guilt that they grow up with. Guys don't grow up with nearly the amount of guilt that the women have to deal with, so, it's actually it's kind of an elevated position as far as sexual matters go.

Thus, in his fantasies, Kendall places himself and women in similar positions, but judges only the women, and judges them harshly. As many of the men in my sample, Kendall comes to pornography with sexist scripts *and* progressive feminist scripts. Upon reflection, their contradiction becomes evident to him, but it is unclear how his thinking would have progressed had I not been present. Kendall's conflict is an example of flexibility and shifting interplay between pornography and available scripts. If Kendall uses his sexist scripts, pornography will show him big fucking whore bags to his heart's content. But if he uses his progressive feminist scripts, pornography will show him women that are not "lowered," but "elevated" by their sexual preferences and rapacious appetites. These women, like his own position in a gangbang, "have the power." Like him, they are the ones that the guys need.

A similar, but more self-conscious process is visible in Graham. He says that he and his girlfriend enjoy watching "couples porn"⁵ together. Even though he likes that genre, sometimes when he's alone he watches movies he wouldn't show her. Note how he becomes self-conscious of his double standards as his story develops. Graham says:

I don't really want to show her a movie with eight guys on one girl, because if she starts getting excited about that then I have to kind of question certain things about her. I shouldn't say that, because it's not really being fair, but I'm just saying if she's - I like it better that she's into movies that are a little bit more of a partner fashion. I guess I am being a little stereotypical about it.

<Bit of a double standard there.>

I try to be as open about it as I can, but there are times where I guess I pull the old double standard too. Not as liberated as I like to think I am sometimes.

If to a limited extent, feminist thinking has had an impact on Kendall, Graham, and other men I interviewed. This, in combination with the, sadly rare, opportunity for them to talk about and explore these issues in detail, enabled them to see their deeply personal fantasies and ideas contextualized within larger social relations of gender and power.

Other men do this as well, but in more traditional ways. Darryl makes his views on women clear throughout the interview:

I'm from the old school, very macho, very male-centric, male-dominating. I'm sexist, I don't hide it, I don't have any bones about it, that's the way I am, born and bred, very Hispanic, 25th generation. Do I believe in women's lib? No, I don't."

Darryl sees his Latino identity as central to his views on women. None of the other Hispanic men I interviewed, both gay and straight, held such extreme views or embraced their ethnic heritage in this way. His outright endorsement of the double standard was clear. "I know the difference between a good woman and a bad woman, when you have a good woman you keep her forever, and a bad woman, they're a dime a dozen." Despite this madonna/whore frame, he frequently characterized women as "all the same." "All women want it, it's up to you to bring it out in them." This contradiction works in his favor. He maintains the sexual double standard (the social control of women), and is still able to have whatever he wants even from his "good girl" wife, because all women are the same anyway.

Darryl maps out clearly how pornography can solidify and tie into sexist scripts. Note in the following passage how he refers back and forth between pornography and his experiences with women:

[My views] could be from my experiences with women, you know, you live life, you see, and I've had many women.⁶ But it could also be from porn, because you see what's out there, you see these loose women who do a hundred [porn] movies a year, then you look at what you got [your wife] and you say: 'wow, big difference.'

Taken as a whole, Darryl's testimony paints a complex picture of four enmeshed forces: family, socio-cultural history, personal experience, and pornography, all combining to create his views of women. Thus, within this kind of context, pornography can easily fit into existing sexist scripts, stabilizing and reproducing them. I emphasize existing scripts here because pornography often enters this picture after many lessons have been learned; however, pornography may contribute to these lessons. Darryl reports that he first saw pornography when he was about eight or nine years old, although his real interest began when he was about fifteen.

The sexual double standard can be traced in western societies to an attempt to control paternity, kinship, inheritance, and finally, the lineage of power. On one level, the worry that a wife or girlfriend with open sexual appetites will be unfaithful may be a vestige of that kind of control of women's sexuality. On another level, these inequities are by now reified, living a life of their own apart from their social history and context. Thus, in the current era the same inequities are now recalculated within the context of romantic love and its requirement of fidelity. Note how, in its reified form, the double standard can shift fluidly according to social context. For example, Bond is from a working class background. He emphasizes that women should be "pristine" and not "wild about sex." Kendall, whose family is middle class, disparages sluts' lack of "intelligence. ... a mind, and self-respect."

Another nuance in men's feelings about the double standard is encouragement of a partner's sexuality and then disparagement with it is acted on. Bond and I talked in

some detail about an ex-girlfriend of his. In the following story he tells me about pornographic letters she wrote to him at his request based on the videos they enjoyed together. He is quite clear about his contradictory reactions to these letters. This passage gives us insight into the confusion that some men feel in the convergence of the sexual double standard and their pleasure with fantasy, pornography, and the women in their lives.

Bond says:

At my urging, my ex-girlfriend used to write me unbelievable letters about her getting worked over by guys. But sometimes it was coming too close, because she'd write the letter at my request, then I'd get mad. You know, that's kinda weird. And I'd only get mad after I jerked off to it, of course. It was good while I was jerking-off, but then I was like: "Hey, what's going on in your head? You really want this to happen?"

It would be easy to argue that Bond is playing out the double standard, case closed. However, he's clearly conflicted, confused by his anger and contradictory desires. He understands that it's hypocritical to get angry, but he doesn't seem to understand *why* he's angry. It is impossible to know what is taking place here for Bond. It appears, however, that after he jerks off with the letters he inspects the scene through the lenses of our sexist society. He finds fault. His final question is directed at himself, but he implies that he's also mad at his girlfriend. It's almost as if his confusion is the result of a kind of sexual contempt in which he doesn't know who to hate more, his girlfriend (for successfully being a "whore") or himself (for asking her to be one).

Bond allows us to see the price that the double standard exacts upon men, as well as women. Men, especially highly sexual men, who reject a libidinous lover or spouse in favor of someone less sexually inclined, not only hurt the women they reject, but themselves as well. Put bluntly, Bond wants a "pristine" wife *and* a sexually assertive, open, and playful partner in one, but he can't remove the wedge hammered between the two by

our commonplace constructions of sexuality and gender, thus he has to reject one in favor of the other. By definition then, he too splits, into what we might call “respectable husband” and “John” (i.e. whore’s client). Muriel Dimen (1981) argues that many of us split the sexual self. We divide our diffuse sexual potential into numerous parts, accept only those that fit into our society’s cramped sexual parameters, and reject the rest. She calls us “part-people” (p. 69). For Dimen, this partitioning of ourselves allows for the reification and solidification of society’s power hierarchies, and so (re)creates that domination within us. Bond is a particularly good example of this process because he not only dominates and controls himself and his desires via the double standard, but also those of his women partners.

We’ve seen in varying degrees how pornography can solidify and stabilize gendered, sexist scripts. A vital element of this argument, however, is that though pornography can, *it doesn’t always*, tie into those scripts. Clay, for example, has been involved with a few female fans of pornography. His first such girlfriend was, in his words, a “very sexual woman,” who was “much more into [porn] than I was.” When they first got together he says he enjoyed magazines, but:

I wasn’t really interested in videos, I started watching videos with her, before that I saw it as bad acting, bad lighting, bad music.... But from exploring that stuff with her, I found a few things that could catch my imagination.

Clay doesn’t address double standards directly, but he strongly contrasts with the men above. Even though his girlfriend was more involved in porn than he was, he never hints at a negative judgment against her sexuality. He appears unthreatened, and even a beneficiary of her experience with porn. Indeed, he described this particular relationship as: “A very liberating experience.”

Lester was direct about the contradictory nature of double standards. He tells two related stories in the following excerpt. The first is brief and about the interaction he and a friend had while they watched porn together – a scene in which a woman is sucking a man’s cock. His story illustrates the vastly different reactions men can have to the same pornography regarding the issue of double standards. The second story flows naturally from the first. As Lester tells it, his friend said:

‘Yo, that’s how I had this girl doing me, just like that.’ And I’m like: ‘Yea, that’s cool,’ but, you know, how was he looking at it? Because a blowjob is just a blowjob. Like this other friend of mine goes to prostitutes to get his dick sucked, but says if his girlfriend did that he couldn’t respect her. [And I said,] ‘You’re gonna have a lot problems when you get married babe, I’m telling you that right now.’ If you like to get your dick sucked, there’s gonna come a time when you’re gonna want that from your wife, and your wife might not be the type of person to give it to you, so you better go with what you like. You gotta understand a woman’s not a whore or a slut or a tramp because she does these things.

Lester articulates the irony of the double standard for these men: their enforcement of patriarchal ideals upon women and their sexuality becomes an enforcement of the same constricted sexual codes upon themselves. This may not be an unintended consequence. Some of these men are deeply conservative, not only about women’s sexuality, but about sexuality in general. Lester says “a blowjob is just a blowjob,” but to his friends things are different. One seems to feel like he’s putting something over on his girlfriend if she’s sucking his cock, and the other appears to feel like a blowjob is a moral infraction.

Bart speaks to the contradiction of the double standard in an interesting way. “A lot of guys are freaked out if they see a woman who’s confident in her sexuality, the first thing they’ll think is ‘Slut,’ you know, or ‘Bitch,’ or like ‘She just wants to get fucked,’ [but I’m like] ‘What, and you don’t!’” Certainly men can be sluts too, as Bart implies, many men just want to get fucked. But perhaps all this bluster of “slut” and “bitch” (used

in the context that Bart describes) is a defensive response to the threat that women and sexuality represent or the pressures that heterosexual men feel to be on top and in control in an arena in which women have significant power. The following section addresses these issues.

C. HOSTILITY TOWARDS WOMEN

Only a few men in my sample were outwardly hostile toward women. More men expressed resentment and underlying tensions rather than overt hostility, but whatever the emotion, the source of these tensions about women appeared to be sexuality.⁷ Most of these men felt, as suggested above, that women have the power in the sexual arena, and, in addition, that women establish and maintain the rules of the game. The overriding sentiment among these men is that women have the goods, so to speak, and these men resent having to play by what they see as women's rules to get them. The rules of the game, however, don't emerge *sui generis* from women. As argued above, within our current society, women and men have to contend with the sexual double standard. However, women's point of view or the sexual constraints on them were taken into account by only a small number of men.

Pornography's role in this dynamic is complex. Some men never referred to pornography when voicing complaints about women. Otto for example, cited his envy of gay men and their ability to access casual sex.

I find the honesty of the gay life-style appealing, they all admit: 'I like sex and I like casual sex sometimes, and I like serious, romantic sex sometimes too.' They can talk about it, when it's male-female, you gotta, well, I always did, approach it carefully, like there's this ritual of courtship.

Here, Otto concedes some responsibility for the construction and maintenance of the "ritual of courtship." Lester also envies gay men, but his words are somewhat more

harsh than Otto's. He says: "There's always some type of game with them [straight women], not all women, some of them do just want sex and it's not a problem, but with gays it's straight to the point, there's no bullshit." Realistically these types of comments amount to little more than mild gender griping. Were women interviewed in this fashion, presumably similar venting against men would take place.

Adrian and Graham referred directly to pornography in their accounts. They expressed a similar low-level resentment of women based on a dissatisfaction with the "rules of the game." Their specific histories with women contribute to these feelings, however, in a way that I was not aware of with Otto and Lester. Graham has recently separated from his wife and their divorce is pending. Adrian is a closeted bisexual man in a heterosexual relationship, and as such his resentment may be as much about compulsory heterosexuality as it is about women. Nevertheless, in the interview, it was focused on women.

For Graham, like other men I interviewed, pornography represents an alternative to the rules or codes of conduct in heterosexual relationships. He says:

The idea of people just having sex freely like [they do in porn] turns me on. And not having to, you know, look at this person and say 'so what's this mean now, where are we at? Do you love me?' A lot of women are just caught up in this sex means love thing. [But] I can just have sex and not think I have to start considering a future with you, and I think that these people in pornography feel the way I do.

Wilson (1978) and Lees (1989), however, link young women's emphasis on love explicitly with the double standard. Lees argues: "'Going steady' establishes the location of a sexuality appropriate for 'nice girls,' and that sexuality is distinguished from the essentially dirty/promiscuous sexuality of the slag⁸ by the presence of *love*" (p. 26). The girls in both studies agreed that the price of being labeled "slut" was rejection by their

peers, both girls and boys. Because of this threat, Wilson argues that “it was difficult to discover just how many girls *actually* believed in the primacy of love, and how many simply paid lip service to the ideal” (p. 71) in order to protect themselves. Thus, it would appear that the convention “women want love and men want sex” becomes taken-for-granted knowledge, and the sociological link to the double standard is forgotten.

Given Graham’s frustration with our society’s current sexual parameters, pornography’s meaning and importance to him becomes apparent. Pornography provides him with images of women and men who throw caution to the wind, defying sexual conventions and the burden of sexual responsibility. Such images are put forward as evidence of pornography’s sexual egalitarianism by a number of commentators (see Steinberg, 1990; Strossen, 1995; Webster, 1986). These images can be positive, but they may also lead, as they appear to for Graham, to the disparagement of women who do not defy convention, as if they were the source of the sexual rules-of-the-game. Of course, as we saw in the earlier section, when women are sexual “rebels,” they are disparaged by sexist men for their “slutty” behavior. Women, rather than the social rules men themselves abide by, bear the brunt of men’s hostility.

Adrian uses very similar language to Graham. In addition, like men above, he idealizes the subculture of anonymous sex available to gay men. The difference, however, is that he is part of that subculture. As a closeted bisexual man, *gay* pornography plays right into these tensions about heterosexuality for him. He says:

Everybody knows porn is just used to get off, there’s no bullshit like: ‘Do you love me?’ None of that crap. ‘Do you respect me?’ None of that shit. Get your pants off, suck your dick, fuck him, and that’s it.

The repetition of the question “Do you love me?” by both Graham and Adrian reflects the rules-of-the-game complaints of Lester, Otto, and many men in my sample.

Adrian's anger at women is apparent in the quotation, but it is important to note that he is referring to *gay* porn here, not straight. Thus, even as there are no images of women, he ties gay porn into his resentment of women. This twist underlines not so much the role of porn, but the context and conditions under which porn is consumed.

Compared to these men, Bond's language and emotion is more intense. Here he narrates a typical summer day walking to work with an old female friend.

'Look at that bitch,' I'll say, 'look at that bitch she's wearing no bra, oh man, I'd love to fuck her so much.' That's a sentence I say a lot during the day. 'Oh my god she got the bouncing coming down the block, look at that, she walks out of the house like that. She knows she totally wants it!' If we hung out, that would be the way I'd be talking, totally. I'd be saying 'bitch' a lot, I'd be saying 'slut' a lot. In a nonchalant tone, though, I wouldn't be going off or anything, but I'd be saying those words, the same types of words I'm saying when I'm watching the video. Man, I really wish the world the world was different.

Bond makes clear that he uses similar language when he's watching a video.

Elsewhere he says: "'Yea, I'm gonna see this bitch get nailed.' That's a typical thought that'll go through my head when I'm putting in a video."

The *words* Bond uses are not the problem. Between consenting adults, or masturbating alone, the words "slut" and "bitch" are typical in the so-called dirty talk repertoire of many sexual circles. Powerful experience calls for powerful language. In addition, these lines could be delivered ironically, as postmodern "citations" of sexism or appropriation of sexist language. Yet, in the context of Bond's endorsement of the sexual double standard, his words hold sexist potential, and as will become clear, there are a number of issues at play here pivoting on intricate link of sexuality, gender, and power.

Bond seemed to be *sincerely* troubled about his feelings towards women and sexuality. His uncertainty is reflected in comments like: "I'm always referring to girls as 'bitch,' you know, that's weird." Elsewhere in the interview he talked about how he likes

to “dominate” women when they fuck, “grabbing their wrists, holding them out, that type of stuff.” He concludes by asking for my approval: “That’s cool, right? That’s not bad, is it?”

In an effort to explore his own hostility, Bond contextualized his actions within the cultural setting of his family’s ethnic origins: “My father and my uncle were both born in Sicily, so like, the typical dinner is: the men don’t move, the women clean the plates, they get the new plates, etcetera. Perhaps it [his desire to dominate women] could stem from being in that kind of male dominating family.” While his family adheres, at least to some extent, to their traditions, Bond has to straddle these traditions; for example, in his work environment women are his colleagues and superiors: “Some women are higher up than me, that’s fine, I know some women – certain women are smarter than me, that’s just the way things are.” He appears to be caught between two worlds, and his trouble with women, sexuality, and power might be a product of these intertwining and conflicting worlds.

It appears, though, that sexuality is a special case: “I don’t want to dominate girls in every area [of life], just sex. It might have something to do with the feeling of well, this is the way it should be, at least in this area.” Lynne Segal (1990) has written: “The ubiquity of the discourses and imagery of ‘conquest/submission’, ‘activity/passivity’, ‘masculinity/femininity’, constructing heterosexual intercourse as *the* spectacular moment of male domination and female submission is inescapable” (p. 209). These discourses, Bond’s patriarchal family, and pornography (contextualized within these specifically sexist knowledges), construct a kind of socio-emotional arsenal justifying sexual domination, in his phrase: “the way it should be.” Throughout the interview Bond employed

language of a naturalistic order, referring, for example, to the “primal instinct.... When we were cavemen we were living like I want to live. In other words if you saw a woman you could just do what you wanted to her.... Maybe that really hasn’t gone away, except the society’s trying to make it go away, but it’s always there, it’s just you have to suppress it.” His use of this discourse is far from marginal or radical. On the contrary, biological determinism is the mainstream, and enjoys a great deal of credibility in our society (Connell, 1987).

With his patriarchal/biological/pornographic arsenal, one might conclude that Bond comes to the sexual scene from a position of gender power. On one level, this is clearly the case, but it is complicated by additional factors. In the following passage I asked Bond to tell me about his language: what he means when he refers to seeing women “get worked over” in video, or “get used,” or “get abused.” Observe the depth of *weakness* veiled by hostility. He says:

It makes me feel like this girl’s a total whore, yea, that that’s all she is, she always wants to have sex, she’s a slut. And I guess maybe – because when I was 15-16 I wasn’t having sex, whereas some of the people I knew then were. But when you’re 15-16 there are a lot of sluts, and I wanted to have sex with these sluts, but I could not, to me they were all bitches. They had sex with everybody else, why not have sex with me? And I guess now it’s [watching porn is] almost like me going back and saying to them: “Ok, well now I have you anyway.” Wow, maybe that’s it. Right, because I was jerking off so frequently, I was always in desire, I wanted to have sex so badly, and I couldn’t get any, it was like: “You bitch why can’t I, what’s wrong with me?”

Bond is clearly angry at women, but note also his pain, yearning, and vulnerability. “I believe” David Steinberg (1990) has written: “we are only beginning to appreciate the significance of the emotional work [straight] men must do to be able to repeatedly express sexual interest and initiative to those who are being taught [via sexist and sexually schizophrenic society] to reject us” (p. 55). Because of what has been done to

women's sexuality, Steinberg suggests, for many men the sexual scene has come to mean: "Men want sex more than women. Men try to get women to have sex with them.... [And] men feel resistance to sexual desire from women, expressed as fear, reluctance, disinterest, even revulsion" (p. 55). The forces that drive men to pornography, Steinberg believes, are men's perception of sexual scarcity, the desire for sexual reciprocity, and the fear of being undesirable. These claims are borne out in Bond's account and that of many of my participants. Yet, I do not believe they explain his *rage* at women. Here we must look at how Bond's feelings and experiences are embedded within the larger social structures of gender, power, and sexuality.

From his account above, Bond clearly has very strong sexual needs. These are significant in and of themselves, but they are also symbolic. He said above that sex is the singular site in which men should dominate women: "this is the way it should be." Thus, sexuality, specifically fucking a woman, is the singular place in which his masculinity and her femininity are as they should be. These feelings emerge within the context of specific social relations, discourses, and images – what I have described as his patriarchal/biological/pornographic arsenal. These forces combine to construct sexuality as a tightly packed space, oozing with layered meanings all central to Bond's identity as a man.

This construction of power contains an intrinsic vulnerability to and dependence on women *and* their submission; thus, things go awry. Bond *expects* power and sexual access, and he feels entitled to women's bodies: "They had sex with everybody else, why not have sex with me?" But in these assumptions, there is a complete disregard of the woman and *her desire*, of her experience of wanting him. His repeated expectations of

power, and his recurrent experiences of powerlessness in the face of women, constructs his sexuality (both with women and with pornography), I believe, as a means of revenge. We can begin to understand why he wants to dominate women, hold them down, and in pornography, “see this bitch get nailed.” In his own words, masturbation with porn is “going back and saying to them: ‘Ok, well now I have you anyway.’”

Bond’s simultaneous experience of power and powerlessness brings to mind what Michael Kaufman (1994) calls “men’s contradictory experience of power.” He writes: “Paradoxically, men are wounded by the very way that we have learned to embody and exercise our power” (p. 149). Kaufman argues that the resulting pain and turmoil creates potential for men to lash outward at women in violence or lash inward at themselves in self-hatred or addictions. In Bond’s words, there is evidence of lashing both inwards and outwards, that is, a contempt of self and other: “You bitch why can’t I, what’s wrong with me?” Certainly though, the balance of Bond’s contempt is directed at women; he takes no responsibility for this scenario or his anger. He simply blames women because he sees them as the sexual gatekeepers. However, as is clear from my respondent Roscoe, women are not the only gatekeepers.

As a young man, Roscoe had a terrific sexual appetite, but couldn’t get laid. Like Bond, and with similar language, he lays much of the blame on women: “I see you bounding around all these other guys all the time, every one of you is not a virgin you know. Come on!, what about me?!” Yet, when I asked him if he had ever asked any of these girls out, he answered: “No, more often than not it was all up there [in my head].” From this account, Roscoe appears to have been afraid of sexuality, but as has long been held in gender studies, men’s interest in sexual engagement is often about asserting and

affirming gender identity (Segal, 1990; Kimmel, 1990b,c). Thus, as with Bond, sexuality is not simply sexuality, but it is symbolic of manhood. Furthermore, these men are speaking of their teenage years where identity is particularly unstable. Nevertheless, even though he was clearly responsible for not getting laid, Roscoe still scapegoated women for being the sexual gatekeepers. Other men in my sample were more self-conscious and critical of the problems with this kind of thinking.

I asked each man I interviewed to react to a short quote from Timothy Beneke's (1982) *Men on Rape*. The passage is from a young man named Jay, who is *not* one of the rapists in the book. He speaks hypothetically about his feelings when he sees an attractive, but unavailable woman. Like Bond and Roscoe, he is simultaneously hostile and hurt.

Let's say I see a woman and she looks really pretty and really clean and sexy, and she's giving off very feminine, sexy vibes. I think, 'Wow, I would love to make love to her,' but I know she's not really interested. It's a tease. A lot of times a woman knows that she's looking really good and she'll use that and flaunt it, and it makes me feel like she's laughing at me and I feel *degraded*' (Beneke, 1982, p. 43).

There were innumerable reactions to this. One was to scoff at the idea that Jay would feel "degraded," but at the same time to admit that they may have felt something similar when they were younger. But it is important to keep in mind who's doing what in this scenario. For example, some of my respondents sensed that Jay attributes actions to this woman based on assumptions rather than concrete knowledge about who she is. Gale puts himself in Jay's shoes, but suggests that Jay has to look at his own participation in this scenario rather than blaming the woman for his pain.:

My perspective on that is that it's not her controlling me, it's me almost projecting that onto her. That woman might not be sexual to anybody else, it might not be flaunting to anybody else. Touching her hair in that certain way, and wearing that certain type of clothing, the way I see those things is all about me. She's in-

volved in it because she's what's affecting you, but it's you being affected because of what you have inside, there's no objective sexuality, there's no objective beauty, it's very subjective.

Gale sees Jay holding the woman accountable for *his fantasies about her*. Thus, she may have little or no sense of what Jay is experiencing.

Rubin sees danger for the woman in Jay's pain. As such, he is quite perceptive about the context of Jay's quote. Without knowing the book from which it came, Rubin senses that Jay is discussing rape:

He's deciding what she's doing, but she isn't doing anything, this is *his* reaction, it's all inside his head. That's the kinda guy that'll rape, because he's sure that he knows what she's doing. I have perceptions, but until I ask you or until I check you out, I can't be sure. See, he's thinking about 'women,' not a person, but there's no such thing as 'women,' there's only the woman you're talking to (or the man you're talking to), that's all there is. You can know anything you want about men or women, but every new one, you're gonna have to talk to them.

Rubin is also very perceptive in his sense that Jay is not thinking about this particular woman, but "women" as a category. Drawing on the work of Donald Black, Diana Scully (1990) refers to this as "collective liability." She writes: "A man's intent may not be to punish the woman he is raping but to use her because she represents a category to him" (p. 138). Indeed, the fact that Jay is talking about a hypothetical woman makes it clear that his anger is not at a specific woman, but at women in general.

Bond also walks down the street castigating women as a category. However, he asserted a number of times that he would not rape: "never would I do that." Nevertheless, he's honest about being excited by rape *fantasies*. For example, he and his girlfriend role-play rape scenes. When I ask if they play as if she likes it or hates it, he says:

Yea, that she likes it. Why?, because all girls do, because they're sluts, yea, it totally turns into that, where she'll be saying stop, but in actuality she's getting totally wet, so what is that?

Rather disturbingly, Bond confuses his role-play fantasies (in which his girlfriend is wet because they're having hot sex) with the myths that women really want to be raped, that no means yes, that force turns on all women (women as a category), whether they admit it or not. From here he goes on to talk about a criminal who had been arrested the previous summer. Bond says:

Like when that guy, John Royster, he beat that woman in Central Park, remember that whole thing? And they were saying that he ejaculated. Like I'm not saying that it's good, but I could understand how he could feel that way. I totally understood where he was coming from.

The facts of this case are that this woman was beaten beyond recognition, she was hospitalized and in a coma for weeks following the attack. Royster did not rape her. He was so excited by the beating, it seems, that he ejaculated before he could do so.¹⁰ Royster is a confessed, brutally violent criminal. The lack of empathy, the depth of selfishness, and the woman's *irrelevance* to Bond is deeply disturbing.

Yet, we must be very cautious here. The coverage of this event must be seen as a *representation*, and as such, it is subject to Bond's ideas about what such an event would be like. For example, his sense that he "totally understood where he [Royster] was coming from," means that he had fantasies about where Royster was coming from. The layers of mediation between event, coverage, and reader, need no elaboration here. Bond can't "totally understand." The idea that he is working from fantasy here rather than some direct correspondence with the event is bolstered by the fact that he immediately returns to his role-playing fantasies when elaborating on his feelings about Royster. He says:

When we're role-playing [a rape scene] it's total excitement, like I'm gonna get her, yea, she doesn't want it but she has no control over what I'm going to do, yea, and look at her now she's even liking it, she doesn't want me to stop.

This account has nothing to do with Royster, and yet the two are associated in his mind. It is impossible to know exactly what was appealing to him about Royster, but if he is role-playing rape scenes, clearly the fantasy of forcing sex on a woman who doesn't want it is exciting. This speaks *directly* to his account above about his pain in high school and not being able to get the sex that he wanted so badly. This story should be contextualized within his desire for and sense of entitlement to power based the patriarchal/biological/pornographic framework developed above.

There is a tremendous difference between fantasizing about rape and raping, between having rage and acting on that rage. Though some of Bond's testimony is disturbing, his honesty with his strong feelings allows us to address questions about the connections of pornography and rape, questions that are at the heart of the controversy over pornography.

D. RAPE FANTASIES AND REALITIES.

Men (and probably women) have two kinds of rape fantasies: those about raping, and those about being raped. Women's rape fantasies, as documented by Nancy Friday (1974), are usually about women being forced by men into sexual *pleasure* that "good girls" should not want. They are not about the brutal or manipulative rapes that happen every day. In her book *Men in Love*, Friday (1980) documents that straight men fantasize about being "raped" in similar fashion to women, that is, forced by women into pleasure. Of the thousands of fantasies that men reported to her, they were masochistic by a ratio of four to one. She received only three fantasies in which men raped women. Friday's sample is large, but not representative, so it's important to be cautious. The problem is that researchers (and the researched) do not make Friday's (1974) important distinction

between rape fantasies and actual rape. Hite (1981) and Beneke (1982), for example, report men's accounts of arousal by fictional and nonfictional mass media representations of rape.¹¹ The authors' positions are not explicit because both books focus almost solely on men's accounts rather than on analysis, but a possible implication from the authors is that these men are excited by the idea of *actual rape*, not by depictions or fantasies of rape. Furthermore, because both books focus on men only, another implication is that women would not be excited by similar depictions.

Malamuth (1983; 1986) explicitly equates arousal (penile tumescence) in response to a rape story in pornography with proclivity to rape. Other studies by Malamuth (1981) and Malamuth and Check (1980; 1983) ask respondents if they would rape if they were assured of not being caught as examples of men's proclivity to rape. Malamuth and Check (1980) report fully 69 percent of respondents said they would rape if they could be assured of not being punished.¹² First, this number is incompatible with Friday's (1980) research. Second, there are basic reporting problems with this finding.¹³ Third, the authors neglect to point out that *saying* one would rape has little connection to actually doing it. Finally, and most important, the question is less about who would rape, and more about who has *fantasized* about rape. Men whose fantasies are laced with intent *and* those whose fantasies are strictly imagination might both answer affirmatively.

My position is that there are two kinds of "rape," or more accurately, sexual coercion, emotional and physical; both are brutal. However, fantasies often depart radically from expected scenarios. A woman or man can fantasize about either or both kinds of coercion; anyone can fantasize about being the aggressor or the object, and anyone can fantasize the rape scenario as painful, pleasurable, or some combination of both. Physical

or emotional coercion may be pleasurable to the “victim,” for example, or, the “rapist” may have magical powers like the main character in the novel *The Fermata* (Baker, 1994).¹⁴

The fantasizing of aggressive sexuality that Friday (1974) recognized in women remains controversial: women who fantasize about getting raped may not want to be brutalized, but to get fucked hard, and fantasize about not consenting. I suspect it is the same with most bisexual, gay, and straight men who fantasize about “raping”: they probably want to *fuck*, to gain sexual access, fantasize about taking, but not actually brutalize.

A few men of all sexual preferences in my sample had fantasies about “raping” and “being raped.” In the previous section, I argued that Bond’s rape fantasies, and other men’s hostilities, were based in their anger about women’s power to attract and then grant or deny sex – women’s sexual power. Some readers might consider Bond’s rape fantasy the “typical” heterosexual man’s rape fantasy; it is what many of us imagine men’s rape fantasies to be. But as will become clear, the rape fantasies of the men I interviewed are more complex and varied.

Gale didn’t fantasize about rape with pornography per se, but he talks at length about his fascination with the rape scenes in the Stanley Kubrick film *A Clockwork Orange*.¹⁵ There are two rape scenes in Kubrick’s film. Gale is aroused by one and not the other. The distinction he makes between the two scenes demarcates the line between rape fantasy as sexual access (akin to women’s fantasies in Friday [1974]), which he finds arousing, and rape fantasy as *brutality* and sexual access, which he doesn’t find

arousing. As such, he informs us about differences among men regarding types rape fantasies, and also about some of the different issues at the source of those fantasies.

In the first scene, Alex (the main character) and his gang enter an abandoned theater and see a rival gang raping a woman on the stage. This scene excited Gale for a number of reasons: “the nudity” and “the intensity of the action.” Rather hesitantly, he makes his fantasy clear: “I was aroused by it, this naked woman being, you know, being raped.” As he continues, however, he begins to clarify the conditions of his arousal.

They were fucking her and doing whatever they needed to do with her, groping her, and holding her down. I was aroused by that, and at the same time I knew that wouldn't be something that would be exciting for me, to just hold a woman down and fuck her. At some point I knew that this was a movie, that there was choreography involved. There was no punching, there was no beating, so on that level I knew it was playing.

Gale makes clear that rape *fantasy* is what excites him, not actual rape. The absence of brutality is key, “no punching,” “no beating.” His final word “playing” is interesting as well, if ambiguous. It could mean playing as in sex play. Because Gale is an actor, it could also mean play-acting or role-playing. Either way, or combined, consent is intrinsic, thus distinguishing real rape from rape fantasy. In this sense, this representational rape is clearly “playing,” and thus, akin to the rape fantasies of the women in *Friday* (1974).

The second rape scene in *A Clockwork Orange* depicts Alex's gang breaking into a heterosexual couple's home. They terrorize the couple, and finally, cripple the man, and rape and kill the woman. Gale says that in the beginning of the scene, the nudity was arousing, but:

Then something switched. It has to do with Alex, and the fact that I see the violence in him. You look at him and you can see his face, you can see him transformed into this monster, it's vicious at that point, and so I'm not aroused by that. At that point it wasn't about sexuality for me.

Gale's conclusion mirrors the centerpiece of 1970s feminist analysis of rape: it is not about sexuality, it's about violence.¹⁶ Once Gale sees violence overwhelm the scene, once there's all viciousness and no playing, there's no sexuality. It should be noted that the scene Gale describes is *still* a rape fantasy, it's just not Gale's rape fantasy. It's no more or less real than the previous one he described. It's just as choreographed and performed, only in a way that doesn't turn him on. For others, the violence and monstrous nature of Alex may well be arousing.

For Rubin, like Gale, it is the fantasy of rape that turns him on. However, he identifies with being forced. "My identification would be with the person being forced rather than the person doing the forcing." Rubin wants to be "raped." He describes a rape scene from a pornographic book in which a woman, reminiscent of *A Clockwork Orange*, is raped in an auditorium. The woman is "a very middle class, virginal type of woman, basically a prude." He continues:

She's forced to remove her clothes on stage, in front of all these people. And then she's forced to have sexual relationships with someone on stage also. That thing got me so excited, I couldn't read but a few lines of it before I was off without touching myself. So I do like the rape fantasies, but only the rape fantasies. In reality I wouldn't touch it with a ten foot pole.

When I ask him about the appeal of force, he responds with delight:

Well, I gotta tell you it just tickles me pink, spanking, anything like that. But [seriously,] it does two things, it makes it [the sex] terribly sinful, and it also lets you off the hook because you're forced to do it.

Rubin's delighted response about force is reminiscent of Gale's reference to "playing." And indeed, throughout the interview, Rubin stressed the importance of play and playing, relaxing and enjoying sex and the body. Linked to these men's sense of play is a suspension of disbelief in their fantasies with force (as with many of these rape fantasies). That is, there's no *real* force at all. When he says force makes the sex "terribly

sinful,” this is play as well. If there’s no real force, then there’s no real sin (unless the sex itself is considered sinful). There’s a great deal of make-believe here. Many women’s and men’s rape fantasies appear to be constructed around, as Rubin says, letting oneself “off the hook” from the very real sin and sex-negativity so pervasive in our society. These games allow them to play, relax, and enjoy sex and the body. In Rubin’s delighted response on the meaning of force, we see the depth of pleasure that the elaborate subterfuge of rape fantasy can provide.

Finally, Darryl presents us with an important variation. This rape fantasy is *not* about women’s sexual power, but a specific woman’s structural power, his former boss. Though he takes revenge on her sexually, his fantasy is not about her sexuality.

I had a female boss for years, she was a bitch, what a bitch, you know. Pop on a tape, think it’s her getting gangbanged, they’re all coming in her face, have a couple laughs, get my revenge, without having to tell her off, I get my revenge. She isn’t the snob that she is at work, she’s getting fucked, basically, and not in a nice way, it’s not love, it’s not sex, it’s getting fucked.

Though Darryl does not refer to rape specifically, it seems safe to qualify this as a rape fantasy. His language fits into anti-pornography activist images of what men do with porn. It would seem that some of their claims are accurate. That said, note his sense of boundaries between fantasy and his work life. He can get his revenge “without having to tell her off.” His anger and resentment remain under wraps. It is clearly sexist and very much about power, but it remains an action that does not affect the boss. It seems equivalent to the impotent revenge of throwing darts at a male boss’s picture to blow off steam, as Darryl says, to get “a couple of laughs.”

1. Rape and Pornography

Whether or not pornography incites men to rape is one of the central issues in the pornography debates. In this section I will continue to frame my argument in terms of

the potential for pornography to tie into and stabilize sexist scripts in order to dispute causal and either/or formulations of the connection to rape. I hope to demonstrate the complexity and subtlety of pornography's *relationship* to men and their socially derived, historically contingent sexual and gender scripts.

It is in this light that I present the story of my respondent Chip. He told me about an incident when he was a teenager that appears to be an acquaintance rape. We were discussing the role of porn in his teenage sex life, so he begins by talking about what he got out of porn as a teenager.

Books give you ideas about what to do with real girls, the girls were almost incidental to what I wanted to practice from what I was reading. Like bondage, I didn't think about tying a girl up until I saw this bondage book. It was like you bend her over the thing, and you tie her, and then you blindfold her, you put the thing in her mouth, and I'm like 'Whao, ok, let's power trip.' I mean it got sadistic almost, because at one point this girl Karen let me tie her up in our clubhouse. And then I see [our friends] Bob and Alan coming down the street, and I got her tied up, and she's blindfolded, and Bob and Alan come in, and she doesn't know who's there. So we're gangbanging the girl, and she doesn't even, she can't do anything, she's totally, you know, tied up. Just so happens she never screamed rape or nothing, and she happened to enjoy it, so we kept on doing it, but... [he fades off]

<So she didn't seem upset about it then? >

She was upset because she didn't know who they were, at the time, but then when she realized that it was just Bob and Alan it was cool, 'cause she'd had sex with both of them already anyway, so yea, it wasn't like something she hadn't done before, but it was just the way I went about it. She was a nice girl, she was fun, she would do anything, I don't know what you would call it, like her moral standards weren't real high and her self-esteem was probably even lower.

It is difficult to know exactly what took place in this situation with such limited and contradictory information. On one hand, Chip acknowledges that she could have "screamed rape." At the same time, he says that once she knew who everyone was "it was cool," and she enjoyed it. It is possible that her experience changed during the incident, but this doesn't negate his own testimony that when she was tied up, blindfolded,

and gagged, a number of unidentified men started gangbanging her, and they continued to do so, even as (or because) they were aware of her helplessness. Thus: “it got sadistic almost,” and “girls were almost incidental to what I wanted to practice from what I was reading.” He finishes off by stating that “her moral standards weren’t real high,” and thus suggesting, as a slut, she can be used for their pleasure.

While this scene can be viewed as reprehensible, it is imperative to be precise about where responsibility rests. It is too easy, for example, to assume an intrinsic link between reading about and doing rape, bondage, and gangbangs. There are numerous manuals which stress safe, consensual, caring s/m practices (see Easton and Liszt, 1998; 1999; Henkin and Holiday, 1996; Wiseman, 1996). Jeffery Weeks (1985) tells us “no sexual act has any intrinsic meaning... [and] though they may not be conclusive factors, subjective feelings, intentions and meanings are vital elements in deciding the merits of an activity. The decisive factor is an awareness of context, of the situation in which choices are made” (p. 219). It is the relationship context in which sexual acts take place that must be looked at, not the act itself. Thus, it is not bondage or the gangbang that is the problem, but the manipulation, the deception, and the emotional/sexual violence that took place between Chip, Karen, and their friends. Indeed, Chip points to this analysis himself when he says: “It was just the way I went about it.”

The role of pornography in this incident is not simple either. To what extent did his reading of pornography tie into this incident? Chip indicates that he never thought of bondage before he read about it; he indicates that the book instructed him about some basic procedures of bondage. For many, this would be bad enough (for “convictions” of pornography based on similar evidence, see MacKinnon and Dworkin, 1997; Attorney

General's Commission on Pornography, 1986). However, instruction in the procedures of bondage is not instruction in rape, and even instruction in rape does not mean the reader will rape. At the same time, to argue that the pornography was in no way involved in this scene would be naive and wrong. It seems clear that Chip's pornographic book linked to an existing sexist (and exploitative) script which allowed him to act as he did when Karen was tied up. The *extent* to which it did so is unclear. Since Chip has had a great deal of experience with pornography before this, it's also important to ask the extent to which prior pornography contributed to the formation of his sexist scripts. Pornography is used in the context of a sexist society – thus, we must look far beyond pornography itself to know the other contributors to these scripts.

We are not completely adrift, however. An important factor is Chip's urban, crime-riddled youth. He has done jail time, as have several of his friends. For some youth, violence is one of the central proving grounds of masculinity (Canada, 1995; Majors, 1993). Scully (1990) points to these hypermasculine worlds as one of the ways in which masculinity can contribute to rape. As such, we have very specific and multiple contexts in which pornography might be interpreted as contributing to sexual violence. These multiple contexts must be accounted for, and even within them it is never clear how much porn contributes.

For example, later in the interview Chip talks about rape scenes depicted in pornography, and how he didn't find them erotic. Indeed, this leads into further stories about women friends of his who were raped, and how it destroyed their lives. About one friend he says: "She's never been the same person, no, never. She went from being this open, friendly, outgoing person to being this paranoid, reclusive, protective – it changed eve-

rything about her life.” What do these stories mean? Are they a guilty reaction? Had he ever thought of his story as rape before? Experiences and time have led him to see rape from the point of view of the victim; was a sense of himself as a perpetrator shocking? Is it possible that he has changed? Again, there are no answers to these questions, but they do raise important issues of time and change. In the next chapter we will see clear evidence of the possibilities for change and growth.

E. CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrated that pornography can tie into to sexist double standards, hostility towards women, and even rape. As I emphasized in the introduction, the key phrase here is *tie into*. Pornography cannot act on its own, nor can it stand outside of its socio-historical contexts. It is imperative to acknowledge, for example, that those with the most conservative, sexist, and hostile attitudes towards women were those men from the most conservative backgrounds. Within these social contexts pornography has potential to tie into and contribute to sexist attitudes. Though this is probably often true, it is not always, and nor is the reverse – we must resist sociological mechanics. There are innumerable factors which play into the pornography and sexism equation in unpredictable ways. As will become clear in the following chapter, for example, men’s personal experiences with women are critical to understanding how sexist and non-sexist dynamics develop and play out. Pornography is but one factor in a fantastically complex web of social relations.

If pornography can tie into sexist processes, then, pornography is not innocent. The sexism, anger, hostility, and violence in this chapter are real, spoken and narrated by men who have the ability to cause suffering. Pornography’s exact part and the extent of

its contributions remain uncertain. Though I do not believe pornography *causes* sexism, it clearly has the potential to nourish it, stabilize it, add to its complexity, shift its focus, or bring it into the bedroom.

The following chapter begins with a discussion relevant to these issues. It emphasizes how porn fans are not static individuals, and documents one fan whose negative attitudes about women changed over time when he began to have intimate sexual relationships with women. The theme of that chapter will be pornography in relationships.

F. ENDNOTES, CHAPTER VI

¹ Note that I am addressing the anti-pornography feminist concerns of sexual violence against women. I am not concerned with the morality issues and the endorsement of stronger obscenity law supported by right wing anti-porn activists (see Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, 1986).

² For a detailed discussion of the divisions among men, see Connell (1995).

³ This comment is made in the context of a discussion about *Playboy* magazine and its models, thus I understand the phrase "this picture" as referring to a picture in *Playboy*.

⁴ The humor and wordplay here is a playful convention in porn titles.

⁵ This is a typical industry phrase. These videos usually have higher production values, typically they involve acting and a story line, which may or may not be romantic. They are as explicit as any triple X feature.

⁶ This comment may be self-aggrandizing, but because he toured for years as a professional musician, it also may be true.

⁷ It seems likely that this is a function of the topic of the interview. Thus, were these men followed through their everyday lives, it is likely that broader social and cultural tensions would have also come into play.

⁸ "Slag" is the British equivalent of "slut."

⁹ My response to his question was: "If they're into it, it's definitely cool." He gave no indication that these acts were anything but consensual. Again, it is important not to judge sexual acts as if they have intrinsic meanings of their own. Furthermore, these sorts of sexual games are, I think, more common than is generally recognized. For example, Lillian Rubin (1990) reports that about 25 percent of her sample played with and enjoyed light bondage similar to what Bond is describing.

¹⁰ Articles in the New York *Times* state that of his four victims, Royster "sexually assaulted" only one, according to the *Times*, the District Attorney's Office gave no further description of the crime. The other three were beaten severely around the head. See New York *Times* June 14, 1996, p. 1; June 15, 1996, p. 1; June 16, 1996, p. 23.

¹¹ Hite's (1981) respondent cites a "a show in which a man is planning a rape" (p. 742), this appears to be fictional. Beneke's (1982) man cites a "newspaper" account, which would appear to be the reporting of an actual rape.

¹² Russell (1998) cites these studies in support of her contention that men's proclivity to rape is caused by pornography.

¹³ Sixty-nine percent “indicated a 2 or above ... [on a scale of 5] (1 = not at all likely, 5 = very likely)” (p. 540). The full breakdown of the scale is not provided, but it is common sense that 1 = not at all likely, 2 = unlikely, 3 = maybe (or don’t know), 4 = likely, and 5 = very likely. This is critical to our understanding of this finding because “2 or above” is the only information given. Thus, it is possible that the vast majority of this sixty-nine percent indicated that their proclivity to rape was *unlikely*.

¹⁴ In this novel the protagonist is able to stop time and freeze everyone around him for hours. He often uses these opportunities to undress women.

¹⁵ Though this film is generally not considered pornographic, Gale seamlessly refers to it in the discussion of his early experiences with pornography. Because *he* makes the association, and his rape fantasies are rich and complex, I include it here. In addition, it is noteworthy that the clearest reference this pornography fan has to depictions of rape is a popular film.

¹⁶ Scully (1990) argues for the reintegration of sex into feminist understandings of rape. “Rape is a violent act, but it is also a sexual act, and it is this fact that differentiates it from other crimes.” She contends that “emphasizing violence – the victims’ experience – is also strategic to the continued avoidance of an association between ‘normal’ men and sexual violence” (p. 143).

CHAPTER VII. PORNOGRAPHY IN RELATIONSHIPS

A. INTRODUCTION

There is much popular discussion about couples watching pornography together to add spice to their sex lives, yet many other issues emerged when I discussed relationships with my research participants. The chapter addresses bisexual, gay, and straight men's lives as porn fans with partners and how they attempt to (or do not attempt to) adjust and negotiate their practices with pornography in the context of their relationships. Most of the relationships addressed here have lasted longer than three years; the range was six months to 25 years. The chapter addresses four main topics: Is porn a replacement for "real" sex?; problems with porn in relationships; the affect of partners' attitudes on fans; and finally, porn and hot sex.

B. RELATIONSHIPS¹

1. Is Porn a Replacement for "Real" Sex?

While some men shifted away from masturbating with porn as they got into relationships, others did not. Perhaps the most obvious question here is: If men are in a relationship, why do they masturbate with porn? There is no single answer. Terry, for example, narrates a story about a former relationship. According to Terry, she wanted to have sex more than he did, but he enjoyed porn more than sex with her:

She wanted sex every other day almost, but I wanted it less. There is more imagination to the videos than there is in real life, there's more visual, more glistening, more bodies oiled up and shiny than there are in the real thing.

<Sounds like you liked it better than sex with her?>

Yea, sort of, a little bit, she didn't have to know that.

From his account, the troubles in the relationship seemed to be based on her trying to get closer and his trying to move away. Lillian Rubin (1983) refers to this dynamic as the “approach-avoidance dance.” Terry, however, enacts his role partially through pornography. When, on occasion, he would mention to her that he had watched some porn that day, he reports that she would ask: “Why didn’t you include me, why did you leave me out?” But Terry experiences her desire to be included almost as an attack:

She wanted to get into what you’re thinking, or know how your mind operates. I was closed off to it, I was kind of quiet, I didn’t really say what I thought a lot of times.

I simply do not have enough information to assess this relationship fairly. It seems, however, that Terry is using porn, among other things, to withdraw sexually and emotionally from this relationship (the reason, though, is unclear). It seems likely that porn is a tool in these circumstances, used like work, sports, television, an affair, or a local bar might be in other unhappy relationships.

The question about why one would masturbate with porn when in a relationship is based on the assumption that porn fans are lonely, isolated people who use pornography and masturbation as replacements for “real” or partnered sex. This assumption, in turn, is the basis for theories that sexual scarcity is one of the roots of the appeal of pornography (Kimmel, 1990c; Steinberg, 1990). Although my sample is not representative, sixty-three percent of the fans I interviewed were in relationships, and only two of these men said they were not having regular sex. In their national study, Laumann et al. (1994) found: “Across individuals, most Americans do *not* use autoerotic activity² to compensate for a lack of partnered sex. In fact, higher levels of autoeroticism are associated with higher levels of partnered sexual activity” (p. 137, my emphasis). National surveys are useful,

but they give us only numbers, not stories. Therefore, it is illuminating to listen to men for whom porn was a replacement for and a complement to partnered sex.

Two single fans did use porn as a substitute for sex with lovers, but feared that it made sexual satisfaction too easy. One of them, Mitch, a gay, white man in his 30s, said he was thinking about this issue as our interview approached.

I must be honest with you, the pornos are satisfying. I've had lovers before that, you know, they don't want to give out, or their jaw starts hurting [when they're sucking cock], and it's like: 'Man, I could just throw on a porno and get this over with right now.' So, I mean, I hope it doesn't somehow replace a relationship. But sometimes I'm done jacking-off, and I'm like: 'Wow that felt great, why do I need a lover?'

Despite his annoyance with some of his lovers, Mitch was conflicted about being single. When he finished this speech I suggested "maybe you don't [need a lover]." He said: "I keep thinking that, but everyone says I should have one, I want one, but that's a whole other issue." As if on the defensive, he abruptly changed the subject.

Other men I interviewed found that their interest in pornography and masturbation faded when they were in relationships – suggesting that for some men porn fills an otherwise empty sex life. Remi says: "It's waned considerably when I've been in relationships with women." And Fred told me: "When I'm in a relationship I don't get involved with it [porn] much, it just doesn't come to mind." For these men, the theory of sexual scarcity would seem to apply.

However, some men in relationships alternate between porn and sex with their partners over time. Robin is a married, straight, man who began his marriage believing that there'd no longer be a reason to masturbate: "I believed that I was going to get married and never jerk-off again, I believed that until about three weeks after I got married." He goes on: "Then I found myself with a tremendous hard-on, and my wife

was out or something, I had to.” During this period he and his wife were having regular sex, but he continued to masturbate and go to adult theaters. In this way, he fits Laumann et al.’s (1994) finding – high levels of partnered sex is found in tandem with high levels of masturbation. As they began to have children, their sex life changed considerably. When speaking of sex with his wife now he says: “It’s nowhere near as frequent as I would like.” At various points in his marriage, then, Robin was clearly using porn as a replacement for sex with his wife, beginning with her first pregnancy: “She was sick all the time, not just in the morning. She went to bed after dinner, and that’s when I started renting videos regularly.” But this was only temporary, when the pregnancy was over they were back to normal sexual frequency. These days, however, with more kids and his wife as the primary caregiver: “It’s very difficult to be spontaneous, and when they [the kids] finally get in bed, she’s just so tired.” Robin hypothesizes about her feelings: “I think she kinda likes the fact that I have this other outlet, it might even make her feel less guilty because I think at times she does feel guilty.”

Buster is a gay man who, in a discussion about how porn fits into his relationship with his lover, identifies the “porn as replacement” question explicitly: “I suppose somebody once told me that pornography tended to be only for people who weren’t getting it, or who weren’t being fulfilled.” But Buster took issue with this. He goes on: “But I tend to think that because my lover likes it, and we use it together, that it only adds to our sexual life together. I’ll bring some home and he’ll bring some home, you know, it’s something we share.” I ask him to clarify, though, whether or not he masturbates alone, and if so, does Andy, his partner, know? He said that early in the relationship Andy knew about his video collection. Yet, Buster was still embarrassed about

masturbating alone. His rather awkward phrasing lends insight to his feelings: "I hadn't let him in to actually seeing me use the porn on my own." When Andy came home early one day, Buster explains what happened:

I was in the bedroom masturbating and watching this movie, and at first I felt embarrassed, I really did. And he said "Why? Why would you stop?" And he taught me something, that I shouldn't feel embarrassed, and so I continued to do what I was doing.

Whether Buster's embarrassment is about masturbation and porn in general or just in the context of his relationship is unclear. Nevertheless, these circumstances speak to the relentless and elaborate qualities of shame – even when he and his partner watch together, even when each clearly have their own collections and have masturbated with them extensively in the past, Buster is ashamed to be found masturbating on his own. It is his partner that helps create space for private sexual pleasure within their relationship. Since Buster continues to masturbate regularly within the context of his relationship, I asked him if porn does something for him that his lover can't. He says:

It allows me to have a personal sexual being, life, of my own. It allows me the freedom to have sex with my lover when he's available to me, but also the ability to find some sexual fulfillment on my own. It's beyond family, it's beyond friends, what else in this life do we really do for ourselves and on our own?

Buster's sentiment recalls the language in Chapter Four in which single men and men in relationships spoke of privacy, self-love, and escape.

Oscar presents another story. He and his wife have an understanding about pornography. He's clear that she is not as interested in porn as he is: "She doesn't masturbate. So she's not gonna go pick up one of these magazines or a novel unless we're gonna have sex and it's a night where we'll devote some more time to it, maybe plan it. She's not like me, I look at it everyday." Thus, though they enjoy porn together, only he masturbates with it: "She thinks it's humorous that I am so preoccupied, she's bemused by it. She sees it as

something that sex-crazed men use, you know, she laughs at it.” I suggest to him that he doesn’t fit the stereotype that porn is a substitute for “real” sex. Oscar responds,

That’s very interesting, because, I like to masturbate. I like to have sex with a woman, but I like to masturbate too. So I don’t see it as second best, I think when I was younger I might have felt that way, but over my life time, it’s just one way of having sex. Let’s assume, if I had, I had a woman available to have sex with whenever I wanted to, I think I’d still masturbate with porn.

Robin mirrors this statement exactly: “Even if I had sex with my wife every night, I’d jerk-off anyway.” Yet, masturbating with porn while also having regular sex with a partner is more than a matter of sexual appetite. Oscar’s phrase, “just one way of being sexual” implies that there are many ways of being sexual, and masturbation with pornography is one of them. Thus, it can be *another* way of being sexual which provides unique pleasures of its own.

Both Robin’s and Oscar’s wives enjoy porn currently, or have in the past. Otto tells a different story. He hides his pornographic practices from his wife because she blames herself for his interest in porn, thinking that she must be inadequate. This frustrates Otto, and his insistence throughout the interview that “my wife and I have a tremendous sex life” indicates, as he says, that he *is* happy with their sex life and that porn *is* “totally different,” separate from her, another way of having sex. He elaborates: “The fantasy aspect [allows me] to explore something that is titillating that I wouldn’t necessarily want to do in real life.” By his own account, his pleasure with pornography is to *check out* the variety “kinks” or fetishes³ in pornography, rather than practice any of them. When he goes to the peeps, he says: “Usually I just flip from one [video] to the next, I love the variety, sometimes I feel like an anthropologist studying human sexuality.”

Masturbation with pornography can be a profoundly complex and rich sexual experience. It can be about transgression of the boundaries of self, gender, and/or sexual orientation; it can be about self-love, sensual and ecstatic, or the construction of a private, nurturing space for oneself away from the pressures of everyday life. It can also involve the affirmation of the sexual self, and more. The pleasures that these men derive from masturbation and pornography are significantly different from those associated with conventional heterosexual sex, and indeed, all told, measure up to a different way of being sexual.

However, these private relations are sometimes criticized or resented by partners and shamefully concealed as a result.

2. Problems with Porn and Masturbation in Relationships

Pornographic fantasies can be threatening to partners and fans, gay men and straight women alike, by making them feel excluded or inadequate. Also present in these accounts is the fear of infidelity, that the fans will act on their fantasies. In addition, partners differ in their assignment of blame: some partners blame my respondents, other partners blame themselves.

Many of my respondents, both gay and straight, described their partners as hurt or confused by the appeal of pornography:

Hector's girlfriend: "Why do you need to watch other women, you have me, I am real, you can touch me."

Aaron's boyfriend: "You have me, you don't need this."

Lester's girlfriend: "Don't I satisfy you enough?"

A few gay fans I interviewed had similar concerns about *their* partners. One gay man, Max, said of his boyfriend: "If he was using the magazines or movies instead of me, what's up with that? I'm a real live person, the hell with the movie, I'll take you." Jack, another gay man, wondered if there were negative consequences of watching porn for both him *and* his lover: "A guy watching a movie where these guys are hung ten inches and his lover's only five inches, how does that affect the next time he sucks his dick? That starts to erode a relationship."

Generally, a partner's problems with porn is *not* a matter of differences between women and men. It is a matter of sexual *preferences* and tastes, and, as Jane Juffer (1998) has argued, the fact that women and men have unequal access to pornography. Some gay men are averse to pornography (and many straight men are as well⁴), and many women enjoy pornography. Indeed, Juffer asserts that the commercial success of Candida Royalle's *Femme Productions*⁵ and the explosion of "erotic fiction" published and marketed to women by publishers like Simon & Schuster document many women's enjoyment of sexually explicit media. She goes on to argue that while women appear less interested in video, it may be because it is less available to women. (She cites the structural and spatial restrictions placed on women by the typical video arcade's overwhelmingly male clientele and management.) Furthermore, I would argue, much conventional video pornography is shot from what might be called a "boys in babeland" point of view. In most porn, the male gaze of popular American cinema and television is taken to its sexual extreme – little wonder some women find it alienating. Indeed, Royalle began her company in response to mainstream video pornography's aesthetic

(Royalle, 1993), hoping to provide an alternative vision of pornography for straight women.

My respondent Clay experienced conflicts about pornography with some ex-girlfriends, yet he articulates an analysis of these issues without referring to sex differences.

Previous girlfriends wanted to be the source, the one and only source of my arousal, of my sexual pleasure. They would feel very threatened by the fact that I was able to do it on my own, or the fact that when I'm doing it on my own, I'm thinking about someone else. Does that mean that at some point I'm going to get tired of doing that by myself and go get that person? It was scary for them.

Clay suggests that those who do not enjoy masturbation⁶ find it, and pornography as its corollary, threatening.

Masturbation and pornography disrupt the partner's status as the sole source of sexual excitement, so fans' decreased dependence on their partners may well be a source of friction. Similarly, the husbands of Janice Radway's (1984) fans of romance novels objected to their wives' attention being drawn away by romance novels. Radway speculates that husbands may feel "unsettled by their wives' evident ability to satisfy themselves emotionally, a situation that perhaps suggests a reduction in their spouses' dependency on them" (p. 101). Radway does not suggest that the husbands may have been jealous due to the content of romance novels – fantasies (often sexual) of the ideal relationship. Pornography's content, by contrast, clearly raises fears of exclusion and possible infidelity for many partners.

Otto corroborates Clay's analysis by suggesting that his wife's personal experiences with masturbation contributed to how she felt about his masturbation.

She was married before me. It started out ok, but in the end they were not happy and still living together. And masturbation was the only way that she had any fun

because they just stopped having sex, so for her masturbation was like a bad thing, like having to.

Some respondents didn't like dating people who had trouble with porn. Stu dates women he calls "bad girls." He explains, "It's a matter of being aggressively sexual, wearing revealing clothes, kissing in public, talking about sex. These are bad girls." His girlfriends have varied in the degree to which they were involved with porn, but he's clear that he "wouldn't get along" with someone who thought porn was "strange or sick." Speaking of past and present girlfriends, he attributes their openness to porn directly to the fact that they masturbate. "Most of them masturbate on their own, with or without pornography, so it's not like it's something really foreign and weird and dangerous."

Thus, for many partners, their own enjoyment of masturbation appears to play a critical role in their acceptance of fans' masturbation with pornography (again, see Laumann et al. [1994]). There are exceptions, however. Oscar indicated that his wife doesn't masturbate, yet, according to him, she has no problem with his porn and masturbation, and they often read pornographic novels or watch videos together.

3. The Effects of Partners' Attitudes on Fans

a. Secrecy

Some of those who had a partner who was uncomfortable with porn and masturbation felt they had to conceal their pornographic practices. What kind of pornography they hide, how they hide it, and to what extent, varies among the men I interviewed. Sean, for example, told his fiancée about his pornographic practices in the past, but concealed his current practices. Otto chose to be silent about some pornographies and not others. During his regular visits to the peep-shows he enjoyed

“the kinks,” but was open with his wife only about his enjoyment of pornographic comic books and prose.

Sexual orientation can tie into this matter as well. Robin, a married man who fantasizes with gay and straight porn, hid only his gay porn from his wife and was completely open about his straight porn. Adrian, a closeted bisexual African-American, hid *all* his porn, most of which is gay, from his girlfriend. He did so, he told me, in order to protect his reputation in two ways. First, he wants to maintain his image as a straight man since he works in an environment that is hostile to queers. Second, he doesn't want to be considered a “punk” (a man who masturbates with porn and is therefore weak; someone who can't get women). Thus, sexual orientation is involved in his decision to hide porn, but it doesn't account for all his concerns.

As with others in relationships who keep secrets from their partners, keeping porn private is a “workable” solution for some of my respondents. These secrets demonstrate a need for “boundaries” and “privacy,” even in close relationships. As Erbert and Duck (1997) argue, “If unity and togetherness themes dominate conceptions of the [relationship] ideal, a rigid structural prison that serves to limit the validation of other types of relationships is constructed” (p. 200). As long as their use of porn does not come out into the open, some of these men feel their relationships are stronger.

Sonny laughed off this issue with ease: “I live in the Bronx, I work in Manhattan. I just don't bring any [porn] to the Bronx.” Asked if he wanted to debate the issue with his girlfriend, he said simply: “her mind is made up.”

Others feel that their relationships are more vulnerable. Darryl's wife has also made up her mind, as has Darryl, but he's not as sanguine as Sonny. Asked about what it's like to keep porn from his wife, he says:

It's not the best thing, it's a bit hypocritical, but this is my world, this is something I have control over and I choose to keep that away from her because she won't understand. She'll be judgmental, being a religious person she's, you know, "It's dirty, you're dirty, why do you do this?" No matter how many ways you phrase it, it's still no good.

Darryl's phrase "she won't understand" is the exact phrase used by Otto to characterize his problems with his wife. Both men are frustrated by this impasse, but Darryl's wife appears to lay the blame squarely on his shoulders. In contrast, Otto says that his wife blames herself for his interest in porn, so hiding it from her appears almost protective:

She feels like [if I'm into porn] she's not satisfying me 100 percent, somehow she let me down, if I'm not happy [she thinks] it must be because of her. I can't explain it to her, that it's totally different [from sex with her]. Well, I can, but she won't understand, it's just – that was not the happiest conversation we ever had. She got over it, but so I'm not in her face, I don't openly do it.

Confronting his wife, Otto says, "would only make for an argument, make her feel bad, and I don't want to do that. I don't like having to hide it from her. I wish I didn't have to."

Protective is a key word. Avoiding conflict not only protects Otto's wife and the relationship, it protects his interests as well – he can continue to enjoy pornography. But there is an additional level of self-protection on Otto's part. He exhibits a *vulnerability* about pornography. As noted, Otto is fascinated by the variety of "kinks" or fetishes in pornography. Yet he continually refers to this kind of porn as "horrible" and "disgusting," and I suspect that his visceral, and perhaps shameful, reactions to these images are part of his pleasure. This plays itself out in negative ways too, however, and perhaps especially in how his wife might react if she knew about his pleasures with porn:

She'd be upset if she thought I went to the peeps and was just watching vanilla sex, ordinary things, but if she knew I was watching what I watch, she'd be pretty horrified, [and she'd probably say to herself], "What a warped, deranged individual he is."

Why doesn't Otto feel he has the right to defend himself? By his account, his wife is making a mistake, she doesn't get it. Otto tells me repeatedly that he's more than satisfied with their sexual relationship. Why won't he fight with her, or explain it to her? Perhaps these couples' inability to communicate is about the sexual shame *both* members are probably experiencing. But the men, in particular, don't appear to feel that their position is legitimate and can be defended. And, indeed, according to the sexual activities hierarchy that Gayle Rubin (1984) developed, masturbating with porn ranks low. Unlike other tabooed sexual activities, there is no community of fans to go to for support or resources. As my respondent Bart said about fans' silence the wake of New York City Mayor Rudy Guiliani's assault on porn: "Nobody's willing to stand up and say: 'Hey, I use porn.'"

b. Troubles with Self

Hector was particularly clear about the pain and alienation that concealment caused. In fact, he has even stopped buying porn so he doesn't have to hide it from his girlfriend.

I want to share that with her, to at least speak freely, and to have my magazines. I want her to know, I want her to see me for who I am, but she's just not that open. I don't like it, I really don't like hiding that part of my life from her. That's why I decided not to buy it anymore, so I just don't have anything to hide.

In this relationship and in many of the other relationships in which these men conceal their porn, what is lost by conforming to the sexual mainstream is an honesty about self-presentation. Hector is not only hiding porn, but an important part of himself as well. What is his girlfriend losing when he shuts down part of himself like this? One

could easily counter that the porn constitutes a loss of intimacy – a distraction from the relationship. Yet, isn't there an intrinsic distance and barrier set up between them now? The kind of alienation that Hector articulates may not simply go away. Where does the separation that began here lead?

Darryl has also begun to give up porn for his wife, but doesn't appear to experience pain like Hector. He seems to have turned their difference into an expression of love.

I had to make a choice whether I was going to be combative on the issue or whether I was going to give in, and I gave in. I used to have a drawer full of them [videos], now I have maybe two or three hidden away. Maybe we used to discuss the issue once, twice a year, now we don't discuss it at all.

<How's that make you feel?>

To a certain degree relieved, it makes me feel good that I'm not as selfish a man as I used to be. I can actually give a little, and I've developed as a human being, much better than I thought I would, I'm very proud of myself in that respect.

<So it's a sacrifice>

Yea, it is, that's exactly what it is. Because I enjoy porn, I like it and I've always liked it. For me to give it up as much as I did, maybe 80 or 90-95 percent is a lot for me. It shows you how much I really want this relationship to work, how much I love the person I'm with. Maybe one day I'll give it up entirely.

Both Darryl and Hector sacrificed much, if not all, of their practices with porn for their partners. Yet, their stories are very different. Darryl appears dignified in his sacrifice, "proud" is his word. Hector, however, seems hurt and alienated. Darryl acts like he wants to change for his partner, Hector sounds like he feels cornered. They both are affected by the lack of "benign sexual variation" in Western society. As Rubin (1984) writes:

Variation is a fundamental property of all life, from the simplest biological organisms to the most complex human social formations. Yet sexuality is supposed to conform to a single standard. One of the most tenacious ideas about

sex is that there is one best way to do it, and that everyone should do it that way.... [Thus,] most people mistake their sexual preferences for a universal system that will or should work for everyone (p. 283).

To the extent that my respondents continue to masturbate with and enjoy pornography, they resist a single standard of sexuality. At the same time, because they avoid conflict with their partners (and thus with themselves), they also avoid a more comprehensive resistance – one that would challenge themselves and their partners not only to think differently about their relationship, but also about pornography, masturbation, and sexuality.

Reading romance novels is a stigmatized practice as well, and, like these porn fans, Radway's (1984) readers were often put on the defensive by their husbands. According to Radway, their reading was a source of shame for many women. Some successfully countered this by citing culturally endorsed values of reading and education to which they argued romance novels contribute. For fans of pornography whose partners do not accept porn, however, this argument is not available, which presumably increases feelings of shame, marginalization, stigmatization, and defensiveness in general and in their relationships in particular. I was struck, for example, by the large number of fans who felt they could not, or should not, defend themselves and their sexual choices. They simply chose to hide pornography or sacrifice it, rather than confront or fight with their partner about it. It is my contention that, for *some* of these fans, the decision to hide pornography or sacrifice it is fundamentally a decision based on shame. Indeed, for *all* fans who hide or sacrifice pornography, even if they continue masturbate with it covertly (and resist the single standard privately), by not resisting the singular standard for sexuality in their relationships, they inherently endorse it.

In the following section, I will discuss various issues which develop in attempts by both partners and fans to enjoy porn together.

c. Attempts to Share Porn

I interviewed many men who watched or read porn regularly with their partners. Finding the right dynamic between partners turns out to be complex. A number of my respondents reported trying to watch with their partners, but encountering difficulties. These difficulties were far from uniform. Sometimes the partner was unsatisfied, other times it was the fan, and still other times, it was a mutual dissatisfaction. Let me begin with fans who, for various reasons, found sharing their pleasures with pornography unappealing.

Woody's comments recall the language of the partners in the previous section who were confused by the appeal of images versus "real" people: "I always found it pointless to watch pornography with a girlfriend. Because, here I have a real live woman in front of me, am I gonna touch some real vagina or am I gonna look at the screen?"

Sean says watching with his fiancée was "disorienting" because he was used to watching it privately. With her, the pornographic experience was sexually social.

I enjoy having sex with her more just the two of us, without watching anything. It was a little disorienting for me because we watched it, but we were together. It was like using a tool that I have experience with, but not using it the same way, so disorienting is the right word.

It was his fiancée's idea to watch together, not Sean's, and watching porn together did not become a regular part of their sex life. Sean told me of other instances in which she was more interested in sexual experimentation than he was. Her sexual assertiveness and desires may threaten him, and his refusal to watch with her could be a subtle form of sexual control over her.

Kendall also says that he's "inhibited" when he watches porn with his girlfriend.

He, too, doesn't really want to share the experience and prefers watching alone:

I don't wanna share it. I want something to be just mine, and I guess I don't feel inhibited when I'm by myself, wherever it takes me, you know? And whatever the fuck I want to do while I'm watching it. I don't want to have to think, and guess, all that shit, I don't want to do that. Like if she were there I wouldn't have gone to the refrigerator and grabbed a fuckin' carrot and stuck it up my ass.⁷ I may have wanted to, but I would have thought about it and said 'oh no that's silly,' or whatever.

Kendall describes himself as a very giving lover, thus, if his partner is there, he attends to her rather than to himself: "I'm always concerned, like, you ok?, do you need anything? When I'm watching it [porn] I don't want to be that way." As Erving Goffman (1959) makes clear in his discussion of "fronts" and "performances," there is a radical shift that takes place between the moment when one is alone, and the moment when someone else enters the room. Of course, whoever that someone is makes a tremendous difference. Kendall has no need, for example, to hide porn from his lover. As he says, she gets off on the same stuff. Yet, the constraints of his performance with her seemingly make it impossible for him to attend to his own pleasures.

The question remains, however: Why is sticking a carrot up his ass "silly" in her presence, but hot and sexy when he's alone? Is his inhibition related to sexual shame and self-consciousness? For example, in her presence he may feel a need to explain what he's going to do with the carrot, whereas when he's alone he can just act on his impulse. In this sense, his perceptions of her presence drains his spontaneity. Privacy is safety: Kendall may well feel that he can be completely himself, no need of explanation, when he is alone.

Rufus and his girlfriend both wanted to try watching together. He told me that it was good to try, but *neither* of them were that interested in doing it again after they tried it:

I could tell she was into it only because it was a new experience. She wanted to try it then, but didn't want to get into it as a normal thing. She really didn't care for it too much. I guess for me it was a fantasy, you know, "it would be nice with a girl here." It was ok, but it wasn't as erotic as I expected it to be. I got more out of her spiritually, physically without it, we're more one-on-one [without porn], so it wasn't important to me either.

It's difficult to know here if his partner was turned off by the porn itself or by the change in the sexual scene instigated by the porn; Rufus' interpretation, though, prioritizes their mutual pleasure.

A number of straight men I interviewed were clear that some of the women they tried watching porn with were turned off by it. Lester voices a common sentiment when he says: "If you can see you're the only one who's having fun, stop the tape, get it over with, don't even waste the time. If you can't do that together it's ok, find something that you can both do sexually."

Candida Royale's company Femme Productions makes pornography by and for straight women and couples. August recounted his experiences with his wife when they tried some of this straight women's pornography:

This was back in the mid '80s when Femme and Gloria Leonard and all those things were coming out. We're intelligent people, we read, so we saw that there was some different porn out, so "let's try it!" It was different for a while, but it wasn't anything to bring her into an enjoyment of porn. When I saw that she was having to work too hard to make any sense of it, well, what was the point? We did fine on our own. So that's fine, I respect that.

This matter-of-factness reflects one dimension of August's feelings about these circumstances, but he sounds melancholy when I ask him to describe his hopes for watching porn together:

I'm sure my expectations were a little higher in hoping that it would work out, I truly hoped that she would enjoy, maybe she could share, not in my fantasy, but that we could share in our own. But it didn't work out. As I said it's a place I go to all the time, but some people don't need to go there, I guess. But she gave it a try, so [he trails off].

It is a very intimate gesture for a fan to share what is typically reserved for private masturbation. August is particularly interesting in this way because he watches gay porn exclusively on his own, yet the pornographic space is so meaningful to him that he wants to try to share straight porn with his wife. Their failure to connect in this way and August's resulting melancholy,⁸ testify to the risk intrinsic in the attempt to share the pornographic experience.

Oscar, who enjoys watching and reading porn with his wife, identifies the danger *and pleasure* of the risk of sharing a social taboo:

To watch pornography with another person is a very intimate thing. You're sharing your enjoyment of this taboo and forbidden thing with another person. I like that, because you're comfortable enough with that other person to do that. But there's still the fear of: Will they reject you, and the behavior?

Although August and Oscar's partners reacted differently to pornographic images, there is a communicative quality in these relationships that is noteworthy. For instance, both men made efforts to find porn that would appeal to their wives. The following section discusses variations on the ways couples enjoy porn together.

4. Porn and Hot Sex

Many of the fans I spoke with said porn acted as a form of foreplay. As Clay said:

I don't think our sex is very different once we get into it, it's just a different way of getting there. If we start out with a story, then we're already at a certain level, there's no slow burn, no slow building up, we just get into it right away, it's very different that way.

Others identify porn as foreplay explicitly. Quoyle says: “Probably within five or ten minutes of watching the movie I’m not interested in it anymore. It’s almost an element of foreplay.” Dexter agrees that after ten minutes he and his past lover were no longer watching. But because the video continues to run in the background, Dexter says it continues to play into their sex, even if they’re not watching it. The soundtrack, he says, added “a little extra stuff in the air, it made me feel as though we were participating in an orgy because there were sounds of sex that I knew we weren’t making. So it provides that extra atmosphere.”

Dexter, Quoyle, and many others move pretty quickly from the porn to sex, but Graham said one film he and his girlfriend rented, *Chameleons*,⁹ was different.

We’ve done it [rented porn together] five or six times, but *Chameleons* is the first movie we watched from beginning to end without completing sex. With the others we watched the first scene, and then the next thing you know we’re going at it. So what did it really do? It just initiated the act, but this movie played a part in what we were doing. We sat and just kind of played with each other through the whole movie. We were both fully dressed in the beginning, and it was a very slow undressing of each other while we were watching, it was like foreplay for the whole 90 minutes of the movie. And the sex itself although a little shorter than normal was really intense. I was so stimulated I didn’t last very long.

Robin also prefers videos like *Chameleons*, with story lines and characters. He found this kind of long, drawn-out scene, lingering in sexual play, to be the typical experience when he and his wife watch porn together. The point of the experience appears to be to avoid finishing. Indeed, Robin uses the word “romantic” in his narrative:

We’d watch together holding hands, or my arm would be around her, we’d watch some of the foreplay, very often kiss, almost romantically in a sense, it wasn’t pure sex. The way I’d hold her, taking off each other’s clothes, it was very exciting to take off her jeans and then her panties and see how wet she had become just by playing with her tits. I liked when she would take off my pants and take my hard-on and just kind of fondle it, touching it, touching my balls. Then being naked or near naked watching them on screen. There was a lot more use of senses too: we’d be watching with the lights on, it wasn’t done in the dark in the middle of the night. I was able to take my time, and I’d be kind of romantic

and feeling, and taking in the sights as well. It was all because, in a sense, that's what we were watching and we were emulating what we were watching because all that happens. Then we'd build up into typical sex and we'd stop, not completely stop, but settle down at least, watch a little bit more, start up again.

Rather than romance, Lester talks about playing with porn with his girlfriends – playing sexual games. “It’s much hotter when you watch with someone, especially if you just want to fool around for a bit, it’s excellent. You can try crazy games, like to do everything that the people are doing on the screen.” This game was mentioned by many of my participants as something they had tried.

These accounts point to a tremendous versatility that people have with pornography. The men I interviewed spoke about porn’s part in everything from brief or extended foreplay to lengthy romantic encounters. This malleability is an important aspect of pornography for Cody:

It’s about your frame of mind, porn’s whatever you want it to be, it’s very versatile. If you want to get off, you just get off. If you want to prolong and just kind of enjoy it, then you can. I think it can also help bring tension down between people, spark some things also. When I used to watch it with [my boyfriend] it was an emotional thing, an environmental-emotional thing. It’s a tool, a thing to use, it’s like a toy.

Cody raises two interconnected notions: pornography’s “versatility” and its potential to be used as an imaginative and versatile “toy” – a sex toy. Indeed, if one thinks of sex as play, then porn compares well to other sex toys: dildos, vibrators, crops, feathers, sexy apparel. Porn, like any other sex toy, can play a central, marginal, or other role in a couple’s sex play, and the non-narrative structure of much video pornography accommodates this kind of play quite well. That is, non-narrative pornography is composed of loosely connected, or often disconnected, sexual vignettes that can be watched on and off – as foreplay, as background, as foreground, as additional stimulation, and any combination of these.

Cody also suggested that sharing porn might “spark some things” or give the couple ideas they may not have considered. Billy said, for example, “I think it gets a little kinkier than it normally would in bed, just because, maybe you’re watching acts that you two don’t normally perform.” Robin is more specific: “I’d never have imagined doing anal sex without pornography.” But, Robin says, when he saw anal sex on video, he said to himself:

“God, she’d [my wife would] never be into that.” But one night when we were watching a video we were in a 69 and she’s very wet, and while I’m licking her clit, I said [to myself] “Why don’t I just move one finger down a little bit.” I was just massaging the rim of her ass, and she didn’t seem to mind, so I said to myself, “well let me just see if she, if she bites my cock I know she probably doesn’t like this, so I inserted the finger, just the first knuckle, and at that point I lifted my head up and out of her cunt and said “Do you mind?” She said “No, it feels good.” [And I said to myself] “Well ok,” a little bit more and a little bit more. When we were finished with foreplay, she was on her back and I entered her as I would normally. And I just had this idea, pull out, and put the head of cock up against her asshole and see what she thinks. I did that and said, “You want me to try with something a little bit bigger?” She laughed and said, “Well, try.” And I said, “Well, if it bothers you, just let me know.” And no additional lubrication was needed because she’s very wet, and so I got the head of my cock in and I said, “Anything?” And she said, “It feels ok,” and so I fucked her in the ass for the first time. She liked it and I liked it, I really liked it, it’s an entirely different feeling. And it was fun, so we did that on a relatively regular basis.

What’s particularly important about Robin is that he takes anal sex further than many men would. He goes on to tell a story about how a year or so later his wife started to play with *his* ass. She started just as he did, rubbing the rim, then he said to her:

“Why don’t you put it in my ass a little bit.” She got her finger nice and wet, and I liked it, and then later she used a dildo on me, too. In fact, the hardest time I ever remember coming was when she was using her finger on me and blowing me at the same time. She must have hit something, because when I came it was like, it was really powerful, it was shocking.

Robin said that by this time he had become interested in bisexual and gay videos, but plainly he doesn’t interpret pornography literally, nor is he stuck in a gender grid that wouldn’t allow him, as a heterosexual man (albeit with bisexual fantasies), to be fucked

in the ass by his wife. Indeed, it is testimony to their intimacy that they are both comfortable enough with each other to play like this. It is important to note that there were a few men in my sample who watched straight porn exclusively and expressed interest in finding videos where the men were fucked by women. This is quite rare in straight porn, but there are exceptions.¹⁰

Most important, however, is Robin's clarity about the contribution that pornography made to his sex life with his wife. Not only did porn carry them in different directions than they might have gone otherwise, but they were themselves able to move beyond the restrictions of mainstream porn to experiment and play themselves.

Oscar tells me it's difficult to find video that turns his wife on. Most of the hardcore that he watches he says she finds "boring, they're just fucking." However, Ann Rice's pornography, which focuses on dominance and submission, appeals to both of them. In the following segment he tells me of one video series that worked as well. "*The Story of O* video series."¹¹ It surprised the hell out of me, because in my opinion this is pretty strong stuff. [But] she loved them, we watched the whole series." He explains the series is not hardcore porn, there's no explicit sex but there's a serious effort to portray the story effectively.

But this is very, very good stuff. It has a story line, there's acting, elaborate costumes, dungeons. So I guess it's a matter of my finding the right material [for her]. So the act of watching that with her is exciting to me because she's enjoying it, I get off on that. I get off on the fact that she's enjoying watching *O* on her knees sucking some guy and getting whipped and having a dildo shoved up her snatch and one in her ass, and my wife is watching this and getting off on it. I'd have her suck me off, I'd say like "suck my cock" [spoken aggressively] you know, like something off the film, I actually tied her to the bed too.

I interrupted him here because I was surprised. Earlier in the interview he had made it clear to me that he enjoys being dominated by his wife, and, in pornography,

identifies with whoever is being dominated, man or woman. Therefore, I asked: “So you were dominating her?” He responded: “Yea, when we were watching that stuff. See it’s tough because she’s actually kind of submissive, she likes *The Story of O*, so it’s kind of a tough combo because I’m submissive too.” So both Oscar and his wife are versatile, but, according to him, both prefer submission.

Oscar’s pleasure here is not so much about pornography bringing new “techniques” into the relationship. He was very clear with me that he enjoyed light domination and submission (among other things mainstream and not so mainstream), long before he saw these videos. On one level, *The Story of O* is simply a sexy story, as its terrific popularity attests. In addition, for many fans (though not all), it’s better to share pornography with someone. Finally, there is a strong emphasis in Oscar’s account of his pleasure being a result of her pleasure. That is, her pleasure affirms his own. This was true for many fans, as noted above, however, it may be even more exciting in the context of a transgressive narrative like *The Story of O*.

C. CONCLUSION

This chapter addressed the negotiations of pornography fans in long-term romantic relationships. Issues covered included: private masturbation with pornography in relationships, problems for both partners and fans when pornography was present in the relationship, the affect of partners’ attitudes on fans, and finally, couples enjoying pornography together.

The chapter began by asking the question: Why does someone masturbate privately with porn if they are in a relationship? It has been established throughout this dissertation that masturbation with pornography can provide radically different and

compelling sexual experiences. In this chapter, fans said that their pornographic pleasure was an addition to their sex lives, simply another way to be sexual.

The bulk of the chapter addressed the difficult negotiations between partners and fans. An interesting finding was that both partners and fans could be jealous of porn. It is conceivable that partners could be jealous of porn without having strong feelings against porn itself. For example, a partner could be neutral on porn, but jealous of comparisons, fantasies, time not spent with them, and fear the potential of infidelity. However, I was unable to tease out this distinction in my interviews.

A number of men suggested that their partner's feelings and experiences with masturbation contributed significantly to their feelings about masturbation with pornography. For some couples with problems, masturbation, rather than pornography, may have been the divisive issue (though pornography may well have contributed). Secrecy and shame emerged as important factors in these relationships. In order to avoid conflict, many fans felt they had to hide their pornographic practices. Shame as a tool of social control of sexualities is relevant here. Hiding porn from a partner is one way that porn is controlled. However, because the fan continues to masturbate with porn in secret, he is silently resisting. For many fans, shame made them feel incapable of defending their pornographic pleasure, and, thus they were unable to outwardly resist social controls.

The chapter's last section was on sharing porn between partners. Because of the versatility of porn, there are many different roles that pornography can play in couples' sex lives. It can be used as foreplay, as an opportunity to play sex games, as romance, or a gateway to more transgressive sex, like domination and submission.

Finally, the relationships between fans and partners described here differs dramatically from those described in anti-porn literature. They are not sexist, exploitative, and uni-dimensional. Rather, there is tremendous variation and complexity as these couples contend with individual imperatives, the needs of the relationship, and the context of our current socio-sexual order.

D. ENDNOTES, CHAPTER VII

¹ A basic limitation of my research was that I was not able to interview respondents' partners, therefore, all of the following material is from my respondent's point of view alone. As such, conclusions must be limited. The previous section provided evidence of how being in relationships with women can significantly affect the ways men think about pornography and their partners. The balance of this chapter deals with bisexual, gay, and straight men and how they negotiate their practices with pornography in their relationships.

² Autoerotic activity is defined in Laumann et al. (1994) as sexual fantasy, masturbation, and the use of pornographic materials. Furthermore, these three were found to be strongly intercorrelated.

³ Typical foci of this genre include: bondage and domination, s/m, plaid skirts, school uniforms, feet, toes, gargantuan tits, pubic hair, fat, leather, latex, women dressing, women undressing, and so on.

⁴ Michael et al. (1994) report that only 23 percent of men had watched a porn video, and 16 percent had read a porn magazine in the past 12 months. These percentages are *not* mutually exclusive. Some of these non-fans are more averse to pornography than others, some are probably not averse to it at all.

⁵ Femme Productions was founded by former porn star Candida Royalle, and has the highest profile of women owned and operated pornography production companies. Her work is aimed specifically at heterosexual women and couples.

⁶ I believe this would apply equally to men and women. Michael et al. (1994) reported about 59 percent of women and about 37 percent of men never masturbate.

⁷ This refers to a story that he related to me previously in the interview about how once while he was masturbating with porn alone he spontaneously got a carrot and fucked himself in the ass with it.

⁸ Though melancholy may not be clear in the transcription of his speech, it was palpable in the interview.

⁹ The full title is *Chameleons, Not the Sequel* (John Leslie, dir.). Highly regarded in guides to adult video (Winks, 1998; Brent and Brent, 1997), *Chameleons* is porn that comes close to a mainstream film in terms of production values, acting, and story.

¹⁰ See *Takin' it to the Limit, Vol. 1* and *The Masseuse 2*. There are also amateur and pro-am videos (thus not big studio productions) in which men getting fucked by women is the focus of the action, see *Sam Gets Shafted*, a recent series *Babes Ballin' Boys*, and the instructional videos *Bend Over Boyfriend*, #1 and #2.

" This differs from the film version of *The Story of O* released in 1975 directed by Just Jaeckin. The version which Oscar refers to was directed by Ron Williams, released in 1984, in which the story is stretched over a series of 10 videos.

CHAPTER VIII. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to describe bisexual, gay, and straight men's experiences with pornography. The study was designed to test the hypothesis that current discourse on pornography does *not* represent men's experiences. Although there is a vast literature on pornography, none of it addresses the fans themselves. This study went directly to porn fans in an attempt to *demystify* their experiences with pornography.

A. THE POLITICS OF PORNOGRAPHY – CONTRIBUTIONS TO EXISTING ISSUES

The most fundamental issue at stake in this work is the contention that men learn sexism and violence against women from porn. This issue has been spearheaded by feminists against pornography, taken up by the Meese Commission, many men in feminism, and some socialpsychologists (the primary purpose behind their studies of pornography is to support or refute this contention).

In every chapter of this dissertation, there are numerous instances in which it is clear that men learn a tremendous amount from pornography. Men learn sexual information and how to perform with their partners. Men's private fantasies, desires, and their private and interpersonal sexual behavior are influenced by pornographic scenarios. Some men's sexism can be bolstered by pornography, as well as their latent hostility towards women. My research indicates that the main question is not whether men learn from porn, but *what* they learn. My conclusion is that sexist men may learn to solidify their misogyny with porn, but other men, bisexual, gay, and straight, learn a lot that is positive for them and for their partners. Many readers may feel that some of my findings are irreconcilable: How is it that some men's belief in sexual double standards can be re-

inforced while other men learn ways of encouraging their women partners to be more sexual and enjoy sex more? The answer is not in the porn itself, it is in the men's biographies, their past and current sexual experiences and partners, and how they use porn as part of these sexual experiences.

My focus, therefore, has not been on the interplay of porn and society as a whole, but on how particular men engage their pornography. Just as feminist theory has urged listening to women's voices, I have listened to men's voices about porn's place in their lives. Only when those voices are heard have feminists urged extrapolating from what women say about their lives and thoughts and feelings to larger issues. I contend, therefore, that the debates over porn's harm have to be grounded in men's experiences with it.

In the Methods chapter I argued that these men speak as men first, then as pornography fans – they were initiated into the privileges of masculinity (of which porn is certainly one) long before they were devoted porn fans. Being a fan is not the centerpiece of anyone's identity; pornography is an identity "accessory." Thus, men learn or interpret pornography in different ways because they bring different things to it. This was made starkly clear by my respondent Remi, who created Nazi fantasies with an innocuous image from *Playboy*. Of the many men excited by more hard-core video, like gangbangs, for example, very few viewed them in sexist ways. Indeed, one of the sexist men in my sample was *only* interested in *Playboy*.

Background and upbringing play a large part in what these men bring to their pornographic practice. The most sexist men I interviewed came from the most traditional Catholic (Hispanic and Italian) families or from crime-riddled, violent, urban

backgrounds pervaded by macho culture. The way they use porn often exacerbates their virulent views of women, but these views were not created by porn. If porn was not available to them, it is unlikely that their views of women would become more benign. It is more likely that they would find other cultural representations to reinforce what they think.

This research argues that there is sexist *potential* in pornography, but it is sexist men that see porn in sexist ways. Sexist images don't necessarily have to be read as such, nor do they have to inform or replicate a sexist stance in their viewers. The meaning and power of porn does not stand alone; as with any other aspect of culture, it must be "read" by an audience. So if my findings indicate that pornography can tie into, stabilize, and bolster pre-existing sexism and misogyny, they do not support the argument that pornography is the cause of sexism and violence against women.

B. NEW WAYS TO THINK ABOUT MEN AND PORNOGRAPHY

This dissertation brings new ways to think about men and pornography, issues that the voices of the men I interviewed illuminate. Four issues constitute a broad reframing of the current debates: pornography as popular culture, pornography and shame, pornography and men's sexual pleasure, and the ways in which pornography enables and shapes men's fantasies.

1. Pornography as Popular Culture

Williams (1989) was the first to "read" pornography as popular culture. This study is the first to address the men who watch pornography as an audience, as *fans* of pornography.

There are two critical points that my interviews illuminated:

First, individual pornography fans often have no sense of community, yet they are, in fact, members of a group with similar experiences, feelings, and knowledge about porn. Second, and similarly, the aggregate of porn fans fits into a broader context of “spectator/participant” fan cultures, such as rock music fans, *Star Trek* and other TV fans, romance novel fans, and so on. These comparisons allow us to see that much of the practices of porn fans and other fan cultures are similar and quite normative. For example, almost every fan culture devotes itself to collecting and trading autographs, pictures, and cards of stars. Fans have detailed knowledge of the major players in their area of interest as well as historical periods, trends, and controversies. Fans often acquire a depth of specialized language. In porn culture, examples include the “reverse cow-girl” and “DP” sexual positions, or an “ECU” camera shot. Fans of *Star Trek* know what “phasers,” “cloaking devices,” and “warp cores” are. Rock music fans can name the members of esoteric bands or recite song lyrics. Furthermore, the sexual elements of some fan cultures (the sexual activities of some rock groupies, sexual plot developments in slash and romance fiction) are stigmatized, covert, or controversial. Because pornography fans are by definition sexual, however, they are particularly susceptible to the stigma still attached to sexuality in the United States. As a result, porn culture is atomized, invisible, and often not identified by its own members. It is a culture with a common language that is rarely spoken. The silence of porn fans is the result of sexual shame and the social control of sexualities.

Yet porn use is extremely widespread. Rich (2001) tells us: “Take even the low-end \$10 billion estimate [of per annum revenue] ..., and pornography is a bigger business than professional football, basketball and baseball put together” (p. 51). The

widespread but secret use of porn in the United States puts into question the nature of deviance and normativity in our society. Is “normative” something that most people say they do, and in fact do? Is “deviant” something that most people say they don’t do, but do? Or, can something be “normative” if many people do it, but lie about it? Is there such a thing as the deviantly normative, or normative deviance? On some level, porn *is* normative.

2. Pornography and Shame

Shame has always been assumed in the discussion and descriptions of porn fans (see Winick, 1971; English, 1980; Tewksbury, 1990), yet it has never been explored in detail. The power of sexual shame is generally not recognized. It was present in the trembling voices of many of my participants and clear in their self-perceptions about their private practices with porn and in their negotiations with partners about pornography use.

Shame operates not only privately and internally, but at virtually every layer of social structure and interaction. First of all, it is historical, deeply rooted in Western society’s self-definition (Original Sin is only one example). Shame operates through our most powerful macro-level social institutions – the state, the family, the church, the educational system, the military (“Don’t ask don’t tell”). The painful and ironic dyad of titillation and shame is a staple of news and entertainment media alike.

In this study, I found that shame operates in micro-level relationships as well. It emotionally colors porn fans’ long-term relationships, reverberates in the covertness of the sex shop, and is hidden in the silences of fans among friends and associates regard-

ing their pleasure with porn. Shame is even within fans – affecting them when they are alone, in the privacy of their homes.

Porn fans are not simply the instigators and objects of shame, they also engage, resist, and embrace it in creative ways. Indeed, the fans I spoke with usually had complexly interwoven struggles with shame, resistance, and acceptance. Fans may experience shame in all the following ways, one after another or layered simultaneously:

- Fans experience shame simply by being a porn fan, even if not masturbating or looking at pornography.
- While masturbating, fans resist shame so they can keep going to orgasm.
- Shame can also add to fans' excitement – the thrill of being bad. In this way, shame is resisted with irony but with an intrinsic acceptance of the taboos that produce the shame.
- Some fans feel less shame or are able to resist it more effectively. They embrace masturbation as pleasurable, and reject prudishness as backwards. This may be experienced as sexually free, but is premised on the power and control of sexual proscriptions.

The personal struggles with shame, the negotiations over porn, and the resistances to sexual taboos that my interviews revealed are matched by the struggles, negotiations, and resistances over sexual behavior at every level of the social structure. The porn industry itself operates as resistance to shame at the macro-level, though this is clearly not its sole purpose. Larry Flint's Supreme Court battles with Jerry Falwell to protect speech operated as resistance to shame at the macro-level. But because porn use is still kept under wraps and considered taboo and shameful, despite its pervasiveness, these battles are fought with no real conclusion or change in the public climate.

If shame is as powerful as I have suggested, how is it that porn is so popular? For one thing, it is freely available. In the United States, the restrictions against porn have never approached those of other tabooed sex practices. To this day, a gay woman or man

can be expelled from the army, beaten up on the street, or rejected by their families. It's difficult to imagine anything like this happening to a porn fan. Because of the relative freedom of pornography, there hasn't been an organized pro-porn activist political movement, as there has been for homosexuals.

Scholars have argued that the harsh regulation of homosexual *acts* paradoxically created the homosexual *person*, and subsequently communities, organizations, and their vocal, political resistance (Foucault, 1990a; Plummer, 1981; Weeks, 1989).¹ In contrast campaigns against pornography beginning as far back as Anthony Comstock in the 1880s, right-wing and feminist alike, have been aimed at controlling pornography as a media form: banning its production and distribution via the postal service, sex shops, or internet access. To my knowledge, the *fans* of pornography have never been targeted directly. Porn fans may have originally been seen as victims of media and not defined by their actions. To this day, fans are addressed via the language of addiction and are encouraged to "quit" (see Carnes, 1992; and P.D.N.E.C., 1987). Thus, pornography is conceptualized as being outside the individual, like a substance, and, as I have argued, an identity "accessory."

There are advantages and disadvantages to this arrangement. Because shame and pornographic practices are continually swept under the carpet, fans do not organize and must for the most part cope and resist alone. At the same time, being spared the political and social wrath that other groups have experienced is clearly to fans' advantage. Shame is present, but less intense and more easily resisted.

Depending on one's background, shame varies significantly. But relatively speaking, it is not very difficult to be a porn fan.² Furthermore, porn is easily compart-

mentalized. Most of the men in my sample were serious fans, but many typical fans probably have a few magazines or videos, masturbate, maybe feel a little shame, but ultimately don't think about it so much. In addition, it can be a completely private sexual practice. Masturbating is predominantly private, and the media itself is easily hidden. Only acquisition is public, and even that is unnecessary with mail order and e-commerce. Finally, in the age of AIDS, masturbation is the safest sex, and pornography simply enhances it. All these factors, combined with a dash of taboo, just enough to make porn enticing, but not so much to prevent it from being widely appealing, make porn an attractive and safe sexual practice for a very large audience.

3. Pornography and Men's Sexual Pleasure

In a candid interview, Annie Sprinkle was asked about sexual violence and the media. Her response was:

I find it odd that you want to ask me about rape. I think that deep down everyone in the world wants to have more fun, more ecstasy, more pleasure, have some laughs, be loved, be touched. Isn't that what everyone wants? So I'm trying to be a living example of what that might look like. That's my job, my goal. But inevitably what happens is, I'm constantly being asked: "What about rape? What about abuse? What about child pornography?" I'm always getting asked about all this shit. Why is that? I'm just fascinated by that. Wherever I go, people want to talk about pain and suffering (in Brown and Novick, 1995, p. 42).

Though rarely mentioned in the debates on pornography, pleasure was of central importance to the men I interviewed. I have noted the irony that the taboos on certain sexual behaviors can be a source of titillation. Pleasure introduces another angle to this irony. One way sexuality is controlled is to shame it and close it off from public view, to privatize it. That private space, ostensibly for shameful practices, has been put to use for pleasure. As Simon and Gagnon (1986) argue, the private erotic space is an area where "the dimensions of self that were to be excluded from the everyday self or

were denied full expression could rally” (p. 108-9). Private space, thus, is a place in which porn fans can fully engage these excluded “dimensions of self” – they can do what they like. Though not free from shame/resistance issues, private space is arguably the freest space available in the current social order.

Images of men’s pleasure in this work included stories of self-love and nurturance, private time for oneself, long and sensuous masturbation sessions, and men’s fantasies of identification with women, straight men having sex with men or transgendered people, shifting into different identities and multiple selves. Much of the pleasure described by the men I interviewed challenges the stereotypical images of men’s sexual enjoyment. Men appear here in a private sphere with almost “feminine” tenderness and nurturance of the body and self. The accounts of men masturbating are not those of the performance-based, orgasm-oriented masturbation, though that was certainly present also. Many of these men touched their entire bodies, used sex toys, stimulated their asses, enjoyed their smells, sweat, come, and often masturbated for 30 minutes to an hour. These are voices of men’s pleasure that we have not heard before.

There were many accounts of having pleasure by giving and sharing with partners. Many of these men are not just porn aficionados; they are sex aficionados. These are men who devote a great deal of thought to sexual pleasure and how to get more of it. They talk about the G-spot, the clitoris, women’s ejaculation, the perineum, the prostate. They are critical of men who don’t see a difference between sex in porn and sex with a partner, or those who think they have to be like the stud on the screen. Many of these fans play with sexuality (literally inventing sexual games to play), switch dominant roles, enjoy “dirty talk,” experiment with sex, read about it, research it (sometimes extensively).

explore it, think about it, use sex toys like paddles, canes, nipple clamps, vibrators, butt plugs, cock rings, enemas, anal beads, oils, lubricants, incense, hand cuffs and other restraints. They play with different sexual personas and roles, act out scenarios, watch videos with their lovers, have sex outside, on rooftops, in parks, in movie theaters, in peep-show booths, in cars. They have group sex, interracial sex, sex with transgendered people, homosexual, and bisexual sex. Just as my respondent Oscar says of himself, "I take my sex seriously," so it could be said of many of these fans. These men are devoted to sexual experimentation, play, and pleasure in ways that most people probably are not. Porn is only part of their very active, very varied sexual lives.

4. Pornography Enabling and Shaping Men's Fantasies

Fantasy is perhaps the heart of the pornographic experience. Though some feminists against censorship suggested the possibility of cross-gender/cross-power identification in fantasies with pornography, no one, including myself, anticipated the fluidity of body, self, sexuality, and gender that the men I interviewed told me about. The transgressive nature of these fantasies was a source of both pain and pleasure for many respondents. One reason that they have not been revealed previously is, no doubt, because of shame. In fact, some of the fantasies I heard about were veiled by unconscious dream-like obfuscation and symbolism – such as the men who fantasized about sex with intersexed people in order to veil their homosexual desires. A competition between shame and desire was commonly played out in fantasy.

Even if these fantasies provide great pleasure, if they remain private there is a question as to how transgressive they can really be. One might hope that private transgressions will somehow seep into the public realm, and thus, to some degree undermine

the mainstream. And indeed, as these fantasies become public, this may be what happens. Though these men's faces are veiled, their stories have now been told. And for many men, their pleasure with pornographic fantasy is intrinsically tied to either dissatisfaction with, or, at least, curiosity about the possibilities beyond the common boundaries of gender and sexuality. When other fans know that such fantasies are shared, those fantasies may become more acceptable, and may increasingly become part of public discourse and representation. In this way, we see the potential to destabilize categories of gender and sexuality on a broader scale.

Throughout this dissertation, pornography has been linked to popular culture in a variety of ways. The experience of fantasy with pornography is linked to popular culture by the pleasures of narrative fiction. The common ground between pornography and narrative fiction is that the "reader" or fan constructs a fantasy space through the narrative. Iser (1980) identified this space as the "virtual dimension" of the text in which the text and imagination come together in an interactive and creative process. The difference is that since the text in most pornography is minimal, the interpretive landscape is vast, and, as was clear in numerous interviews, fans are actively engaged in "writing the story." Thus, the fantasy process with pornography is a highly personalized form of narrative.

The importance of narrative in human society is inestimable. Michal McCall (1990) argues that everything from history and journalism to fiction and people's stories of the minutiae of everyday life are all fundamental ways in which the members of human society interpret the world, gather shared meanings, and construct culture. Barbara Myerhoff (1980) has called us *homo narrans*: humankind the storytellers. Ken Plummer

(1995) applies these arguments to sexual story telling. He sees sexual stories creating the possibility of new communities and cites, for example, lesbian and gay coming out stories and women's rape and sexual abuse stories as forming the basis of identifications with similar others. Of private sexual fantasy and masturbation, however, Plummer writes: "Maybe the most solitary of sexual tales is the masturbatory fantasy – told in private to the self and heard in private by the self" (p. 35–6). Plummer insists though, that even if fantasy is private, it is "sucked out of the elements available in the culture" (p. 36). This is particularly true when pornography is involved in fantasizing. Rather than being treated like pariahs, pornography, masturbation, and fantasy need to be contextualized within practices that are on some level very basically human. This kind of sexual story telling is, I believe, one of the fundamental elements of the pleasure, nurturance, meaning, and importance of sexual fantasy to the fans of pornography, and one of the principal reasons why these practices and sexual representation itself are as popular and enduring as they are.

C. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND THE FUTURE OF PORN

These original contributions support my choice of the qualitative, ethnographic model for this project. The limitations of discourse on pornography that I hypothesized is borne out by my findings. We are in an era in which different voices are garnering a great deal of attention in the social sciences. If we hope to understand these voices, the ethnographic model is indispensable.

Based on gaps in this project, there are a number of directions that future research could take. Important follow-ups to this work could broaden the sample. First, I would like to see a similar interview-based study of *women* and their practices and fantasies

with pornography. Though there have been brief essays written on this topic (see Matrix, 1996; Loach, 1992), an empirical research project is in order. Second, I encountered difficulty in my attempts to recruit couples. A study that focused on interviewing both partners in a couple about their experiences with pornography would expand my research. Third, another gap in the sample was the absence of men who had problems with porn. A small number of men inquired about the study, but when they found I was not offering therapeutic services, declined to participate. These men would constitute an important addition to this work. Though the category of pornography “addiction” is prominent within the 12-Step community, I had no participation from such men. Finally, my sample was composed primarily of devoted porn fans. It would also be beneficial to interview more casual fans, those between the aficionados and those who experience pornography as a problem.

Two central issues in this dissertation which could benefit from further research are shame and sexual pleasure. There has been some interest in shame in the past decade in psychology, but very little in sociology. Indeed, my primary resource was Elias (1978), yet this work was originally published in 1939. As argued here, sexual shame is a force of tremendous power and complexity, operating at every level of social structure and interaction. Sociology would benefit greatly from a serious treatment of this topic.

The majority of the men in my sample masturbated every day, sometimes more than once. As I have already argued, sexual pleasure and fantasy play a very significant role in these men’s lives in a number of ways. It is extremely common and *meaningful* behavior, yet presumably because of sexual stigma, these issues have also

been ignored sociologically. What kind of people masturbate regularly? What, if anything, is special about *sexual* pleasure? How do men manage active sexual engagement in a society wrought of sexual shame?

Recent technological developments in porn media also open new areas of inquiry. According to Rich (2001), DVD technology is adopting the popular video game format of first person point of view, which allows the fan to see the action as if she or he were taking part in it. But it goes further. “‘Being with Juli Ashton’ [is] VCA’s take on ‘Being John Malkovich’ ... [and allows the fan to] “go inside the head of the person having sex with Juli Ashton, male or female” (p. 54). This type of media makes the kinds of fantasies I have described as gender-transgressive potentially commonplace and underscores the appeal, power, and potential of transgressive fantasies to instigate gender and sexual destabilization.

D. PERSONAL REFLECTION

In the introduction to this project I identified myself as not only a researcher, but a “fellow traveler” among the fans I interviewed. When I began to think about this study, however, I was nothing of the porn fan I am now. I didn’t know there was such a thing as a *fan*. It was only in writing and thinking about the interviews that I recognized my participation in a fan culture. Long ago I had recognized that porn, masturbation, and fantasy were meaningful and important to me. But like some of the men I interviewed, even as I held porn close, my practices were for the most part closeted and compartmentalized due to shame and lack of community. As the interviews progressed, I had my first experience of sexual community, though I didn’t articulate it as such then. I learned a tremendous amount from my respondents, but most of all that mas-

turbation, porn, and fantasy can be an extremely meaningful and rewarding space for many people.

What does pornography mean to me now? Here I would like to use a quote from my respondent Clay. His humor, sociological insight, and emotional honesty speaks closely to my experience.

[In pornography] there are no social stigmas to sexual gratification; there are no great social rules about where this [sex] can happen, when this can happen, why this can happen; it can happen whenever you'd like it to happen. It's sort of like if you switched the tables on this culture and replaced economic activity with sexual activity. If you're making money, people don't mind, you can do that just about anywhere, anytime, it's always appropriate. So [in my fantasy sex world] there would be very specific times when you could make money, but sex, any time you want, any time you connect with someone and decide to do that, you could do that.

So there is this big gap, a chasm between the way I'd like things to be and the way they are, and there's a certain amount of sadness that comes in realizing that. This [pornography] helps for a brief period of time, you no longer feel the sorrow about that, because for that second it's all right, that chasm's not there.

Clay's analysis addresses the *meaning* of social control of sexualities on a personal level – loss, “sadness” and “sorrow,” in his words. Asked if he feels these emotions while he's masturbating, he says: “No, when the illusion's working, then they're gone.” Clay and I are different in this respect. For me, those emotions are never far away when I'm masturbating with porn or even having sex. Indeed, one of the reasons why pornography is so meaningful to me is that it gives me the opportunity to feel a whole range of emotions, including pain, desire, need, laughter, vulnerability, play, anger, loss, and desire for a freer sexual world. Pornography allows me not simply compensation, but an opportunity to recognize the array of my sexual feelings, to make these complex experiences conscious, and to appreciate their relevance. Perhaps most important is that while I might experience loss, *at the same time* I'm giving myself tremendous sexual pleasure, feeling

sexually full, basking in all the sexual desire that I control during the day, looking, being invited to look, and fantasizing about bodies, intimacy, play, and luscious juices. For me, there is a therapeutic element to my pornographic practice that recalls the issue of self-love, care, and nurturance raised by my respondents. And there are many fantasies, desires, and feelings beyond those listed above that pornography and this project have enabled me to listen to, articulate, and assert in ways that I may never have. In this way, my life has been fundamentally changed for the better.

E. FINAL COMMENTS

Men in this country are very lucky to have pornography easily available to them. It's clearly a male privilege, bisexual, gay, and straight alike. It is just another way in which women have experienced so much more sexual control and discrimination than men. Women could benefit greatly from a sex industry that served their needs. It is possible for women to go to prostitutes, masturbate with pornography, go to strip clubs, and get a sexual massage like men, but the availability of these services for women is severely restricted and the social stigma is exponentially higher. Of course, the anti-pornography feminists argue that in an equal society these services would not exist. I would respond that in an equal society sexual professionals and their services would be valued, and women and men would have equal access to them.

To understand social phenomenon we have to listen to the stories being told by the people that are part of them. This study draws on a limited sample, and the degree to which a qualitative study can be generalized to the broader population is questionable. However, the extraordinary popularity of pornography might be seen as a kind of collective story in and of itself. It could be said that Americans are speaking with their dollars

in ways that they don't speak with their voices. Pornography is meeting, or at least addressing, a significant need in American society. Pornography's unique voice speaks to Americans as nothing else does, and Americans buy and enjoy a lot of it. Is this restless consumerism? Is it an effort to fill a sexual gap, to search for sexual meaning, to have better sex, to explore different sexualities? Is it a desire for cheap thrills, for sexual knowledge, for a sexual hoot? Whatever it is, this study has shown that the pornographic experience is hardly limited to violence and sexism. This work is a first step towards understanding the complex and nuanced experiences that pornography provides for men.

F. ENDNOTE, CHAPTER VIII.

¹ Other examples include: Prostitutes, pedophiles, transgendered people, intersex people. All have experienced persecution, and to varying degrees all have organized.

² This applies best to fans of mainstream porn. Fans of child pornography, for example, face a completely different set of taboos.

APPENDIX A. Basic demographic description of each respondent

Alias	Age	Racial Identification	Sexual Orientation	Relationship Status
Aaron	early 50s	Euro-American	Gay	Domestic partner
Adrian	mid 20s	Afro-American	Bisexual	Single*
August	early 40s	Euro-American	Heterosexual	Married
Bart	mid 30s	Euro-American	Heterosexual	Single, separated
Billy	mid 30s	Euro-American	Gay	Single**
Bond	mid 20s	Euro-American	Heterosexual	Single
Buddy	mid 30s	Euro-American	Gay	Single
Buster	mid 30s	Euro-American	Gay	Domestic partner
Chip	mid 30s	Afro-American	Heterosexual	Single, divorced**
Clay	late 30s	Afro-American	Heterosexual	Single***
Cody	mid 20s	Euro-American	Gay	Single
Dana	mid 50s	Euro-American	Heterosexual	Single
Daniel	mid 20s	Hisp-American	Gay	Single
Darryl	early 30s	Hisp-American	Heterosexual	Married
Dexter	mid 20s	Afro-Caribbean	Gay	Single**
Dizzy	mid 30s	Euro-American	Bisexual	Married
Easy	early 30s	Afro-American	Heterosexual	Single
Elias	early 20s	Euro-American	Gay	Single
Ernie	mid 50s	Euro-American	Gay	Single
Evan	mid 30s	Euro-American	Gay	Domestic partner
Felix	mid 30s	Afro-American	Heterosexual	Single
Fred	early 30s	Afro-American	Heterosexual	Single
Gale	early 20s	Euro-American, Hisp-American mix	Heterosexual	Single
Graham	mid 30s	Euro-American	Heterosexual	Single, separated**

Hector	mid 20s	Hisp-American	Heterosexual	Single***
Henry	late 40s	Afro-American	Bisexual	Married
Jack	mid 50s	Euro-American	Gay	Domestic partner
Jason	mid 30s	Euro-American	Heterosexual	Single
Jeff	mid 30s	Euro-American	Gay	Single**
Kat	early 30s	Euro-American	Gay	Single
Kelly	late 20s	Euro-American	Heterosexual	Single, separated
Kendall	early 30s	Euro-American	Bisexual	Single***
Kyle	mid 20s	Euro-American	Bisexual	Single †
Leon	mid 30s	Euro-American	Heterosexual	Single
Lester	mid 20s	Afro-American	Heterosexual	Single
Malcolm	mid 20s	Afro-American	Heterosexual	Single***
Mario	mid 30s	Euro-American	Gay	Domestic partner
Max	early 30s	Euro-American	Gay	Single
Mickey	mid 40s	Afro-American	Bisexual	Single ††
Mitch	late 30s	Euro-American	Gay	Single
Nate	early 40s	Afro-American	Heterosexual	Married
Oscar	mid 40s	Euro-American	Bisexual, "practicing heterosexuality"	Married
Otto	mid 30s	Euro-American	Heterosexual	Married
P.J.	mid 30s	Euro-American	Gay	Single**
Patt	mid 50s	Euro-American	Heterosexual, bi-curious	Married
Quoyle	mid 40s	Euro-American	Bisexual	Single
Remi	mid 40s	Euro-American	Heterosexual	Single
Robin	early 40s	Euro-American	Heterosexual, "with homosexual experiences"	Married
Roscoe	late 20s	Afro-American	Heterosexual	Single***
Rubin	early 60s	Euro-American	Heterosexual	Single

Rufus	mid 40s	Euro-American	Heterosexual	Single
Sandy	mid 30s	Euro-American	Gay	Single***
Sean	mid 30s	Euro-American	Heterosexual	Engaged
Sonny	early 30s	Afro-American	Heterosexual	Single***
Stu	mid 30s	Euro-American	Heterosexual	Single**
Teddie	early 30s	Afro-American	Heterosexual	Single ††
Terry	mid 40s	Afro-American	Heterosexual	Single
Thor	mid 30s	Euro-American	Gay	Single
Victor	late 30s	Euro-American	Gay	Single
Wade	mid 20s	Euro-American	Gay	Single
Walker	early 30s	Euro-American	Heterosexual	Single***
Wesley	mid 20s	Hisp-American	Heterosexual	Single***
Woody	mid 40s	Euro-American	Heterosexual	Single, divorced***
Zack	mid-30s	Euro-American	"Mostly heterosexual"	Single**

* In relationship with woman for an unknown period.

** In relationship for under three years.

*** In relationship for three years or more.

† In two relationships with men, one of eight years, the other of one.

†† Recently ended a relationship of three or more than years.

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