What We Talk About When We Talk About Porn: A Meta-critical Analysis of Moving Image Porn Studies Discourse Since 1989

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ABSTRACT

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Shawna Plischke Culleton

This thesis is a meta-critical analysis of the "forever emerging" (Andrews 51) field of moving image pornography studies (porn studies) beginning with Linda William's *Hard Core* (1989), a seminal text in the field of film and video porn criticism. Specifically, this research examines moving image porn studies discourse that addresses implicitly or explicitly the question: How are we affected by pornography? This thesis demonstrates that porn studies scholars have a tendency to over-emphasize pornography's presumed effect as *the* dominant force pushing us towards either social degradation and dehumanization or freedom and equality. In other words, sexual inequality and discrimination is the disease and pornography is constructed within porn studies discourse as either the cause or the cure.

My literature review presents existing meta-critical investigations of porn studies discourse. The thesis then proceeds to examine a selection of porn studies scholarship that features power and fear, monstrous metaphors and warns about pornography's harmful effects, and examine porn studies discourse that contains language and ideas related to pleasure and truth and anticipates pornography's liberatory potential. Finally, in my conclusion in a self-conscious methodological shift, I descend from the meta-analytic to the analytic and describe and examine what I am calling "authentic" pornography whose production, marketing and content attempts to embody the ideologies of sex-positive (feminist) discourse, with

an emphasis on consent, mutuality, respect and authentic sexual experience. Integrating advocacy of this nature into my conclusion serves as one pointer to future research directions in this burgeoning field of porn studies.

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Chapter One: What We Talk About When We Talk About Porn

I borrowed my title from a short story by Raymond Carver, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" (1981). In the story, two couples sit around a kitchen table drinking gin and exchanging stories that highlight the very different ways that love is defined and understood. The conversation touches on violence and abuse, shame, divorce, authority, class, history and suicide. The host, Mel, is the character who initially brings up the subject of love; he believes that love is an absolute, that there is a truth to love that can be identified. His wife, Terri, after sharing that her ex-boyfriend "loved her so much he tried to kill her" (243), repeatedly asks the others to acknowledge that the love that her abusive ex-boyfriend felt for her was real, even if he hurt her, even if it drove him to kill himself. They continue to talk at cross-purposes, to seek acknowledgment and understanding for the position they hold, but end up at an impasse. The story ends with the two couples, now out of gin, stuck silent in their chairs, seemingly paralyzed as the sun sets. My mind kept returning to this story as I began to navigate the landscape of porn studies discourse. What *do* we talk about when we talk about porn? That is the question that inspired the research in this thesis.

The following chapters are a survey of the "forever emerging" (Andrews 51) field of moving image pornography studies beginning with Linda William's *Hard Core* (1989) as a seminal text in the field of film and video porn criticism. This is a meta-critical analysis of the language of porn studies, a criticism of criticism, an investigation of the trends and tropes that stand out as porn studies have been

coalescing into a distinct academic discipline over the past twenty years[1]. Specifically, this research examines moving image porn studies discourse that addresses implicitly or explicitly the question: How are we affected by pornography?

That pornography is imbued with special powers to influence "the masses" is a presumption that is common in porn studies discourse. I hope to demonstrate that porn studies scholars have a tendency to over-emphasize pornography's presumed effect as *the* dominant force pushing us towards either social degradation and dehumanization or freedom and equality. In other words, sexual inequality and discrimination is the disease and pornography is constructed within porn studies discourse as either the cause or the cure.

My literature review presents existing meta-critical investigations of porn studies discourse. The thesis then proceeds to examine a selection of porn studies scholarship that features power and fear, monstrous metaphors and warns about pornography's harmful effects, and examine porn studies discourse that contains language and ideas related to pleasure and truth and anticipates pornography's liberatory potential. Finally, in my conclusion in a self-conscious methodological shift, I descend from the meta-analytic to the analytic and describe and examine what I am calling "authentic" pornography whose production, marketing and content attempts to embody the ideologies of sex-positive (feminist) discourse, with

[1] I offer Film Forum's upcoming conference (April 2011) as further proof of the coalescence of porn studies into a discipline. The conference features a section for porn studies scholarship that explores the "geographies of audiovisual pornography" ("Film Forum").

an emphasis on consent, mutuality, respect and authentic sexual experience. Integrating advocacy of this nature into my conclusion serves as one pointer to future research directions in this burgeoning field of porn studies.

Delineating Porn Studies

My primary interest and focus is on the popular but marginalized branch of film studies that is increasingly referred to as porn studies, especially within film criticism.[2] Porn studies also includes contributions from a number of other disciplines, but pornography is not a subject of study with an established discipline: it does not yet warrant a convergence of texts in one distinct section of the library, a department of its own within an academic institution, or widely available teaching opportunities and/or available courses (Andrews "Soft-Core"). In fact, when I first began this project, I wasn't sure if porn studies existed. It is not that porn studies is invisible, but that it is somewhat scattered. While the discipline may be scattered, many of the works that make up porn studies focus on the moral and ethical implications of pornography: does pornography deserve to exist? Is porn "socially and morally dangerous or sexual liberating" (Lacombe *Blue Politics* 5)? And from that, should limitations be placed on the production and distribution of pornography? These questions have not emerged along with porn studies; they have been present for centuries (Kendrick, Lacombe). Personally, I believe that pornography is fun, arousing, beautiful, educational, inspirational, comforting, thought provoking, challenging, disturbing, ugly, disgusting, and shameful. I believe

[2] To be clear, porn studies does not limit itself to the study of moving image pornography, but this study does place this limit on the texts that will be examined.

that it is up to me to explore and discover my personal limits, and to look away when I encounter pornography that pushes me further than I am prepared to go. You can find anything you look for in pornography, and I align myself with anti-censorship porn studies scholars who look for (and find!) "positive, powerful pornography" (Wasserman 1996).

One of the challenges of attempting a meta-analytical study of porn studies criticism is that the newness of porn studies, and its marginality, mean that many texts seem to keep re-inventing the wheel. Because so many of the articles that I read were by scholars whose main focus is not moving image pornography, the texts were often written without context in the field. I encountered many similar arguments in works because writers who are dipping their toes in porn studies don't seem to do extensive reading in the area, and therefore are not familiar with what their contemporaries are writing. As I will demonstrate in my literature review, Walter Metz's essay, "Shark Porn," and Carmine Sarracino and Kevin M. Scott's book, *The Porning of America,* are such complementary works and it's a real missed opportunity that the authors of the latter were not familiar with the former. This is also one of the main factors that has motivated me investigate porn studies criticism in its breadth and depth, to prepare me for future work in the field of porn studies.

Purpose & Objectives

The primary purpose of this research is to examine moving image porn studies discourse that focuses on pornography's presumed effect on society. A secondary purpose that developed as a result of what I perceived as a gap in existing

porn studies discourse is to define and analyze a sub-genre of pornography that I am calling "authentic" pornography. It is my intent that my research reflects the full spectrum of sexual diversity; therefore, I aimed to be inclusive while researching porn studies discourse and hard core pornographic film and video.

To accomplish these goals, I have:

- Examined the existing meta-analysis conducted on pornography
- Identified the prominent themes found in a selection of porn studies discourse
- Sampled porn studies discourse that concentrates on pornography's potential positive or negative effect for analysis
- Viewed hard core films and videos that included (but were not limited to) mainstream heterosexual porn (hereafter, commercial heteroporn), amateur porn, trans porn, lesbian porn, gay male porn, Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism (collectively referred to as BDSM), etc.
- Identified an emerging sub-genre of pornography that is an articulation of sex-positive (feminist) philosophy: "authentic" pornography.

Methodology

This is a sex-positive feminist meta-critical analysis of porn studies discourse since 1989 inspired and informed by critical discourse analysis theory and work by Deborah Cameron, Michel Foucault, Sara Mills, Teun Van Dijk and Raymond Williams. Deborah Cameron's 1989 meta-critical investigation of feminist discourse

about pornography, "Discourses of Desire: Liberals, Feminists, and the Politics of Pornography in the 1980s," is the critical discourse model that I used for this thesis. Deborah Cameron is a Professor of Language and Communication at Worcester College at the University of Oxford. Cameron organizes her essay around the question "what do we think of pornography?" and looks at the following four books to answer it: *The New Politics of Pornography* (Donald Downs 1989), Letters *from a War Zone: Writings 1976-1989* (Andrea Dworkin 1989), *Touching Fire: Erotic Writings by Women* (Louise Thornton et al. Ed 1989), and *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Williams 1989).

In her essay, Cameron observes that pornography had become a focal point for feminist theory and sexuality discourses, and that it had become a "topic meriting the serious attention of academics from all over the disciplinary spectrum" (784). As I noted earlier in this chapter, the scattered nature of porn studies is still present twenty years later. She touches on the position of pro-censorship feminists who wish to restrict pornography (Dworkin), of those who study what pornography is and means and the condition of its production and consumption (Williams and Kappeler).

In a moment of rather precise foretelling, Cameron recommends what has become a staple in porn studies criticism—critics who read pornography against the grain and discover subversive potential for pleasure and power: "More attention needs to be given to the conditions under which the potential for subversive readings might be realized" (791). She is writing at a time when porn studies had not yet begun to recognize itself as an academic discipline, and before the rapid

growth of hard core pornography and its many sub-genres began to proliferate on the Internet. In other words, the landscape of porn studies has changed so much in the last twenty years, that it seems important work to re-examine the discourse.

Before we move on to my process, I would like to note that I am including Cameron's essay in my methodology because her study is similar to mine, but that I have excluded her from my literature review of meta-critical analysis of porn studies because there was no porn studies, per se, when she was writing and therefore her study is markedly different from the others that I chose to include in my literature review.

I began my research with this question in mind: What trends or conventions are beginning to emerge as porn studies becomes established as a legitimate academic practice? This text, then, is a meta-analysis of the trends in my corpus that structure the way that moving image pornography is theorized by porn studies. The language, the recurring themes and assumptions whose threads I trace through this body of work were not only fascinating to me, but in need of careful examination.

What is almost universally agreed upon within porn studies criticism is the need for experts in the field, for junior scholars to "risk their capital" on porn (Andrews 54; see also Metz, Champagne, Lehman, Williams *Porn Studies*). As a junior scholar with an interest in hard core moving image pornography and porn studies criticism, I decided to take up this challenge. Not only have I spent this past two years reading books and articles on pornography from which I sampled the

books and articles in my corpus, I also viewed a lot of pornographic film and video[3] from every country, sexuality, and kink that I could acquire to be versed in pornography. It is my intent that my research reflects the full spectrum of sexual diversity; therefore, I studied commercial heteroporn, amateur porn, trans porn, lesbian porn, gay male porn, Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism (collectively referred to as BDSM), etc. I mostly found films from Europe, Asia and North America because that is what was available to me in my geographical locale and cheaply/free on the Internet. While my thesis does not concentrate on the analysis of pornographic films, I felt that it is important to study these films to become qualified to assess the work being written about them[4].

A shortcoming of many porn scholars is that they are not that familiar with hard core moving image pornography. This lack of porn knowledge among porn scholars is a by-product of the lack of porn archives (whether commercial or institutional), and, frankly, it is expensive to legally obtain (by purchasing, renting or streaming) a quality personal library. Furthermore, the availability of pornography through illegal channels (such as peer to peer technology) is entirely dependant on "popularity" for finding titles (that often turn out to be mislabeled). My local high quality video store (by which I mean a store that is selective in its library and has demonstrated a long standing devotion to archiving and to providing a variety of international film titles) does not use the same selection criteria for its

[3] By pornographic film and video, I mean moving image pornography—not literary porn, or photography, or online chat rooms.

[4] For easy reference, I have added a partial list of moving image pornographic films and videos consulted following the works consulted.

porn collection as the rest of its films. Their porn section is small (a curtained off closet under a set of stairs) and very limited in the types of pornography offered—no real thought has gone into building this "collection." The same can be said for the pay per view offerings of my local cable provider. It has been challenging to expose myself to a variety of pornography without going broke!

My process began with a list of keywords that I was reading for: sex, power, privacy, consent, authenticity, (mutual) pleasure, respect, harm, shame, abjection, degradation, and violence. From there, I identified trends and themes that seemed to emerge around these keywords. I began to focus on the concepts of power and fear, pleasure and truth/authenticity, recurring metaphors, and a concentration of texts describing a phenomenon called "porning," "pornification," etc.

Finally, my attention kept drifting towards criticism that either explicitly or implicitly grappled with the following question: how are we affected by moving image pornography? I firmly believe that the future of porn studies will be built on existing discourse that shrugs off the tiresome harmful/liberatory debate, but recent contributions to this debate acted upon me like a shiny object to a crow and became the focal point of my research.

Political Framework and Other Biases

I believe that there is insufficient evidence to prove that pornography is harmful or liberatory, but since you can find anything in pornography (and I mean

everything! I've looked!), I choose to see the positive. I am a sex-positive feminist[5] and this informs the meaning(s) that I find in pornography. In broad terms, sex-positive feminists believe in the pursuit of sexual autonomy and pleasure (sexual agency), respect the spectrum of sexuality and gender expression, and many take an anti-censorship stance on pornography. I disagree with pro-censorship scholars who argue that controlling pornography will help society achieve systemic social and sexual equality, or at the very least root out a major cause of social and sexual inequality (Dines, Dworkin, Kendall, MacKinnon, Paul. etc). I believe that laws designed to protect society by controlling pornography cannot lead to equality or freedom, but to the institutionalization of patriarchal hegemonic (heterosexual) control of the representation and expression of sexual freedom. Sex has no "natural," no "normal." When it comes to freedom of sexual expression, including pornography, there can be no majority rule, only consensual activity between parties.

I have been bi-sexual for as long as I can remember, although I struggled for a few years trying to figure out if I was gay or straight. I'm neither. I am currently in a (monogamous) long-term heterosexual relationship, institutionalized by marriage. I have bracketed our monogamy because we have made no vows to be faithful and we are both open to the possibility of seeking additional sexual partners. I am also the mother of two pre-school aged children who were born 19 months apart, and whose care sapped so much energy from my partner and me, that putting a little zest back

[5] See "Feminism, Moralism, and Pornography" (1993), Ellen Willis' essay that first described the sex-positive feminist movement as a reaction to anti-porn activists of the 1970s and 1980s.

into my sex life was no small motivator to taking up pornography as a subject for this thesis! I prefer pornography that features eye contact, consent (implicit or explicit), respect, authentic or well-acted orgasm, and mutual pleasure. I prefer all-male pornography and lesbian pornography to heterosexual pornography. During the course of this research I noted my preference and thereby discovered my overwhelming preference for pornography intentionally produced from sex-positive philosophies, what I am calling "authentic" pornography. Pornography (literary, photographic, and moving image) has been a part of my life since my pre-teens.

I have assumed an ideal reader who has accepted the value of studying pornography and who is familiar with main threads or discussions in porn studies. Specifically, I have decided not to re-hash the feminist porn wars in these pages. While I will be considering texts that are pro-censorship or anti-porn (the work of MacKinnon, Dworkin, and Kendall, for example) alongside texts that are pro-sex, pro-porn or anti-censorship (Bell, Capino, Champagne, Kipnis and Williams, for example), I will not be summarizing the contributions to the "porn wars" of the 70s and 80s. I feel that there are sufficient texts that re-capitulate the porn war debates (see Cornell, Ellis, O'Toole, Sarracino and Scott, and Williams' *Hard Core*).

Defining My Corpus

I spent over a year reading books and articles on pornography from which I sampled the books and articles that will be discussed in this thesis. While I feel that it is important to approach pornography from a number of platforms, I decided to limit my corpus to "sex in motion pictures" and "pornography—social aspects" since these are the subject areas into which porn studies has been streamed.

Furthermore, I have only selected texts that focus on hard core moving image pornography. My corpus has remained multi-disciplinary, but manageable and these limits have helped me to define the boundaries of porn studies as an emerging academic discipline (as opposed to, sexuality studies, for example).

From the list of works consulted, I have selected key texts based on the following criteria: A) their importance in the field of porn studies—to which end, Linda Williams is heavily represented and B) their value as examples/case studies of the trends I will be discussing (Mason 1996). Canadians are included by virtue of their nationality (and therefore geo-political relevance) whether or not their work can be demonstrated to be important to porn studies as a discipline. This process is by no means scientific in the sense of empirical evidence or content analysis; it is based on the depth of the discussion, repetition of tropes I have identified and my own often intuitive and personal engagement with the text (there is a built-in bias for texts that stood out to me and therefore stuck in my memory for sometimes unidentifiable reasons). I have done my best to include the works of academics that are teaching pornography (such as, Andrews, Champagne, Kipnis, Lehman, Metz, Penley, Waugh, and Williams), since they have increased opportunities for influencing the next generation of porn studies contributors.

Literature Review

I hunted exhaustively throughout my research for examples of meta-analysis in porn studies. This is not a topic that is searchable by entering "meta-analysis" and "pornography" in the proper fields of EBSCO Host, for example. At my most desperate and despondent moments I would highlight the literature reviews of the

texts in my corpus in the hope that close analysis might reveal meta-analysis in their summaries. I don't mean to dismiss the brief moments of meta-analysis found in the introductory chapters of most academic work, but they do not assemble a quality literature review for a study of this nature. In the end, I found three journal articles that contained sustained meta-analysis of porn studies discourse: David Andrew's "What Soft-Core Can Do for Porn Studies" (2007), John Champagne's "'Stop Reading Films!': Film Studies, Close Analysis, and Gay Pornography" (1997) and Walter Metz's "Shark Porn: Film Genre, Reception Studies, and Chris Kentis' *Open Water*" (2007). The following paragraphs will discuss these three articles at length; including an evaluation of the expertise of the authors in the field of porn studies, the objectives and methods found in the articles, the similarities and differences in their arguments and the conflicts that they raise.

To begin, let's meet our authors in alphabetical order. David Andrews holds a PhD in American Literature. In the past, he has taught courses at four universities in the United States and is currently an independent scholar. He has published two books, including *Soft in the Middle: The Contemporary Softcore Feature in its Context* (2006). He has also published several articles on softcore and hard core pornography. According to his bio in *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, he has had a "new definition of 'pornography' accepted by the *Journal of Popular Culture* that will come out in 2011" ("bio—David Andrews"). I consider him an expert in the field of porn studies.

Next up is John Champagne, an Associate Professor of English at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College, Pennsylvania. He has published three books, two are

novels and the third is *The Ethics of Marginality: New Approaches to Gay Studies*. (1995), which does cover pornography. "Stop Reading Films!" is Champagne's only published work that deals exclusively with pornography, but he teaches pornography, and pornographic material regularly in courses at Penn State. He also qualifies as an expert in the field of porn studies.

Last (and also least) is Walter Metz, an Associate Professor in the Department of Cinema and Photography at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. He has published two books: *Bewitched* (2007), an analysis of the television program and its impact on culture, and *Engaging Film Criticism: Film History and Contemporary American Cinema* (2004). He has also published about thirty journal articles and book chapters, most of which discuss the relationship between films and the novels they are adapted from. He is not a regular contributor to porn studies and I do not feel that his article "Shark Porn" demonstrates expertise of this subject. He makes some claims to expertise in porn studies, having "just read the major works" (Metz 36, 58), but he is only familiar with hard core pornographic films by reputation. In his article, he demonstrates knowledge of three films, two of which he has actually viewed, one he refuses to ever see, plus a general familiarity with the grainy 80s aesthetic and synthesized sound of straight to video hard core pornographic films (not really the general standard of hard core pornographic film and video in the 21st century).

As for the articles themselves, I'd like to start with Champagne's article because it comes first chronologically, but I'd like to make clear that this article is not responsible for inducting a conversation that is continued by the other two

texts. None of the three texts that make up my literature review address the work of the others, and I suspect that I may be the first to bring them into dialogue. Also, as far as sustained meta-analysis of porn studies discourse is concerned, "Stop Reading Films!" is probably the weakest entry as it is more concerned with arguing against a method of analysis for film studies in general; whereas, Metz and Andrews invest themselves in diagnosing the flaws of porn studies in particular.

Champagne

Champagne's main objective in his article is to demonstrate why close textual analysis of films is not a useful method for studying pornography in general, and all-male pornography in particular (Champagne 76). Champagne is "diagnosing" film studies as having a bad case of close analysis myopia, for which the "disruptive potential" of pornography is the cure (76). According to Champagne, the industry standard of "close analysis" in film criticism is blunting moving image pornography's potential: "Instead of calling into crisis the way the discipline constructs its objects of study, for example, pornography might become just another set of texts to be included in the curriculum" (Champagne 76). Champagne claims "pornography has the potential to disrupt established ways of working in film. It can allow us to confront some of our most treasured disciplinary pretensions, procedures, and assumptions" (Champagne 76). Therefore, close analysis "obscures both the social and historical conditions in which certain kinds of texts circulate and the everyday uses to which subjects put such texts" (Champagne 76). He provides an analysis of the historical conditions of the reception of gay moving

image pornography by examining the physical space and actual viewing spaces of video arcades in different parts of the United States.

Very little of the essay involves meta-analysis of actual porn studies texts. He is writing to his film studies colleagues, and while he is using pornography to make his point about the limits of close analysis, there is no expectation that his readers are familiar with (or interested in) porn studies. The other two articles that I will discuss in this section are more specific to porn studies. Champagne is interested in "diagnosing" film studies, while the other two articles in my literature review are concerned with porn studies in its current state.

Metz

Metz, on the other hand, is a critic who seems determined to describe in detail the ills of both moving image hard core pornography as a genre and his "worries about the academic orgasm of interest in pornography" (36). Metz has written an interpretation of *Open Water* (Chris Kentis 2003) as an "anti-porn film." *Open Water* presents the story of a strained married couple on vacation that are left in the ocean by a tour boat and then slowly attacked and killed by sharks. He uses moving image pornographic films and videos as "a reading frame. If one keeps thinking about pornography while watching a non-pornographic film, what is the resulting interpretation?" (45-46). Essentially, he argues that horror films substitute violence for sex, which is not a groundbreaking conclusion (see, for example, Clover 1993, Halberstam 1995 or Shaviro 1993). Before he begins this analysis of *Open Water*, he spends half of the article criticizing porn studies as a discipline for engaging with the widely released stolen home video *Pam and Tommy*

Lee: Hardcore and Uncensored (1997)—a video that he has never watched and will never watch (43). I take issue with this: a critic should not use a stolen home video (one case, not studied and in most respects unrepresentative of pornography as a whole) to make broad statements about pornography and porn studies criticism.

For the first five pages or so, I read Metz's article, "Shark Porn: Film Genre, Reception Studies, and Chris Kentis' *Open Water"* with curiosity and interest. I was excited to have finally found sustained meta-analysis of porn studies and it seemed well argued and it raised interesting points, but phrases like "polite public company" (41) coupled with his description of the critic's job, to protect and enlighten (42), revealed a conservative and moralizing tone quite at odds with my personal leanings.

"Shark Porn" and Sarracino and Scott's *The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What It Means, and Where We Go from Here* (2008), which will be discussed at length in chapter two, are two texts that seem to take Kendrick's "Young Person"[6] as their main focus. Champagne's "threat" and "potential" of (all-male) pornography seems to be what Metz hopes to contain when he recommends a "centrist" approach to pornography in "Shark Porn." Metz claims "there are some significant reasons to put the brakes on a rabid, radical celebration of the liberating potential of pornography" (38). I think that Metz might be satisfied by the "centrist" work of Sarracino and Scott's *Porning of America* written a year after Metz's essay,

[6] "Young Person" is the term Walter Kendrick uses in *The Secret Museum* to describe a group or community that needs to be protected from dangerous (pornographic) information. It can mean actual youth, but women of any age are also associated with the term (67–94, 227).

although they do not refer to Metz's article in their book, since both texts are heavily prescriptive and moralizing.

As I mentioned earlier, Metz has formed his opinion without actually studying moving image pornography. He states in the article that he watched Andy Warhol's *Blow Job* (1963), and he barely made it through *Deep Throat* (1972)—a film he refers to as "horrifying:" "The existence of this film, I think, does not bode well for the future of our civilization" (Metz 36 and 58).

Additionally, his notions of "public" and "private" space seem to come from another century and are at odds with the study of pornographic material:

> There is a justifiable distinction between the private and public space… Sex is a private act (regardless of how many people willingly engage in it at once); the public space is for work, entertainment, the discussion of ideas, and whatever other communal endeavors we choose. (Metz 41)

I don't think the boundaries are set that clearly in the 21st century if they even exist at all anymore. Furthermore, pornography is public sex, so he seems to take issue with the very nature of hard core pornography. For example, with regards to the *Pam and Tommy* video he writes:

> I really do not have any problem with lovers enjoying oral sex with one another. However, it is simply inappropriate for this to become a public image. The engagement in acts of sex should be a private affair. Inside the private space, I really do not care what people want to do as consensual members of a loving relationship. However, the civic and civil reasons for containing sexuality (both physical and imagistic) to the private space

> are compelling, and not the result of prudishness and intolerance. (Metz 42)

This is the first instance in my academic career where I have scribbled "fuddy-duddy" in the margins of a journal article.

Perhaps one of the most distinguishing features of Metz's "Shark Porn" is that it is the only text that I encountered that considers the moving image pornography canon and trying to establish criteria for inclusion (unfortunately, he seems to exclude all hard core pornography from any canon he deems worthy of academic study). As for the *Pam and Tommy* video, it was a massive cultural event. The video went viral[7]; therefore, I think it is a text worthy of discussion. How many moving image pornographic films or videos can a scholar write about *and* be certain most people have seen the film or video?

Furthermore, Metz's method of reading a film through the pornographic frame is by no means unique, and it has been used to generate interesting interpretations on non-pornographic texts and cultural phenomenon. For example, it can be found in "Sexed Authorship and Pornographic Address in Music Videos" (Paasonen 115-127), and in Sarracino and Scott's analysis of the widely released and infamous Abu Ghraib photos and subsequent trials in *Porning of America* (137-167). His analysis of *Open Water* was what I valued most in his essay, but I had trouble coming up with reasons why the first section denouncing pornography and proscribing "the benefits of the center with respect to pornography studies" (37)

[7] The phrase "went viral" is now commonly used to describe videos that achieve widespread viewing on Internet sites such as YouTube.com. *Pam and Tommy* was one of the first videos to go viral (Almond).

rather than taking a liberal or radical approach had any bearing at all on his reading of *Open Water* (2003).

I find Metz's reading of a non-pornographic film using pornography's aesthetic and then calling the film a kind of "anti-porn" a very interesting exercise, but it seems divorced from the bulk of the essay which is spent moralizing and criticizing overly enthusiastic porn studies scholars and their misplaced attention on the Pamela Anderson/Tommy Lee sex tape. Lucky for me, this oddly sutured article has provided fodder for my literature review.

Andrews

The two articles we have discussed so far certainly make contributions to meta-analytic porn studies discourse, even if their observations are tangential to their main arguments. Andrews' "What Soft-Core Can Do for Porn Studies" is the only example I found of careful and sustained meta-analysis of porn studies criticism and its current state within academia. As such, Andrews' work has strongly influenced my study, specifically with regards to recognizing porn studies as a distinct discipline with emerging conventions that are in need of examination. In fact, the work that I am doing in this thesis could be described as a response to the lack of scholars who aim for authority when it comes to pornography (52).

Andrews refers to his article as a *précis*, a sketchy summary, "unified by the idea that porn studies has been encouraged by the institutional logics of academic publishing even as it has been restricted by the related logics of academic pedagogy" (51). He has metaphorically positioned himself as a medical examiner by using the rhetoric of medicine; "fix this defect," "significant handicaps," "diagnose the field's

deficiencies" (51). He goes on to systematically describe the problem with porn studies, including, the lack of teaching opportunities for porn studies scholars, the lack of thorough genre studies, the difficulties in accessing primary texts, and the overall conservatism of academic institutions who "view themselves as the guardians of culture" (55). Porn pedagogy is essential to improving the quality of scholarship in porn studies, and Andrews writes "teaching porn is so tricky that writing how-to articles on the subject has become something of a cottage industry in porn studies" (54).

While I find all of the points that Andrews raises to be engaging and worthy of serious attention, his assessment of the work being published in porn studies is what is most relevant to the work that I am doing. Andrews summarizes the problem thusly: "Porn studies encourages scholars to engage in quick-and-dirty projects while deterring them from undertaking ambitious ones" (52). This is detrimental to producing high quality work in the field. Because sexualized material can be successfully capitalized on, it encourages scholars to dip their toes in the market because it can lead to "ready publication" (53) before they move on to more "serious" interests. As Andrews puts it, "porn's low status… acts as a deterrent to scholarly activity" (54). The result of the deterrents described by Andrews is brought into relief when we consider that Williams is responsible for both the definitive genre study and the definitive compendium of work being done in the field fifteen years later. Williams has had a profound impact on both the framing of pornography within the discipline and the language that is used—it is a rare porn studies text that does not reference Williams' now infamous term "maximum

visibility."[8] Andrews points out that, as strong as her work is, to build an entire discipline on one study[9] weakens the discipline (52-53).

The biggest difference between the work that Andrews has done and what I am doing can be summed up quite succinctly: Andrews is interested in "what's wrong" with porn studies and I am interested in the emerging conventions and tropes of porn studies discourse. By focusing on the use of discourses describing and debating the phenomenon of pornography, I hope to achieve a deeper understanding of the cultural production of pornography missing in the fierce debates about its effects—social, political, interpersonal, cultural/artistic and sexual—and thereby make an original contribution to those debates. I hope to make a humble intervention in the current socio-cultural crisis around the "pornification" myth, or pornography's presumed (harmful) effect.

Overview of Findings and Thesis Organization

The first, nearly universal trend in porn studies is to "come out"—with regards to sexuality and, occasionally, with regards to an author's personal use of pornography (explicitness depends entirely on the author, but most articles written

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[8] "Maximum visibility" is the term coined by Williams in *Hard Core* to describe "the imperative of all pornography to prove that real sex takes place. It includes the privileging of close-ups of body parts over other shots, the overlighting of otherwise easily obscured genitals and, of course, with the rise of feature-length porno in the early seventies, the money shot" (*Screening Sex* 352).

[9] There is a tendency within the discipline of porn studies to consider Williams' *Hard Core* (1989) as *the* founding text, neglecting *Jump Cut*'s special edition about pornography published in 1985. Furthermore, Thomas Waugh's *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from their Beginnings to Stonewall* (1996) rivals *Hard Core* as an in-depth genre study with social and historical context.

about pornography firmly establish the author's sexuality in the first few pages, sometimes to justify the inclusion/exclusion of certain types of pornography). While I feel it is important to identify this trend I will not be elaborating on the topic in these pages, except to point out that I do not like the way that it is used as a barrier to studying hard core films or groups of films that lie outside a scholar's personal preferences or comfort zone. For example, in *Hard Core*, Williams focuses her study on heterosexual hard core pornography because she is a heterosexual woman (6); in *Porning of America*, the authors are quick—by quick, I mean it is the third sentence of the introduction—to situate themselves as married heterosexual fathers (ix); and, in *Gay Male Pornography*, Christopher N. Kendall explains that he has directed his writing to gay men because (among other reasons) he is one (xii).

Secondly, I have observed a recent trend (concentrated in texts of the new millennium) in porn studies of turning porn into a verb, or to give a more active form. For example, "porning," "pornified," "porned," and "pornification" are all used to describe "the increased visibility of hard core and soft-core [sic] pornographies, and the blurring of boundaries between the pornographic and the mainstream" (*Pornification* 8). This definition is very similar to William's statement that pornography is "an increasingly on/scene cultural form that impinges on the lives of a wide variety of Americans and that matters in the evaluation of who we are as a culture" (*Porn Studies* 5). However, there is a sensational rhetorical quality to terms like "porning" and "pornified" that is not shared by "on/scenity."

What is the effect of turning "porn" into a verb? Does constructing pornography as a kind of monster within porn studies discourse create a structure

or framework in which the effect of pornography on culture is privileged over framing it as a cultural production? Does porn operate differently from other films? What does porn "do," according to the literature? Do we transfer this effect onto other genres? How do these trends relate to the harm that pornography is said to perform in an anti-pornography text such as MacKinnon's *Only Words* (1993)?

Following on my introductory exploration of methodology and conceptual issues, my second chapter examines a selection of porn studies scholarship that features power and fear, monstrous metaphors and warns about pornography's harmful effects. Specifically, by examining Sarracino and Scott's *The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What It Means, and Where We Go from Here*, as the "typical, extreme… expression of a point" (Mason 144). I use *Porning of America* as a case study to describe the trend of similar works that turn porn into a verb, use dramatic rhetoric, anecdotal evidence, and broad speculation to inflame fears about pornography. This book is also considered in the context of pro-censorship discourse by Andrea Dworkin, Catherine MacKinnon and Christopher N. Kendall. I investigate the concept of "harm" that is found in their writings, in Canada's current pornography laws, and look to the work of Shannon Bell for a counter-argument.

The third and final trend I examine is for porn studies scholars to search for authenticity in moving image pornographic texts. This seemingly baffling trend of seeking truth-value in a genre dedicated to fantasy (Kipnis 65-66, also Bell and Capino) and whose loyalty to an aesthetic of "maximum visibility" has produced what gonzo porn producer and director Paul Little (aka Max Hardcore) has deemed "Hard to believe porn" (*CBC Originals—Porn: Business of Pleasure* 2009). Chapter

three examines porn studies discourse that contains language and ideas related to pleasure and truth and anticipates pornography's liberatory potential. Specifically, I have concentrated on two essays that have developed, above all others, authenticity as a theme: Heather Butler's "What Do You Call a Lesbian with Long Fingers? The Developments of Lesbian and Dyke Pornography" (2004) and Rich Cante and Angelo Restivo's "The Cultural-Aesthetic Specificities of All-Male Moving-Image Pornography" (2004).

Finally, in my conclusion, my parting shot is a sideways shift and a modest endeavor to make a contribution to the field of porn studies per se, describing and examining what I am calling "authentic" pornography: hard core moving image pornography whose production, marketing and content attempt to embody the ideologies of sex-positive (feminist) discourse, with an emphasis on consent, mutuality, respect and authentic sexual experience. And while porn studies scholars using tropes of authenticity have not yet begun to focus on what I am referring to as "authentic" pornography, it seems likely that such a shift in discourse is imminent.

Chapter Two: Porn Studies is a Story About Power And Fear

> *Is there not a danger in the hypnotic quality of the film image, an inherent danger because it is a lure to passivity?*
>
> ~ Richard Dyer

> *The technology by its very nature encourages more and more passive acquiescence to the graphic depictions. Passivity makes the already credulous consumer more credulous. He comes to pornography a believer; he goes away from it a missionary. The technology itself legitimizes the uses of women conveyed by it.*
>
> ~ Andrea Dworkin

In this chapter, I will demonstrate how an uneasy relationship to pornography has created a story about pornography—the story of pornography as bogeyman, or scapegoat. Pornography seems to be at the center of a category crisis making it difficult to distinguish porn from sex and porn for "not porn." The resulting confusion produces a panic and pornography has become the focal point for fears about sex, social degradation, and morality and about the unprecedented availability of and our intense interaction with new media technologies. I will present the work of scholars who use this myth to sensationalize their scholarship and to publish books, sometimes at the expense of careful investigation of the subject because anecdotes, metaphors and "gut reactions" are privileged over social

scientific evidence or results, particularly in relation to discussions of harm and pornography's ability to influence its audience. Thereby, I hope to demonstrate that the discourse used to discuss pornography creates a structure or framework in which the effect of pornography on culture is privileged over framing it as a cultural production and thus denies its contingent, expressive and cultural operation, not to mention its potential as pleasure, subversion, and personal fulfillment.

Pornography, the genre whose relationship to the world causes the most anxiety, comes under the greatest scrutiny and is the focal point for many of our greatest fears because it is difficult to separate porn from sex and the sexual from the personal. Each person's experiences with sex can be filled with an assorted mix of intense emotions that make an objective approach to the subject impossible. Genitals, and what people do with them, have a way of producing the strongest strain of cultural rage. As one of the editors of *$pread* magazine put it in an interview published in *Bitch* magazine's Fall 2006 edition,

> Sex—whether commercial or not—is an emotional issue. It's a really challenging thing to talk about. When you talk about sex, people assume you're talking about them, or that you're talking about sex for all women. And it's just not the case. But those reactions come from it being such a personal thing. (53)

The cultural (and personal) anxiety about sex is transposed onto pornography, often in the form of scholars expressing concern that studying and writing about pornography will have an adverse effect on their reputations and, thereby, their

careers. For example, Williams worries in the foreword of her book *Hard Core* that taking up the subject of pornography might sully her reputation (xvi-xvii).

Obviously, time has shown that Williams' worries were unfounded; she has become widely read and is generally respected for her groundbreaking contributions to the study of moving image pornography. However, as I mentioned in the first chapter with regards to Andrews' evaluation of the current state of porn studies scholarship, it remains difficult to make a career of this type of academic work. Perhaps these underlying fears are partially responsible for the trends in porn studies discourse that will be examined in the following pages.

Porn as Threat

I think that the most efficient way to launch into a discussion of the threatening nature of pornography that is condensed in the porn studies corpus of this chapter is to look at the multiple meanings of the word "concupiscence." "Concupiscence" appears in Jose B. Capino's 2005 article, "Homologies of Space" which was, chronologically, one of the last articles I read when researching this thesis (22). I had to look it up in the dictionary and when I did I saw the entire path of this chapter laid out in the definition of one word. Concupiscence is defined in several ways:

- An ardent, usually sensuous, longing; a strong sexual desire or lust.
- Selfish human desire for an object, person, or experience.
- The orientation, inclination or innate tendency of human beings to do evil. (*Reference.com*)

The definition(s) of this word, that this one word is used to mean these three specific things, are clarifying for the discussion that follows about power, fear and pornography. Concupiscence means sexual desire, selfish desire, and the root of evil—what better word for pornography in this chapter! Sexual desire and lust cannot be recognized without the secondary and third meanings: selfishness and evil. It follows that the porn studies discourse investigated in this chapter concludes that pornography is harmful. The idea of harm is generated by the inestimable power that critics tend to associate with pornography.

Michel Foucault writes, in *The History of Sexuality: An introduction* (1976), an illuminating passage about the omnipresence of power that is important to consider because the current chapter will demonstrate that moving image pornography is constructed as all-powerful and omnipresent even while scholars have difficulty defining or locating the source of that power:

> The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. (93)

What I hope to demonstrate is that the moving image pornography discourse examined in this chapter theorizes pornography as omnipresent (it is everywhere!) and powerful (we are helpless against it!). Thus we have "Pornography" with a capital "P"—a theoretical, and monstrous, construction of pornography as the vessel of power that is wielded over society—affecting individuals whether they actually

view moving image pornographic texts or not. In this narrative, we are all affected (and the effect is characterized as negative). Pornography stands in as sex, and as power—in this construction we are its helpless victims.

The focus of this chapter is moving image pornography discourse that is about fear as demonstrated by monstrous metaphors and imagery, and (exaggerated?) claims about pornography's ability to influence its audience. This anxiety about "Pornography" is about power; pornography is constructed as the most powerful force at work on contemporary culture (the social threat of pornification) and it is also constructed as the most powerful "cinematic" genre (to some, this poses a threat to film studies as a discipline).[10] Before we move on to a discussion of how pornography is characterized as monstrous in some porn studies discourse, let us take a look at how moving image pornography has been constructed, generically, as a "special case" (Kipnis 1998 156).

Is Porn a Special Case?

To be fair, film itself is constructed as dangerous by film studies discourse. The Oxford Guide asks in its first section, "Is there not a danger in the hypnotic quality of the film image, an inherent danger because it is a lure to passivity?" (8) and with regard to its ability to influence and control, "Hasn't film demonstrably been used to manipulate people to acquiesce in totalitarian regimes?" (8). We will examine film's ability (or non-ability) to affect in a later section, for now let us simply accept that pornography, as a genre to be feared, is not alone.

[10] For a thorough (meta-analytical) discussion of the discourse about pornography's potential threat to society, see Kendrick's chapter, "The Post-Pornographic Era," in *The Secret Museum* (1987).

In her 1995 essay, "Political Mimesis," Jain M. Gaines asks the question, "Did documentary films ever produce social change?" Not really, Gaines writes, but the political left's hope for documentary-inspired social change is matched by the political right's fear that film and video will inspire (violent) social change (Gaines). Gaines examines the difficulty of tracing social change back to films (85), a relationship so casually described in porn studies discourse about the "porning" phenomenon. Finally, she states that, pervasive as the myth might be, it is a myth or fantasy that films produce social change (85, 89). [11]

As we saw in the previous chapter, Champagne introduces the concept of the pornographic threat quite deftly in "Stop Reading Films!":

> film studies in the heteronormative academy relies on the practice of close analysis to *contain the threat and promise*—for both men and women, straight and gay—of gay pornography and the porno arcade… the offering up of close analyses, regardless of their individual conclusions, may itself be a heteronormative gesture, a means whereby the *threat of gay pornography is contained*. (Champagne 77 [*mine*])

In this instance, Champagne means the social threat that is posed by pornography, but in his essay he also refers to the threat that pornography poses to film studies by questioning both its object of study and the methods employed: "[Pornography] can allow us to confront some of our most treasured disciplinary pretensions, procedures, and assumptions" ("Stop!" 76). Thus the "social threat", for

[11] For further reading on the subject, see Waugh "Why Documentary Filmmakers Keep Trying to Change the World, or Why People Changing the World Keep Making Documentaries" (1984).

Champagne, has positive potential because it is subversive. The positive potential of pornography is an idea that we will re-visit in the next chapter. For now, I am simply looking to demonstrate that there is consensus that pornography is capable of effect.

Pornography complicates debates about film: if it is all powerful, it is at the expense of other genres (i.e. documentaries, often intended to produce social change, do not produce the kind of social change attributed to pornography), and if it is innocuous, then "we would have to ascribe equal impotence to our most treasured cultural inheritance—including religious texts and pictures" (Kendrick 220). In his book, *The Secret Museum*, Walter Kendrick quotes Richard Nixon's address following the 1970 *Report* by the Commission on Pornography and Obscenity. Nixon said, "if an attitude of permissiveness were to be adopted regarding pornography, this would contribute to an atmosphere of condoning anarchy in every other field—and would increase the threat to our social order as well as to our moral principles" (Kendrick 219).

For a politician, like Nixon, to use anti-pornography rhetoric is typical. What I find unsettling, is the position staked out by Metz vis-à-vis pornography. As we saw in the previous chapter, Metz in "Shark Porn" defines his role as critic according to the following:

> As a film critic, I parse cinematic representations into those that I find dangerous to our well-being (and write articles against them) and those that I find edifying (and write articles promoting them). I see nothing in pornographic films that would make me want to do the latter. (Metz 36-58)

Porn threatens the cinema; porn threatens culture. How can a scholar like Metz, or film scholars more generally, truly give porn a fair shake, if they view it as threatening their object of study (such as Metz's desire to protect the film canon), or their methods of study (such as Champagne's use of pornography to attack close analysis as *the* method in film studies)?

The Porning of America

I will be using Carmine Sarracino and Kevin M. Scott's *The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What It Means, and Where We Go From Here* (2008) as the primary text from my corpus in this chapter because this book, above all others, stands out as "typical, extreme, [and] a particularly articulate expression of a point" (Mason 144). The other main texts that make up the corpus for this chapter are *Pornification: Sex and Sexuality in Media culture* (Paasonen 2007), "Shark Porn: Film Genre, Reception Studies, and Chris Kentis' *Open Water,*" as well as works by Shannon Bell, Andrea Dworkin, Christopher Kendall, Catherine MacKinnon, and Linda Williams.

I would like to take a moment to elaborate on some of my reasons for choosing to feature this book, in particular, for this chapter. For one thing, in their book, *Porning of America,* Sarracino and Scott thoroughly exploit the image of pornography as monster. In addition, their main thesis is that pornography "has now become the dominant influence shaping [American] culture" (9). *Porning of America* also represents the kind of sloppy research often found in the porn studies canon, what Kendrick refers to as the "retardation of pornographic discourse" (*The Secret Museum* 222). Although it doesn't stand out as a shining example of academic

scholarship, it absolutely stands out as the book I might recommend to a casual reader (basically anyone who has asked me why I study pornography), because it would does an excellent job of giving a reader the broad strokes of the porn wars, a persuasive argument for the importance of media literacy, and a summary of America's history with pornography. And it is written in an entertaining tone.

Written by two college English Professors and fathers, *The Porning of America* is less a work of academic scholarship, than a treatise and warning to their daughters, who will, according to their argument, have to become mature sexualized beings in an increasingly "porned" (hypersexualized) world. For example, in the book they advise not wearing thong underwear to high school—"slutwear" according to the authors—if you want to be respected (198, 215). In fact, in the first few pages they make a claim that sets the tone for the entire book, that porn is "*hunting* their daughters" (xi). One cannot escape the feeling that this book was written to ward off superstitious beliefs about the effect that pornography will inevitably have on their daughters (while their sons are mentioned, the fear of these two father-authors seems mostly directed at their female offspring and the "girls" of America in general). The book often confuses sex, sexuality, pornography and what the authors dub the "porning" of American culture and media. The argument is built on the premise that everyone in American culture is sexualized, that sexualization is a bad thing, and that sexualization is coming primarily from pornography.[12]

They focus their study on the United States exclusively, beginning in the 19th century, but mainly concentrate on modern pop culture, advertising and the sexual

[12] For an excellent discussion of the definitions and processes of sexualization and its current negative use in American sexuality discourse see Wouters (2010).

behavior of contemporary teenagers. As an antidote to sexualization and the porning of American culture, they recommend the introduction of sexual education and media literacy in public school curricula and that couples discover "the ancient tradition called tantra" (200). Widespread curriculum reform, though necessary, and changes to cultural attitudes and the actual practices of sex in America are recommendations that fall beyond the abilities of the book to produce or inspire.

They perpetuate a common myth that the violence in horror films can be used to prove violence in pornography. They use horror films, *Hostel* (2005) and *Hostel: Part II* (2007) (wherein tourists are kidnapped and sold into slavery so that they can be tortured and eventually killed in particularly gruesome ways) as examples of what they call violent porn or torture porn (160). I would like to emphasis that these are horror films with no hard core explicit representation of sexuality. Furthermore, for these authors, the simulated dissection of a woman in the horror film *Turista* (2006) is analogous to pornography "with tiny cameras mounted on dildos and inserted deep into vaginas and anuses" (165)—cameras and scalpel are one and the same and the content of horror films is sutured into porn.

The terms violent porn and torture porn are used by these authors in the same way that Metz uses the term shark porn to describe *Open Water.* They are capitalizing on the sensationalism associated with pornography to analyze non-pornographic films. They use these rhetorical devices to increase the dramatic impact of their respective arguments. It seems that circular logic is inevitable when critics use sex to analyze violence and vice versa, and it results in a psychoanalytical trap—is sex a metaphor for violence or is violence a metaphor for sex? Re-hashing

such a tired debate does little to contribute original ideas to academic discourse and less to the enrichment of porn studies.

Furthermore, Sarracino and Scott neglect important work in porn studies, for example, in their one reference to Linda Williams, they write, "Scholars like Laura Kipnis, Lynn S. Chancer, and Linda Williams have approached pornography not as a one-dimensional destructive force, but rather as a collection of the many ways a variety of groups have presented their own sexuality" (181). This is not an accurate description of the work of Williams or Kipnis (I haven't read Chancer). An unacknowledged reference to Carol Clover's infamous "final girl," defined in her book *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992), is found in their torture porn argument, "Viewers of films like *Hostel: Part II* are a savvy audience in that they know the conventions of the genre well, including the likely 'final girl' (the requisite sole survivor of most horror films)" (161). From the description that they provide it is clear that they are familiar with Clover's work on horror films. I find it rather ironic that they would refer to "conventions of the genre" in an argument that misuses horror film conventions to make claims about pornography's generic conventions. They also argue at length about sex, identity, truth and confession without a single reference to Foucault (204).

While Sarracino and Scott state that they are not pro-censorship and that they are pro-sex (a term that is synonymous with sex-positive), they believe that most porn is anti-sex (a term they never explain) (xviii). Their entire argument is predicated on the following presumptions: that pornography is becoming increasingly violent, degrading and misogynistic, that pornography is a threat and

that pornography is harmful. In truth, pornography does not follow a set path (escalation), it is multiplying and diversifying in many directions simultaneously:

> The only difference in the case of pornography is that it faces steady resistance, while these other advances in explicitness win praise for contributing to the enrichment of knowledge. Yet resistance has always been futile; the march of knowledge is evidently stronger. (Kendrick 221)

The next section will examine this "steady resistance" to pornography in porn studies discourse. Specifically, it will examine the anxiety that is revealed by metaphors use to describe pornography.

Pornographic Metaphors

Playful sexual innuendo and puns aside, the metaphors that stand out in porn studies discourse are about monsters, not sex. I am not the first scholar to point out that porn discourse, especially pro-censorship discourse, uses metaphor to make its case (often in the face of lacking evidence). Kendrick, in *The Secret Museum,* summarizes these trends in the 1920s pro-censorship rhetoric, and again in the 1970s:

> The most lifeless features of these latter-day denunciations of pornography is their rhetoric, the extremely limited stock of metaphors they are able to draw on. Metaphors are essential in this realm of discourse, because there seems, and always has seemed, to be no possibility of a literal statement. Comstock, when he turned literal and asked his readers to look around at America's youth dropping in its tracks, obtained no response: if his readers looked, they saw no such

> thing. But when he spoke of poisoned swords piercing tender flesh, or of diabolical parents giving their children scorpions to play with, he could count on arousing powerful emotions. (218)

These "exhausted" metaphors are as present in contemporary porn studies discourse as in the political debates examined by Kendrick nearly twenty-five years ago.

Early in my research, I read a passage that planted an image in my psyche of pornography as a titan roaming across America while the awed populace cowered and submitted to its will. It is a dramatic image, but it is one that recurred in various incarnations in the porn studies texts that are examined in this chapter: "Pornography, as it grows and strides across America over the mid-nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and then dominates American culture at the turn of the new millennium, typically has an essentially Puritan point of view on sexuality and sex" (*Porning* 5). Pornography grows. It strides. It dominates. It is constructed as a person; both powerful and bestowed with longevity bordering on immortality. As I stated early in this chapter, more than any other text I've read, Sarracino and Scott's *Porning of America* portrays pornography with all the tropes of a gothic monster. For instances, they write, "Porn's birth weight had been low, and the runt was pushed into the dark alleys of American life. But there it thrived. By the end of the twentieth century, it had emerged mature and powerful" (*Porning* 9). They go so far as to compare pornography to Frankenstein's monster (itself an exhausted

metaphor for Victorian anxieties about sex, maintained in the proliferation of gothic and horror texts in the 20th century)[13]:

> *Pornography* was thus created, both as a word and as a category of human sexuality. It was in a sense an assemblage, stitched together from disparate parts, a painting here, a fresco there, rather like a certain monster… striking fear across the continent. (Porning xv)

Frankenstein's monster is an interesting choice as it represents "a production that refuses to submit to its author" (Halberstam 12). It is therefore implied that pornography is a deviant, monstrous creation that cannot be controlled (unless it is shunned or "put down," one presumes). The use of the Frankenstein metaphor also establishes a link between anxiety provoked by the Industrial Revolution (the printing press is particular) and today's digital technologies (home entertainment systems, computers, and the Internet).

Sarracino and Scott go even further in the preface of the book when they describe the "dangers to our very humanity by pornography that is based on sexual humiliation and degradation" (Porning xx), and that the phenomenon that they are calling the "porning of America" has left American parents feeling like "porn is *hunting* their daughters" (Porning xi). I would put forth that both the monster and the constructed version of pornography are equally fictitious. Pornography's "danger to humanity" is referenced throughout *Porning of America* as though humanity is somehow a pre-pornographic condition to be protected. The phrase, or variations of it, can also be found in Metz's "Shark Porn" and various works by

[13] See Halberstam (1995).

Dworkin and MacKinnon. It is also the catch phrase of conservative media personalities such as Glenn Beck, host of a nationally syndicated talk radio show and a news show for Fox News Channel.

Kendrick closes *The Secret Museum* with the following description of pornography's monstrous nature:

> 'Pornography' *slithered out* between the bars, polluting streetcorners once again, as if they were its proper dwelling place. Suddenly it was everywhere, in magazines, newspapers, and novels, invading even the sacred confines of the home; the patina of age had been stripped away and replaced by flashy up-to-datedness. *There was no shielding the vulnerable from this monstrous modern brand of filth*, so new strategies were called for… 'pornography' *spread irresistibly*, flourishing in direct proportion to the energy of its combatants. *It seemed, vampirelike*, to batten on their strength, to rise up refreshed from each new campaign to put it down. (238 [*italics mine*])

The point I would like to make about constructing pornography as a monster is that it lends pornography a mythological characteristic from fantasies and nightmares and, presumably, blinds us to any notions that pornography is within our ability to control. Constructing pornography as a person, albeit a monstrous person, implies that pornography has an unconscious (Ray 56), or as Annette Kuhn puts it a "self-image"("Lawless Seeing" 22).

Before we move on to questioning porn's power to affect its audience, we will look at how this effect is described in porn studies. The presumed effect of

pornography on its audience is summarized succinctly by Laura Kipnis in *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America*: "The feminist anti-porn argument is that pornography is a special case, with special powers to cause effects in viewers, that unlike other genres, porn viewers are seized by overwhelming urges to act out what they see on the screen" (156). From what I can tell, monstrosity is what is special about pornography.

Porned/Porning

I have observed a recent trend in porn studies of turning porn into a verb, or to give it a more active form, such as "porned," porning," "pornified," and "pornification." The trend of publishing books describing the phenomenon of "porning" has become, arguably, the most popular sub-genre of porn studies discourse. This trend has also been pointed out by Dutch Sociologist Cas Wouters. In his recent essay, "Sexualization: Have sexualization processes changed direction?," he writes, "sexualization and pornification have become increasingly well-known concepts that usually carry and convey great moral concern and moral indignation. Accordingly, the number of articles and books attacking 'sexualization', and 'pornification' are countless" (724).

These books may not be "flying off the shelves" as quickly as hard core pornography, but they have a strong audience (Ariel Levy's and Pamela Paul's books have both reportedly sold a million copies). This trend includes (but is by no means limited to) the following titles: *The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What It Means, and Where We Go From Here* (2008), *Pornification: Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture* (2007), *Pornified: How Pornography is Transforming our Lives, Our*

Relationships, and Our Families (2005), *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (2006), *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked our Sexuality* (2009), and *Pop-Porn: pornography is American Culture* (2007). The proximity of the publishing dates suggests that we are now witnessing a publishing fad rather than a serious dialogue about the "porning" phenomenon. To be fair, unlike the other titles listed above, *Pornification* stands out as a thoughtful and well-constructed contribution to the discipline of porn studies.

In general terms, these books investigate the manifestations of codes, tropes, and imagery "from" hard core moving pornography that appear in mainstream media, advertising, pop culture, contemporary fashion and sexual behavior. Most argue that pornography is everywhere and this omnipresence is dangerous to (American) social order. At its most basic the phenomenon known as "porning," "pornified," "porned," and/or "pornification" is described as "the increased visibility of hardcore and soft-core [sic] pornographies, and the blurring of boundaries between the pornographic and the mainstream" (*Pornification* 8). In the co-authored introduction to *Pornification,* "Pornification and the Education of Desire," Susanna Paasonen, Kaarine Nikunen, and Laura Saarenmaa, Finns whose research was undertaken and is published in the United States, expand on the meaning of "pornification" as follows:

> While such probing is not a novel issue, the boundaries separating the pornographic from the non-pornographic have become increasingly porous and difficult to map. Women's open, moist and lipstick—red lips, half-closed eyelids or hands suggestively placed on a bare bosom or

> stomach are staple elements in pornography, but also in music videos, cosmetic ads and fashion photography… As a set of styles, scenarios and conventions, the pornographic cuts across media culture. (1)

"Pornographic" in this passage is not related to "maximum visibility" (the distinct visual aesthetic of hard core pornography that includes meat and money shots, for example) (Williams), or explicit sexual activity but to contemporary visual codes and tropes for representing sexuality in our culture. I find it necessary to point out that the pornographic elements that they describe above are not it any way specific to pornography. These elements are not necessarily generated from porn—porn is not always the source of "sexy" (in fact, pornography is often maddeningly un-sexy!).

The phenomenon they describe is similar to Sarracino and Scott's construction, but Paasonen, Nikunen and Saarenmaa are much more systematic and less inflammatory when making their arguments. Sarracino and Scott's definition of porning is quite neutral (patriotism aside):

> Porn increasingly dominates American life in 2008, shaping our entertainments, influencing the way we dress and talk, the way we see one another, and the way we behave sexually. If we want to know who we are now—as individuals and as a nation—we must recognize and come to understand the phenomenon that we call the porning of America. (*Porning* 9)

Like all of the books listed in this section, Sarracino and Scott discuss the erosion of family values, social morality, the breakdown of intimate relationships between

loving consenting adults as "measurable" effects of the "porning" phenomenon. These are rather predictable (right-wing, conservative) reactions to the increased availability of pornography. However, Sarracino and Scott stretch their "porning" argument so far that it is used to explain the physical, sexual and emotional torture performed and photographed by U.S. soldiers on prisoners at Abu Ghraib that became public in 2004 (*Porning* 137-167).

Deep within *The Porning of America,* in the chapter that traces the relationship between pornography and the now infamous torture photos of Abu Ghraib they write, "Porn was not the cause of abuse but rather the language of abuse at Abu Ghraib—a language in which these young soldiers were fluent" (*Porning* 144), but after so many references to porn as monster and as the dominant influence acting on both sexual and violent behavior, this one sentence gets lost. Especially since the main point they are making is that "The abuse and torture at Abu Ghraib alert us to the dangers posed to our very humanity by pornography that is based on sexual humiliation and degradation." (*Porning* xx) The cause and effect relationship they are describing is impossible to prove; it is an emotional, rather than a logical claim: "The visual images, carefully posed and even staged with some complexity, turned a crime into porn." (145) They claim that the soldiers/abusers "created an ongoing violent porn movie, or a series of such movies." (145) Yet, as we saw in the previous section they resort to analyzing violent horror films to connect violence, pornography and Abu Ghraib. In other words, it is very unclear exactly what the source of the "porning" effect actually is because they shift the "blame" for violent pornography from producers to consumers, to pop culture, to advertising, or

to violent horror films so many times it made my head spin. I would like to point out that the abuse at Abu Ghraib was documented using a still camera, not a video camera. When Sarracino and Scott refer to an "ongoing violent porn movie" they are referring the actual experience of life at Abu Ghraib and not film or video footage of the torture and abuse. In any case, it seems to me that turning on a camera and participating in systematic sexual abuse, even if it mimics film conventions, does not constitute making a movie. There is a world of difference between consensual BDSM role-playing pornography and the actual non-consensual torture, abuse and humiliation of victims, even when the latter is filmed.

In all cases, terms like "porned," "porning," etc. are used to describe porn acting on culture as though pornography was a force without human authorship (or origins), stronger than the people it is presumed to be acting upon. [14] The way that these books frame pornography as the aggressor and society as the victim is reminiscent of second wave feminist discourse that cast women as victims so influenced by the patriarchal culture in which they reside that they are unable to consent to sex with men (Dworkin *Intercourse* 122-142).

One of the most baffling features of the "porning" trend book is their "porned" covers[15] (See figures 1-4, next page).

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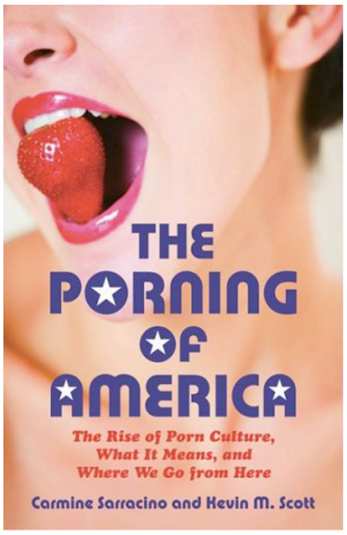
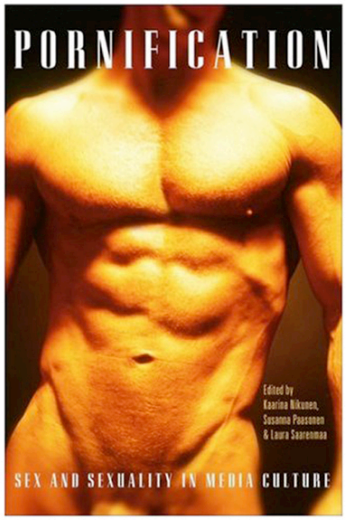
[14] For a detailed analysis of the (exaggerated) effect pornography is presumed to have on its audience see Albert C. Gunther's "Overrating the X-Rating: The Third-Person Perception and Support for Censorship of Pornography" (1995).

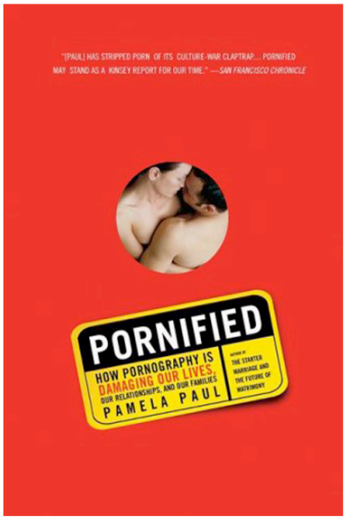
[15] Figures 1-4 (on the next page) are cited with permission of the publisher wherever possible. Every effort has been made to acquire permission to reprint these images as cited evidence for my arguments. Rights-holders who did not respond to my queries or whom I was not able to locate are invited to contact the author in order to rectify the situation.



1: Cover of *The Porning of America* (Sarracino and Scott 2008)



2: Cover of *Pornification* (Paasonen, Nikunen, and Saarenmaa 2007)



3: Cover of *Pornified* (Paul 2005)

4: Cover of *Pornland* (Dines 2010)

It is immediately apparent that the publishers of *Pornification*, *The Porning of America*, *Pornified* and *Pornland* (as well as of *At Home with Pornography* [not illustrated]) have chosen images that are by their own definitions "porned:" this is strange because it perpetuates the very thing they are denouncing (in all cases except *Pornification*, which is a much more objective or neutral analysis of the phenomenon even while it capitalizes on a dramatic title and cover). This discourse, therefore, is produced within and is a reproduction of the very phenomenon that they are describing, and warning us about. A kind descriptor for these covers is ironic, but considering the dramatic moralizing found between these covers, I find them hypocritical—they denounce "pornification" while using it to promote their books.

Pornification Without the Drama

Only in a few instances have I encountered a porn studies scholar writing about the so-called "porning" effect that isn't about fear. The first is Williams' discussion of "on/scene" in the introduction to *Porn Studies*. William's statement is that pornography is "an increasingly on/scene cultural form that impinges on the lives of a wide variety of Americans and that matters in the evaluation of who we are as a culture" (*Porn Studies* 5). Obviously there is a sensational rhetorical quality to terms like "porning" and "porning" that is not shared by "on/scenity." There is also Jane Juffer's 1998 *At Home With Pornography: Women, Sex, and Everyday Life*, a book that frames the so-called "porning" effect as the domestication of pornography and in doing so, "shifts the emphasis away from pornography as a discourse of either universal power or individual appropriation" (8).

Furthermore, Williams and Jane Juffer note the subversive (and positive!) power of pornography to bring marginalized others on/scene (*Porn Studies*, *At Home With Pornography*). This belief is echoed in Shannon Bell's "Pictures don't lie," wherein she describes the subversion and liberatory potential of "porning." According to Bell, pornography allows the invisible other to:

> produce images of their sexualities, or as an act of guerrilla warfare deconstruct the codes of the dominant pornography genre, and in so doing upset the sexism often present in mainstream sexual imagery. This politics of subversion is the intent of the transgressive acts in the final section of this article. (292)

Finally, Capino also describes the "porning" effect as the relationship among pornography, sexuality and sex in terms of their mutuality:

> Sex became saturated in the logic of cinema, giving rise to the heightened specularization of sex, to sex that fed off the immense vocabulary of pleasures and fantasies in the cinema, to sex with the sounds and images of cinema, and to sex through the cinema's apparatus of fugitive identifications and synesthetic mechanisms. To view or perform cinematic sex—whether at home on the couch, in bed, or through a computer monitor—is to engage the pornographic text or supertext in a manner first implanted in moviegoers when cinema became the apparatus par excellence for purveying pornography and, in turn, insinuated itself into the practice of sexuality. (64)

As we can see, critics on both sides are equally invested in pornography's ability to affect, and this effect has to do with the mainstreaming of pornography in recent decades. Pro-censorship and anti-censorship scholars arguably and ostensibly seek the same goal: systemic equality, and sexual tolerance[16]. One side argues that social problems, such as inequality, discrimination, rape and abuse, originate or at the very least are propagated by porn (whose influence is measured above all other possible influences). The other side argues that porn's liberating potential will free us from inequality and sexual repression and oppression and, thereby, bring about systemic equality. Whereas we see in this chapter that power and fear are dominant in the discourse about pornography's "threat to humanity" (*Porning)*, in the next chapter the liberating potential of pornography, the features that are singled out as positive, powerful, and cause for celebration, tend to coalesce around discussions of truth and pleasure.

On Harm: Pro-Censorship and Pornography

We have already noted the anxiety about pornography's potential to contaminate and use of monstrous metaphors in meta-pornographic discourse. Let us now trace this concept in porn studies discourse back to its most infamous progenitors, Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, who have based their work on the unquestioned assumption that porn can do something bad to you. I have selected the works of MacKinnon, Dworkin and their Canadian protégé, Christopher N. Kendall, to discuss the pro-censorship position on pornography because they are

[16] This statement reflects the discourse discussed in this thesis. To be clear, there are anti-pornography and pro-censorship advocates who do not accept sexual diversity and, in some cases, not even gender equality.

well-known for their position(s) and have had an influence on pornography jurisprudence in Canada.

I would like to note that the original publication dates for MacKinnon and Dworkin's work fall before my proscribed limit of 1989; however, their work continues to be referenced in most, if not all, porn studies scholarship and is heavily represented (they have seven articles between them) in the 2000 anthology, *Feminism and Pornography*, produced for the Oxford "Readings in Feminism" series.[17] Further, I refer to their writings for context, more than as contributions to my corpus.

Catherine MacKinnon, a legal scholar, is a Professor of Law at the University of Michigan, and is also a long-term Visiting Professor of Law at Harvard. Andrea Dworkin (1946—2005) was a radical feminist and author. MacKinnon and Dworkin were vital activists in the "feminist porn wars" of the late 1970s and early 1980s and have made important contributions to porn studies discourse. Unlike other anti-pornography or pro-censorship advocates who criticize pornography for moral and/or ethical reasons (U.S obscenity laws, for example, are applied according to "community standards" of decency and modesty), MacKinnon and Dworkin position pornography as sex discrimination. In other words, they frame pornography as a human rights issue rather than a free speech issue. In the mid-eighties, MacKinnon and Dworkin drafted an "Antipornography Civil Rights Ordinance," a document

[17] I have largely neglected the essays contained in *Feminism and Pornography* when selecting my corpus because so few of the entries actually examine moving image pornography-most are writing about pornography as an "issue". Also, the glaring absence of sex positive scholars—Williams or Kipnis, for example—reduces the relevance of this anthology, in my estimation.

meant to put into law that pornography is harmful to women. "The Ordinance" would allow women to seek damages as victims of pornography (thereby, harm to porngraphy's victims would be actionable under U.S. civil laws). In these terms, pornography is not defined as a speech act, but as actions (MacKinnon "Only Words").

The Canadian Supreme Court decision *R v. Butler* (1992), or the *Butler* Decision (as it is known), is heavily based on the MacKinnon/Dworkin co-authored "Ordinance" and was therefore successful in institutionalizing pornography as a form of sex discrimination. Unfortunately, as we will see in an upcoming section, the *Butler* decision is enforced selectively and has resulted in discrimination and prosecution (persecution?) of sexual minorities (Bell, et al., Lacombe (1994)).

Christopher N. Kendall is a Canadian scholar who is a Professor of Law at Murdoch University in Australia. He was part of the legal team in the 2000 case of *Little Sisters Book and Art Emporium*—the Supreme Court case that allowed the standards outlined in the *Butler* decision to be applied to same-sex pornography (Kendall xi). Kendall has adapted the pro-censorship position of radical feminism (women are the victims of pornography) and applied it to all-male pornography (gay men are the victims of pornography) (Kendall *Gay Male Pornography)*.

The broad strokes of Dworkin, Kendall and MacKinnon's pro-censorship argument are that pornography needs to be regulated (censored) because pornography is harmful. The harmful effects of pornography are evidenced by exploitation, desensitization, addiction (to pornography, but also linked to drug abuse), general moral and social degradation, sexual inequality and degradation,

youth sex, sexualization, promiscuous sexual behavior, deviant behavior, sexual and social dysfunction (Dworkin, Kendall, MacKinnon, Sarracino et al, etc.). Harm occurs both at the level of production and consumption. Poor working conditions, abuse of sex workers, coercion, and the portrait of sex workers as victims of sexual abuse, drugs and/or violence is constructed as harm during production (Dworkin, Kendall, MacKinnon). While at the level of consumption, pornography is said to reinforce sexual inequality and discrimination by eroticizing "violence, humiliation and a sexuality expressed in terms of men" (Dworkin *Men Possessing Women).* Therefore, pornography is held responsible for promoting the incidence of rape and sexual harassment. Never mind that most statistics show that rates of rape have actually declined as the production and consumption of porngraphy has increased (Kipnis, *The Female Thing* 136), demonstrating, if anything, either that there is an inverse relationship between pornography and rape *or* that pornography is not the presumed dominant force when it comes to social behavior. Furthermore, according to Dworkin, what happens to performers in pornography directly impacts all women: "The fact that pornography is widely believed to be 'sexual representations' or 'depictions of sex' emphasizes only that the sexuality of women is perceived as low and whorish in and of itself" (*Pornography: Men Possessing Women* 201).

There is often an emphasis in pro-censorship discourse on the working conditions of performers in pornography (especially women) to prove that pornography causes harm. For example, *Blazing Grace*, a Christian anti-pornography web site features "true confessions" of ex-porn stars professing histories of childhood abuse, mistreatment on set, drug addiction, vomit inducing

anxiety and suicide (Lubben). MacKinnon and Dworkin helped promote and support Linda Boreman (aka "Linda Lovelace," star of *Deep Throat* (1972)) when she came out with the story of the abuse and coercion she experienced from her then husband, Chuck Traynor (production manager for *Deep Throat*), during the filming of *Deep Throat* (*Inside Deep Throat* (2005)).

In contrast, Candida Royalle, Annie Sprinkle, and Jessie Jane, all very well-known sex-workers (collectively involved in every aspect of pornography), are vocal about the positive influence that working in porn has had in their life, not to mention their agency and autonomy over the career choices they make (respectively "Porn in the USA", "My Performances in Retrospect" and "Porn: Business of Pleasure).

Bonnie Sherr Klein's 1981 film, *Not a Love Story*, is a striking example of pro-censorship (mis)representation of sex workers. While the film technically falls outside of my 1989 limit, as an important Canadian documentary that clearly demonstrates the role shame and peer pressure play (more effective that any "pornification," I would argue) in pro-censorship discourse, I felt compelled to include it.

Not a Love Story

In the introductory scene, Klein explains that she made the film, *Not a Love Story*, because of a "need to understand what goes on behind those doors and how it *affects* [*emphasis mine*] my life". Klein's version of going "behind those doors" means looking at the production of pornography, by focusing on women who are employed as sex workers. Her interviews consist of several sex workers confessing

that their work makes them feel degraded. She juxtaposes these with interviews with educated middle class anti-porn feminists. Her methodology raises class issues that she neglects to properly contextualize in her film. She sees the sex worker as a victim of circumstance who has been forced to choose between stripping, having sex on film, and prostitution. Her "main character" (and I argue that the performativity of Lindalee Tracey[18] makes her a character rather than a subject) is a stripper who speaks intelligently and eloquently, who has considered carefully her "role" as a stripper, and treats it as performance art in the tradition of Annie Sprinkle's "post porn modernist" shows. Her act consists of a deconstruction of the striptease and relies on humor. Tracey is the perfect sex worker "spokesperson" for a film that aimed (and succeeded) to mobilize the middle class against pornography. She is a woman who can enjoy class mobility due to her education (or the appearance of an education). She easily fits into Klein's world in a way that the grammatically challenged peep show worker also featured could not.

Tracey, at her first onscreen appearance, believes that it is condescending to view female sex workers as victims, and that blaming men is wrong. She believes that the sex club is "a very honest arena" (*Not a Love Story*). In other words, her beliefs are diametrically opposed to Klein's. However, after spending time with Klein, witnessing her aggressive attack on pornography and being exposed to a rather limited sample of "extreme" pornography that Klein uses to argue that pornography is essentially misogynist, she is miraculously "converted." Tracey's conversion occurs in stages (a very effective narrative device); for example, after

[18] Lindalee Tracey is billed as Linda Lee Tracey in *Not a Love Story.*

viewing "extreme" pornography she states, "It's getting to me on an emotional level, a human level… I feel like I have to make justifications… I'm confused, but I still have my foot in the money barrel, in saying that this is how I make my bread and I know that what I do is decent for myself." What we are witnessing is the indoctrination of Tracey, however the participants in this film would be more likely view their influence on Tracey as a deprogramming.

The final coup is a group scene near the end of the film, full of testimonies and tears, when the women (feminists, artists and other interested parties) discuss their own feelings about pornography and the men in their lives. This type of bonding is typical of any group trying to secure new members. The scene contains choice lines like "Man hater that I am, I love men too much" and "Should any population of women be assigned… all the really creepy sexuality of johns?" Their concern for these (lower class) women is rather ironic since they are looking to replace the johns by assigning their version of sexuality to every one.

Juxtaposed with this "circle jerk" are images of Tracey posing nude for *Hustler* photographer Suze Randall. Throughout the film we see Tracey performing to whichever audience gives her a reward (be it money, or acceptance to a community). I stress, Tracey is a performer; she will stand on a soapbox in front of strip bar and scream and argue with the passers by, she dances naked while playing coy yet solicitous of her male clients. So, are we viewers to believe that her sudden meekness while being photographed is anything but catering to the desires of her new audience—the off screen group of feminists led by Klein. You can hear them laughing at her comical expression of disgust and disbelief that she will be touched

up with pussy juice and posed for the photo. If, as she claims, she felt like an object while being photographed, I believe it has more to do with the scorn of her new peers than with sitting naked with legs spread for a camera. I believe that the notes that she reads on the beach at the end of the film confirm these suppositions, "I felt especially that you [Klein] and Yves were watching… it gave me an embarrassing sick feeling." It is not sex or nudity or the camera or the artist that has the power to turn a subject into an object, but shame, whose source is the pro-censorship feminists composing this film. Tracey has been enveloped by the ideals of a woman, Klein, who believes that "The research for this film had exposed me to so much of *the worst of human existence*" (*Not a Love Story* [*emphasis mine*]). These are strong words considering the world of bad that exists beyond the boundaries of pornography.

As a solution to the porn problem, the film posits a need to cleanse culture of pornographic images, including proactively posed women in advertisements: "We have to reject the pornographic image of ourselves. We have been obliged by society to impersonate what society thinks a woman is." Their cure is to become a kind of gender/sex police that will judge women on the correctness (naturalness?) of their performance, and teach them the error of their ways. The strategy is effectively deployed in their conversion of Tracey. While the film fails to effectively demonstrate in concrete (or any) terms the claim that porn leads to violence against women, it does effectively demonstrate the mechanics of peer pressure. Unfortunately, rather than exploring this useful concept as a tool for reforming pornography, they are too busy enacting the process.

Klein herself says early in the film that when she met Tracey she "admired her comfort about her sexuality." Yet, she goes on an aggressive campaign to teach her shame. Tracey has since stated that she felt that the film misrepresented her and that she felt empowered during her career as a stripper (*Growing Up Naked: My Years in Bump and Grind* (1997)). Tracey's "conversion" is the result of aggressive gender policing and criticism on the part of Klein, and should not be read as the happy conclusion of a woman's journey to be liberated from the sex trade. In other words, the real danger or harm that is demonstrated in *Not a Love Story* is the damaging effect of imposing one's beliefs about sexuality as "the truth" for others.

On Harm: What Do Porn Laws Actually Do?

What does the oft-advocated solution of porn laws actually accomplish? Despite increasing legal hindrances to porn in the U.S. since the 1970s, porn laws are not very effective at restricting pornography. In 2006 there were 1.6 million adult-entertainment web sites available on the Internet (Nathan), and the estimated annual revenue of the porn industry in the United States is between "10 and 14 billion dollars" (Williams, *Porn Studies* 2). When it comes to pornography, seek and you shall find! Shannon Bell is an associate professor in the York University Political Science Department. She is a performance philosopher and "fast feminist," co-author of *Bad Attitude/s on Trial* (1997). In her chapter, "Pictures don't lie," Bell demonstrates how the *Butler* decision has been enforced to the detriment of specific groups and communities—homosexuals, BDSM, and youth sexualities. She systematically reveals the problems with MacKinnon's argument, and highlights the

connection between porn and story telling in mainstream media, and the political arena:

> The official, the straight, police/media story of the 'Child' Porn Panic in London and Toronto, Ontario, is juxtaposed with the narratives, the truths, of those talked about—the alleged sexual deviants, the alleged victims, pornographers, perverts, hustlers, and johns. (285 – 286)

The application of Canada's obscenity laws—specifically the *Butler* decision precedent—demonstrates for Bell the dangers when pornography is judged according to its normativity: "the emphasis shifts from the obscene (sexually explicit) to the abnormal (perversion): the sexualities attracting the law's attention are gay and lesbian, sadomasochistic and youth sexuality" (286). Bell has not only eloquently identified the dangers of pro-censorship rhetoric that constructs victims in need of protection, but she is also able to prove in this essay that a law meant to protect Canadians, is, in fact, causing them harm.

Conclusion

As I was writing my thesis proposal in the spring of 2009 the CBC radio announcers were often reporting about the anticipated Swine Flu (later dubbed H1N1 to appease pork distribution); so much of the reporting was speculation about the impact this disease was going to have on Canada and the globe in the coming year. There was a clear narrative arc that read: several cases of swine flu reported in Mexico, will move into the US and Canada (and globally), many will die, we don't have the resources to cope, don't *panic*. I feel that porn discourse traces a similar arc

about pornography and its impact on the citizens of the world if they are exposed. In other words, these arguments are speculative rather than concrete.

Much of the porn studies criticism presented in this chapter postulates a story that is accepted as the "truth" about porn: increased violence, degrading product, porn is contagious and devolving. Bell cuts straight through this moral panic when she explains, " 'Degrading,' 'obscene,' 'dehumanizing' are empty categories that get filled with the content of homophobia, whorephobia, ageism, sadomasophobia, transgenderphobia, and fear of difference" (308).

The strong visceral reaction people experience watching pornography exaggerates the impression of impact, of power. Therefore, porn becomes the cause, the origin of evils and not simply a cultural production—a text operating within cultural systems—but one that acts upon them. But with pornography, no source power is ever identified; it is not the market demanding it/consuming it, nor is it the producers/actors/directors. Pornography itself has been constructed into a mythical beast without a head. Pornography, as the confused category for sex/porn/not-porn, has come to embody concupiscence in all of its meanings.

The story about pornography that is found in the porn studies discourse that I presented in this chapter is an excellent story; it is compelling, dramatic, sexy, scary, and hard to replace: "The value of sex as a commodity, of speaking it as a fetish, is dependant on the maintenance of its status as a taboo" (Williams). However, it is a story that cannot withstand careful scrutiny. Who is the "powerful group" that controls pornography (the public discourse)? The pornographers? The consumer of pornography? Where does the scholarly discourse put the control? Has

it become pornography itself? These were the questions that reading porn studies discourse produced, yet my readings did not produce satisfying answers. These are important questions, that will have to remain, for now, rhetorical.

Chapter Three: Porn Studies is a Story About Truth and Pleasure

> *Through it, we experience ourselves as real people; it gives us our identities, our sense of self, as men and women, as heterosexual and homosexual, "normal" or "abnormal," "natural" or "unnatural." Sex has become, as the French philosopher Michel Foucault famously put it, "the truth of our being."*
>
> ~ Jeffrey Weeks

> *It is as if [film studies] itself has fallen victim to the very "fiction" it once imputed to the camera—the desire to gaze on the real.*
>
> ~ John Champagne

In the last chapter we looked at porn studies criticism selling a popular myth about porn, a story about pornography as an [d]evolving or escalating entity that is following a set path of increasing violence and degradation and the resulting erosion of social morality. In this chapter, we will look at a different story that porn studies critics are telling about pornography—one that projects a narrative arc onto our social and sexual development because of the liberating potential of pornography. One side argues that these social problems originate or at the very least are propagated by porn (whose influence is measured above all other possible influences); the other side argues that porn's liberating potential will free us from inequality and sexual repression and oppression and, thereby, bring about systemic

equality.[19] The features that are singled out in pornography as positive, powerful, and cause for celebration, tend to coalesce around discussions of truth and pleasure. Truth and pleasure are the yardsticks by which the "authenticity" of a moving image pornographic text is measured. I have privileged the term "authenticity" in this chapter because of personal preference, but "natural," "real," "realism," and "truth" are terms also found in the source material of this chapter and will surface frequently, often used interchangeably with "authentic" and "authenticity."

The discussion of the authenticity of pornography is not restricted to texts that label themselves as authentic, but to a wide variety of films. Even a journalistic focus on the most "hard to believe porn" (*CNBC Special – Porn: Business of Pleasure* (2009)) can be a site for critical discussion of authenticity. Authenticity is frequently invoked in porn discourse to make value judgments about pornography. Authenticity is produced, porn studies criticism tells us, by textual evidence: pro-filmic data with a wide range of verifiability such as eye contact, consent, (mutual) respect, (mutual) pleasure, orgasm, sound, sexual choreography that makes narrative sense within a given sex scene, and the especially vague category of sincerity (Mckee "Aesthetics of Pornography"). Authenticity is also produced by extra-textual elements such as space (virtual or actual), community (again, virtual or actual) and authorial intention.

[19] The entire discipline of porn studies is not restricted to this binary. There also exists substantive porn studies discourse that treats pornography as benign and leaves aside speculation about pornography and social change.

Why Authenticity?

Why single out authenticity when writing about pornography? First of all, I have a bias that predisposes me to be attracted to discussions of authenticity because my regular yoga practice focuses on authentic movement. Secondly, as a sex-positive feminist, I believe that sex, sexuality and the pursuit of authentic sexual pleasure are important (and empowering). I have integrated these corporeal and philosophic practices into the pursuit of authentic (sexual) experiences in my daily life. Additionally, my recent experience as a stay-at-home mother and housewife during a three-year break from my graduate studies resulted in a burning desire to authenticate my existence (de Beauvoir) as I resumed my scholarly pursuits.

It is said that film "is not a window onto the world" (Columpar 26), and it follows that moving image pornography is not a window onto sex. Yet, overwhelmingly critics seek their community, their sexual practices, or evidence of authentic pleasure in hard core pornography. When I first began my research and thought about the qualities of hard core moving image pornography, authenticity did not immediately spring to mind except in relation to discourse about female orgasms (*Hard Core*, *The Female Thing*). Pornography is perhaps the most obvious platform on which to build a discourse about sex in a culture that, largely, keeps sex private even while sexuality and reproductive rights issues are continually in the media and make up a large section of political discourse—especially in the United States (Wouters). As John Cameron Mitchell, director of the exceptionally explicit indie feature *Shortbus* (2006), put it: "Pornography is the only American example of sex on film" (*Gifted and Challenged: The Making of 'Shortbus').* In the words of

Foucault, "What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the* secret" (35). When Williams "founded" porn studies with *Hard Core* in 1989, she used Foucault's writing to establish pornography as a "problem of truth" (56). At the risk of oversimplifying things, pornography stands in (albeit dubiously) as the truth about sex.

Before we move on to examining the corpus, I would put forward that it is difficult for our culture to separate pornography from sex, the sexual from "the personal," and sex from truth. Alfred Kinsey, who founded the Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University, was a founding contributor to the field of sexology. Kinsey's research framed sex and sexuality in terms of the truth of sex and sexuality, and cataloguing sex acts (Weeks). Pro-censorship feminists, such as Dworkin and MacKinnon, also tend to invoke the idea of natural (or true) sex, as if it was a condition to be discovered, presumably, once pornography and misogyny are stripped away. Recent developments in sexuality studies tend to dismiss the idea of the "natural" when it comes to sex and sexuality. For example, both Foucault and Jeffrey Weeks describe sexuality and sex as a social construct—there is no natural for sex (*The History of Sexuality*, *Sexuality*).

Authenticity and Film Studies

The use of the term authenticity is often used intuitively (by which I mean the word is commonly used without any need for definition), encompassing literal, existential, and phenomenological meanings. Authenticity is often used in moving image pornography discourse in philosophical ways that tread into

phenomenological and existential arenas, however the authors rarely explicitly refer to these connections. However, the authenticity of film in general, of the cinematic text, is not naively embraced in film studies discourse.

According to Shaviro, the power of the cinema stems from its literalness, its ability to confront us with images that engage both our eyes and our bodies. However, this power is undermined by the nature of the cinematic image whose "reality effect" is composed of nothing more than flickering lights:

> We respond viscerally to visual forms, before having the leisure to read or interpret them as symbols. On the other hand, this literalness is empty and entirely ungrounded; it does not correspond to any sort of presence. Nothing is there except the image (Shaviro 24.5).

This "postmodern ability" of the cinema to represent all and nothing at the same moment, to take an event that occurred in one place and project it displaced in a multitude of new environments, implies a separation or distance between represented and representation. But, I would argue, that this lack of correspondence between image and original filmed event is difficult for all but the most sophisticated analyst to maintain when the filmed event is sex. We saw in the last chapter how pro-censorship feminists have convinced legal institutions and governments that the production and consumption of explicit hard core pornography harms women (Kendall, Dworkin, MacKinnon), thereby collapsing the distinction between pornography and reality and resulting in the so-called "porning" phenomenon. Porn studies discourse that concentrates on the porning phenomenon argues that "we" mirror porn, that behavior that originates in

pornography is (helplessly) mimicked by society. In contrast, the porn studies discourse in this chapter presents porn as the reflection in the mirror, as an image of society.

Authenticity and Porn Studies

In *Hard Core*, Williams describes the root of cinema in terms of truth/authenticity:

> the very impetus for the invention of cinema was precisely that it seemed able to register the previously invisible hardcore 'truth' of bodies and pleasures in a direct and unmediated fashion… As a result, what began as the scientific impulse to record the 'truth' of the body quickly became a powerful fantasy that drove cinema's first rudimentary achievements of narrative diegesis and mise-en-scene. (*Hard Core* 30, 41)

However, it is important to note, she remains skeptical of cinema's ability to produce the truth of bodies, of sex. At the very heart of porn studies is the question of the nature of pornography: at what point does sex cease to be a performance (as it is understood in simulated sex scenes in mainstream cinema) and become the sex act (a name that continues to invoke the performative nature of all sex)? By this I mean that moving image pornography is understood to show "real" sex acts. Already, we see that I am falling into a semantic trap trying to distinguish the truth or "realness" of sex versus its cinematic representations in hard core or mainstream cinema. In reality, while we may intuitively know the difference, these "differences" are difficult to tease out in discourse. For example, Williams defines pornography as

"the visual (and sometimes aural) representation of living, moving bodies engaged in explicit, usually unfaked, sexual acts with a primary attempt of arousing viewers" (*Hard Core* 30). Yet, so much of porn's pleasure is "faked" (as in artificially positioned, poorly acted, entirely absent, unconvincing or otherwise inauthentic). When Williams uses the term "unfaked," she is speaking almost exclusively of bodily motion: the anatomical "proof" of sex involving genital response and/or penetration.

The proof of sex in commercial heteroporn that relies on what Williams has dubbed "maximum visibility" is often counter-productive to producing authenticity—if only because of awkward placement of lights and lenses near the genitals. The "maximum visibility," of unsimulated sex in hard core moving image pornography is taken for the truth of sex because "seeing is believing." The discourse I will be privileging in this chapter looks past genital bodily motion to find other truths in moving image pornography.

In *Screening Sex*, Williams writes "that sex scenes… derive from authentic feeling" (267). She is writing about *The Idiots* (Von Trier 1998), but this sentence captures my own complaint about most moving image pornography, especially commercial heteroporn. The sexual numbers in moving image pornography, especially commercial heteroporn, do not seem to derive from authentic feeling—the moaning doesn't necessarily correspond to pleasurable touches, sexual positions are changed randomly, the actresses are moaning as if they are at the height of pleasure, only to be interrupted by a position change, or a change in sexual activity.

I find it alienating. Without authenticity, hard core moving image pornography can seem more simulated than the implied sex in a mainstream film.

Because the sex is "really" happening (or it really did happen), it is difficult to approach pornography as a representation. In Eugenie Brinkema's, "A Title Does Not Lie," I found a possible reason for all the truth-seeking. According to Brinkema, pornography blurs the lines between representation and reality (98). Furthermore, the aesthetic of "maximum visibility" in mainstream pornography—used to prove that the sex is really happening—moves beyond prurience and has become an acrobatic curiosity that offers a non-erotic peephole for sex acts. Have we not all heard the common complaint about the "fakeness" of most pornography? Haven't most of us uttered this complaint? Despite the fake quality of much of mainstream pornography, Brinkema, paraphrasing the work of Joan Hawkins in *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde,* makes the following claim about our difficulty in separating pornography as a construction of codes (a representation) and sex: "pornography routinely breaks taboos, depicts sex (often and—or with—violence), positions itself as shocking, and blurs lines between life and art, the real and representation" (98).

I mentioned earlier that discourse about female orgasm(s) was the first site where I expected to find authenticity in porn studies discourse because a common criticism of pornography is that it fails to represent female pleasure. Williams writes:

> But seeing everything—especially seeing the truth of sex—proves a more difficult project than one might think, especially in the case of women's

> bodies, whose truths are most at stake. For whereas the women in Diderot's fable could satisfy male curiosity be recounting their adventures in a "loud and clear voice" through their genital-jewels, the visual terms of the cinema do not allow the female protagonists of hard-core films to authenticate their pleasure. (*Hard Core* 32)

This remains true for much of commercial heteroporn, but I'm so pleased to be researching pornography twenty years later when there is pornography available that "authenticates" women's pleasure. Twenty years ago there was not the proliferation of altenative sex-postive pornography that is available today. There are growing sub-genres of pornography that eroticize "intersubjectivity, mutuality, and equality" (Cameron 795), and there is a growing discourse about pornography that is sex-positive, gender-inclusive, sexuality-inclusive, respectful and tolerant. *I Feel Myself* (*IFM*), for example, is a web site dedicated to producing moving image pornography that captures authentic female orgasms.

Sarracino and Scott use criteria that imply authenticity as a way of recognizing what they call pro-sex porn (for them, this means women's porn and amateur porn, though they fail to offer any specific examples) (xviii). Sarracino and Scott identify as pro-sex and they are succinct about how this affects the way that they examine pornography:

> Typically, in true amateur porn, the sex partners, who are not paid, engage in passionate, playful, personalized sex: they seem to know and like each other and to want to please each other sexually… Often, the sex partners look into each other's eyes, as almost never happens in

> professional porn, sometimes grin and giggle. For all the lust, in other words, there is also affection and an evident desire to please the partner. (*Porning* xix)

In other words, what Sarracino and Scott interpret as the truth of pleasure in pornography, of authentic sexual expression, leads them to conclude that an amateur pornographic text is better than commercial heteroporn. Amateur pornography is often described as more authentic than commercial pornography. For example, we find Sarracino and Scott's assessment of women's and amateur porn discussed in a previous section: "pleasure is represented as authentic through a mutually communicative experience" (187).

Nguyen Tan Hoang's "The Resurrection of Brandon Lee: The Making of a Gay Asian American Porn Star" emphasizes the role of sound and soundtracks in conveying authenticity in porn: "The porn soundtrack offers evidence of authentic sexual pleasure, provides proof of the final delivery of satisfaction, and adds realism by fleshing out the visual performance" (234). Heather Butler's "What Do You Call a Lesbian with Long Fingers? The Development of Lesbian and Dyke Pornography" also argues that the amateur quality of *San Francisco Lesbians, Volume 7*—as evidenced by the vulnerability, unprofessional behavior, giggling, and awkward moments caught on camera, such as acknowledging the camera—invests the films with a kind of ethnographic or documentary quality that lends authenticity (188). Authenticity is a key term in evaluating moving image pornography.

Furthermore, the truth of sexuality or personal biography is used to "authenticate" readings of critics who feel a sense of belonging to the class, ethnicity,

community, gender or sexuality portrayed in a film or groups of films. As I mentioned in my first chapter, Kendall, Sarracino and Scott, and Williams all state their sexuality as a limit to the types of pornography that they choose to study. In other words, sexuality becomes a factor in assessing one's ability to produce quality criticism about pornography. One's sexuality, certainly, plays a role in how we might approach a text, but to use sexuality as a limit is unnecessarily, well, limiting. Sexuality and biography can also be used effectively when scholars engage with pornographic texts. Thomas Waugh, for example, uses his sexuality in "Homosociality in the Classical American Stag Film: Off-Screen, On-Screen" to add socio-cultural context and enhance his analysis of the reception stag films in public screenings by complicating assumptions about viewing positions. Secondly, for Constance Penley, growing up "white trash" provides a theoretical formation and conceptual framework to analyze "porn's predilection for white trash looks and tastes" (309).

Gaze theory and reception studies have made it clear that identification with texts is not entirely straightforward. As Capino puts it, "by identifying with and enacting different sexual identities, roles, fantasies in the theater and in their sex lives, spectators rehearse internally and externally the erratic psychodynamics of sexual role-playing displayed in the cinematic text" ("Homologies" 52). Yet, when it comes to pornography critics and consumers alike have a tendency to migrate towards pornography that matches their views, or is authentic to their experience.

Consumers of pornography often select pornography that resembles their personal experience of sexuality (McKee). A recent (unpublished) study of the

effects of pornography on heterosexual men in their twenties conducted at the *Université de Montréal* by Professor Simon Louis Lajeunesse of the *École de service social* showed that consumers "quickly discard what they don't like and find offensive… they will continue to look for content in tune with their image of sexuality" ("Are the effects of pornography negligible?").

More than any other genre of film (including documentary, I would argue), pornography is criticized in terms of authenticity: does it portray actual sex (rather than simulated sex)? Is the sex portrayed representative of the way "actual" people have sex (can it be said to be a documentary of sex)? Is the pleasure real? The following sections will look at porn studies discourse for which "authenticity" is a key term of analysis.

Authenticity and Sexual Minorities

Authentic representation is especially important for sexual minorities who are visible ("on/scene") in pornography more than in mainstream media (Cante and Restivo). Sexual minorities, as represented by the discourse sampled for this discussion, advocate for pornography because it advocates for them (Butler, Cante and Restivo). This section will examine porn studies discourse that focuses on authenticity in terms of community and space. Certain critics place value in hard core pornography that is loyal to a particular community, by referring to actual spaces or filming in them, or including recognizable features from their lives as elements in the hard core film. Discussions about authenticity, especially in relation to community and space, appear most often in queer porn studies discourse. According to Cheryl Smyth in "The Pleasure Threshold," lesbians, as a community,

are able to recognize themselves in porn, because it is a genre where their sexuality is not "repressed, rendered invisible and impotent by society" (154). This on/scenity, as described by Williams, is applicable to all sexual minorities (*Porn Studies*).

After reading several articles about pornography, including Champagne and Capino, one reflects that, in a sense, all pornographic films are about space—that setting, or stage, where explicit sexual activity can occur (O'Toole *Pornocopia*). Before moving on to essays that focus on authenticity in pornography, I'd like to look at two porn studies essays that make important observations about space and pornography. In his 2005 article, "Homologies of Space: Text and Spectatorship in All-Male Adult Theaters," Capino "attempts to develop a model of spectatorship based on moviegoing practices in the few remaining all-male adult theatres in the United States" (50). In methodology, this article is very similar to Champagne's arcade study, "'Stop Reading Films!': Film Studies, Close Analysis, and Gay Pornography"—discussed at length in my literature review. Both Capino and Champagne begin with Judith Mayne's *Cinema and Spectatorship* and then diverge in their choice of frames: Capino uses Kracauer and Champagne uses Foucault.

Capino uses close analysis, after Kracauer's model, and ethnographic-thick description. The ethnographic-thick descriptions parallel the description provided in Champagne's essay, as does the close analysis of the physical screening spaces and behavior of the spectators. Capino's essay is more celebratory than Champagne's. Champagne focuses on discipline, disorder and getting around the rules (naughtiness, cleverness, and ingenuity result in arcade sex), whereas for

Capino, the all-male adult theatre is described as encouraging sexual activity—as an utopian sexual space—a "pornotopia."

Capino reads the all-male hard core pornographic film, *The Back Row* (Jerry Douglas 1972), according to its "spaces" and the actions and sexual initiations of the neophyte main character, as well as the film's meta-fictional insights into the

> extraordinary homologies between the spectator's process of navigating the pornographic text… and the spectator's externalization of that process, which occurs in the acts of navigating the physical space of the adult theater and of responding to the sexual preoccupations of his fellow moviegoers, on the other. ("Homologies" 52)

My only context for such distracted viewing would be the years I attended the weekly "Stars & Strollers" movie screenings at the local Silver City complex. Packed into a dimly lit theatre with a hundred other moms and their infant offspring, outfitted with change tables and free diapers, distracted by the fact that at least one infant would be crying at any given moment, the lights were never fully dimmed, the volume kept much lower than regular screenings. The theatre is transformed into a space that authenticates mothering in a public space, in a way that I recognize in Capino's essay.

Capino describes Chicago's vintage porn theatre The Bijou as "a place where cinema, sex, and spectatorship are one" (58). By this Capino means they are marketed and packaged together all in one space/place. However, it is important to note that while Capino is analyzing porn and sex, he does not conflate porn with sex (58). By recreating the common mise-en-scene in all-male pornography as spaces in

the all-male adult theatre, the Bijou becomes a veritable "pastiche of spaces represented in gay pornography" (Capino 60). In other words, this actual space inhabited by gay men is modeled on all-male pornography, and all-male pornography is often modeled on such spaces. Nguyen, like Capino, Champagne, Cante and Restivo, remarks on the inter-connectivity of actual homosocial spaces and space in the pornographic film: "gay porn's (re) appropriation of homosocial spaces—locker rooms, mechanics' garages, college fraternity houses, military barracks, and prisons—as the 'stages' where sexual fantasy unfolds" (235). Unlike the relationship between pornography and culture described in the last chapter (that porn acts upon us), Capino describes a symbiotic relationship. What I find refreshing in this piece is that he does not assume, or take for granted that porn is sex.

Cante and Restivo's essay in *Porn Studies*, "The Cultural-Aesthetic Specificities of All-male Moving-Image Pornography," provides a reading of space in the film *Night at the Adonis* (Jack Deveau 1977). The objective of the essay is to introduce why space is crucial to all-male pornography specifically and gay culture more generally. For Cante and Restivo, pornography has the potential to create community, and utopian spaces of visible "gayness" contributing to the representation of gay men in media culture:

> From the beginning, feature-length all-male filmic porn was deeply invested in narratologically and imaginistically "gaying" such itineraries of everyday life… not only to make "us" finally visible… [But to]

> continually open all of these everyday spaces to the myriad transformative potentials that develop once we are visible there. (147)

The matching up of virtual and actual spaces of fantasy and reality authenticate the utopian potential of all-male pornography for its viewers. For example, they explain that consumers who go to web sites like *Cruising for Sex* are connected to "authentic" realities of gay men's experience of sex and of public (148-149). Cante and Restivo argue that pornography, and "cruising" community web sites, mimic the pornographic spaces investigated by Capino and Champagne. Therefore, for these scholars, pornography is authentic for representing actual gay spaces and gay men are authenticated by "true" representations in pornography. Butler also makes a point about incorporating lesbian spaces and communities in pornographic film with the following comment about *Hard Love/How to Fuck in High Heels* (Shar Rednour and Jackie Strano 2000): "The film authenticates dyke presence/reality by co-opting an already established dyke community in San Francisco" (186).

Butler's essay in *Porn Studies* stands out above all others in its examination of evidence of authenticity in moving image pornography. Her essay is a survey of the developments in lesbian pornography (defined as lesbian "numbers" and full-length pornographic films) from 1968 to 2000: "I analyze the various permutations of the butch/femme dyad, the dildo, the concept of authenticity, and the idea of creating through representation a discursive place/space that is coded as a specifically lesbian zone" (167). She proposes to accomplish her goal by examining selected films that "attempt to authenticate lesbian sexuality through representation, as well as to interpellate the potential lesbian viewer" (167). For Butler, "the butch

authenticates lesbian pornography:" her presence is proof of sexual orientation, inspires trust from the audience and, even displaces the need to convince viewers "of 'real' pleasure or a real orgasm" (169).

As we saw in the previous chapter, not all porn studies critics embrace the liberatory potential of authenticity in pornography for sexual minorities, or society in general, for that matter. Kendall stands out in particular as a counter-argument to the discourse that I have presented in this chapter. For Kendall, all-male pornography is oppressive to gay males because, he argues, it is omnipresent and homophobic (*Gay Male Pornography* xvi). Kendall argues that all-male pornography "glorifies the masculine and denigrates the feminine, reinforces the male/female social dichotomy and hierarchy… [and] is a form of sex discrimination central to the maintenance of sexual and social inequality" (xvi). Therefore, the integration of all-male pornography into gay male culture has crippled gay men by indoctrinating them in the dominant patriarchal hegemony and narrowing their perceived options of gender performance. More generally, porn studies discourse aligned with the pro-censorship position criticizes pornography for mirroring sexual inequality, violence, and abuse that are pre-existing social conditions (Dines, Dworkin, Jensen, Kendall, MacKinnon, etc.). Pornography is authentic because it reflects truths of patriarchal society.

Conclusion

Porn is celebrated because it is authentic. Porn is denigrated because it is authentic. Authenticity is a key factor in moving image porn discourse. Pornography is about

sex, it attempts to represent sex, but it rarely reveals the truth of sex. Authenticity is frequently invoked in porn discourse to make value judgments about pornography; for example, pro-censorship feminists hate porn because it explicitly mimics (and often exaggerates) power imbalances in our patriarchal society. Other critics use the concept to applaud pornography for realistically portraying their community or their sex lives. As we've seen in the porn studies discourse discussed in this chapter, pornography acts as a mirror in which we seek an authentic image of ourselves. Mirrors are great when you want to be seen. Mirrors are awful when you want to hide.

Conclusion and Coda

I opened my thesis with the image of two couples that become paralyzed under the weight of philosophical difference when talking at cross-purposes. The porn studies discourse that I have presented in these chapters is locked in an (irresolvable) conflict regarding the potential effect of moving pornography on its audience. If pornography is harmful, then it must also be liberatory and vice versa, but it is rare for porn studies critics to acknowledge the truth in both these positions (at least since 1989—Waugh did so in 1982). Pornography, in the porn studies discourse that I have presented in these chapters, is constructed as an overwhelming presence in American society. For some critics, it is the most influential factor in American cultural identity (Sarracino and Scott, for example). What I hope I have demonstrated in these chapters, is that all the academic discourse about moving image pornography describing the "porning" phenomenon, using metaphors about monsters and tropes of authenticity, are actually talking about sex, whether phobically or utopianly, corroborating Foucault's dictum that sex is the "truth of our being."

For some critics, this means advocating censorship of certain types of pornography in a (superstitious) attempt to shore up cultural and personal identities against the threat of pornography, sex and sexuality that are increasingly on/scene. For others, it means embracing pornography that authenticates their community, sexuality and experiences by making these visible in ways (and in volume!) not available in mainstream media (for now). Therefore, critics are

constructing stories or myths about pornography that ease their discomfort about sex, power, violence, fear, desire, sexuality and otherness. Much of porn studies criticism celebrates a "truth" belonging to an interest group or social or cultural community. In Canada, we have legislated the "truth" of conservative interest groups and anti-pornography feminists into a judicial precedent, the *Butler* decision, that controls the kinds of pornography that are permitted in Canada. This is done in the name of equality and protecting pornography's victims (women or feminine-identified persons) from the harm inflicted on them by pornography and its agents (Kendall). Positing women as victims re-produces the sexist stereotyping that this law is meant to combat. It also takes away the freedom of choice under the guise of protecting personal freedoms. Anti-censorship advocacy is not arguing that all pornography (or any pornography) be distributed among the Canadian populace, but that individual Canadians are better able and equipped to determine what suits them than customs officers and legal authorities with gender and sexuality biases that the *Butler* decision, and *Little Sisters*[20] have been unable to neutralize.

There are problems with both sides of the "effect" debate. First, censorship laws are not effective at controlling pornography (their primary purpose), and it is an over-ambitious hope to believe that censoring pornography will bring about equality of the sexes. Second, the potential liberatory effect of pornography will never win a debate against the risk of harm.

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[20] *Little Sisters Book and Art Emporium* (2000) is the case where the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that Canada Customs could apply the same test for harm to same-sex pornography that was outlined in the *Butler* decision of 1992 (Bell, Kendall, Lacombe).

Not all of porn studies discourse is locked in the harm/liberatory binary. Coming to the end of this study, my thoughts turn to the meta-analytical possibilities of focusing on discourse that ignores this remnant of the 70s and 80s porn wars. While I have not made these earlier contributions to porn studies discourse the focus of this study, their meta-analysis would be more likely to illuminate future paths for porn studies. That said, it was my intent to determine the trends that were emerging as porn studies coalesced as a discipline, and it is not surprising that a core was formed around the debate about pornography's effect.

I also raised the point that pornography is a focus for fears about the transformative power of new media technologies on society. This apprehension often manifests in recommendations that media literacy skills become an educational priority in the 21st century (Cameron, Juffer, Nathan, Sarracino and Scott, etc.). This conclusion was reached by Deborah Cameron in 1990 and is repeated, nearly twenty years later by Sarracino and Scott. Porn studies discourse coming from the United States also stresses the need for sex education. Without sex education, pornography does end up sliding into the pedagogical gaps. Unfortunately, widespread curriculum reform, for sex education and media literacy, will not be achieved by the recommendations in porn studies discourse. These conclusions overreach the ability of the discourse.

The research that I have presented here comes out of the process of gaining mastery of porn studies—of reading extensively on the subject and, in order to test the accuracy and pertinence of selected writing, exposing myself to as wide a variety of pornography as I could within the constraints of time and money. Mastering porn

studies means familiarizing myself with the academic discourse, and the production and consumption of pornographic texts and the texts themselves. Obviously these pages have presented only a portion of the knowledge I have obtained, but I am now qualified to do serious, high-priority further work analyzing the marketing, production and content (video, film, promotional stills) of "authentic" pornography.

I talk a lot about my research because people are often curious when they find out that my Master's thesis is about pornography. I would estimate I have answered questions about my research and entered into frank discussions about pornography with nearly one hundred individuals in the past two years. Only two of these dialogues stand out at negative experiences; in one I offended a casual acquaintance who felt that porn studies should be left to criminologists, and in another I was offended by the lewd comments of a casual acquaintance who perceived my topic as an opportunity for self-aggrandizement and sexual harassment. Overall, these casual encounters, an unexpected by-product of my scholarship, have not only given me an opportunity to de-bunk porn myths, but have shown me how curious people generally are about pornography and, paradoxically, how few people invest time and energy learning about pornography. Most porn consumers I've encountered, if I may be afforded the liberty of offering anecdotal observation, are rarely impressed by the pornography that they have easy access to (cable pay-per-view, for instance) but are not motivated to seek out pornography that might actually impress them. In short, I am often asked if I can tell someone how to find good porn, since I've already done the footwork. Compiling a canon of good pornography was something that I expected reading porn studies discourse

would deliver. It did not. This lack in porn studies is the final observation that I would like to offer, and a gap that I would like to take a brief moment to begin to fill. Finding "good porn" was the result of committing my time and resources to viewing a wide variety of moving image pornography.

"Authentic" Porn: Where Porn and Sex-positive Discourse Converge

Rather than discuss the "typical" in porn, I would like to draw attention to a sub-genre of pornography that markets its product using claims to authenticity. As a junior porn studies scholar taking my first steps, I would rather advocate for "authentic" porn, than defend moving image pornography, generally. To be clear, I am not simply referring to amateur porn claiming to be "real," but to pornographic films using sex-positive discourse to articulate authenticity. I have noticed in my research that there is a new trend emerging in pornography, that of "authentic" pornography, roughly dating back to the turn of the century, that seems to proceed from complaints about pornography and to (overtly) embrace the philosophies of sex-positive discourse. The texts that make up "authentic" pornography take different subjects and make different aesthetic choices but share a commitment to re-produce or represent sex that is respectful, consensual, and most often abandons maximum visibility and artificial position changes and auditory tracks in favour of more "holistic" scenes. "Authentic" pornography includes (but is not limited to); *Shortbus,* the films of Maria Beatty, *All About Anna, The Crash Pad,* Comstock's *Real People, Real Life, Real Sex* series, and pornographic web sites such as, *Kink*, *Beautiful Agony*, and *I Feel Myself* (*IFM*). To demonstrate, I have selected Comstock Films' *Real People, Real Life, Real Sex* series; *I Feel Myself*, a website featuring (female)

masturbation videos; and *Kink*, a web site that is a portal to more than twenty sub-sites dedicated to BDSM. All three have web sites that promote their product as authentic.

I Feel Myself (*IFM*) describes their product, consisting of videos of women masturbating shot in their studio, on location (public fantasy scenarios), or sent in by members, as "An historic achievement in erotica. The beauty of authentic female orgasm beautifully filmed and tastefully presented" (*IFM*). The mission statement quoted in the previous sentence is present in the top banner of every page on the site. They have an inclusive sex-positive message:

> What you'll find on IFM is real women having real orgasms. We are dedicated to encouraging our contributors to have honest, raw, impassioned experiences and we refine our aesthetic approach to capture that. We also make every effort to ensure that our contributors are comfortable and feeling positive about what they've shared. The women of IFM have presented themselves out of a desire to be a part of something different, something that honors their experience above all else. (*IFM*)

Comstock Films is similarly invested in authenticity and sex-positive discourse. The company gets its name in part from co-founder Tony Comstock, but also because it is a cheeky reference to Anthony Comstock, American moral crusader and anti-pornographer from the mid to late nineteenth century (*Comstock Films*). Comstock films are produced to offer a "real" and "authentic" alternative to mainstream pornography. The first film in the series, *Marie and Jack: A Hardcore*

Love Story (2003), emphasizes the differences between "real sex" and "porn sex." Their twenty-minute interview is largely about why their sex is different than their onscreen sex. It is quite adorable that they used euphemisms like "down there" for female genitalia, or "small area of pleasure" and "my spot" for clitoris, considering they are both performers in explicit hard core films and are no strangers to sex talk. While Maria Silva (aka Aria) has appeared in a number of hard core films, she comments, "It's nice to have footage… it's nice to see the real thing" about the shoot she did for Comstock Films.

Finally, I have chosen to focus on *Kink* because it is a website where space, community and sex-positive discourse are strongly featured. The homepage for *Kink* is a hub for more than two dozen web sites they produce that are dedicated to BDSM, including extreme bondage, water sports, public humiliation, and 24/7 BDSM play on the "Upper Floor" where models actually live in the studio (like a BDSM *Big Brother*). Basically, this is a website that promotes the kinds of sexual activity anti-pornography or pro-censorship critics bill as degrading; more importantly, *Kink* is a company that is dedicated to creating "ethical" porn ("values" *Kink*). The sites of Kink feature nearly every activity "prohibited" by the Cambria list[21], which reads: no appearance of pain, no spitting, no coffins, no blindfolds, no wax dripping, no bondage-type toys, no male/male penetration, no transsexuals, no degrading dialogue, no incest topics, no forced sex.

[21] The Cambria list is an internal industry list that contains a list of sex acts producers should not include in their product if they wish to avoid censorship in the United States. It is named after Paul Cambria, an American first amendment lawyer who has represented the porn industry in censorship cases.

Content for the site is mostly filmed at their studio housed in the San Francisco Armory, a heritage building that is featured at the beginning of every video available on *Kink*—the image of the building is a part of their branding. The CEO, Peter Acworth, is featured in videos in the "Behind Kink.com" section of the site, which includes "making of" style documentaries (available on pay per view or by subscription) and radio and video podcasts about the company, its channels and the studio that are billed as "the voice of Kink.com" and help usher viewers into their "community." Kink's mission statement, found in the "Values" tab of the web site and throughout the site is to: "demystify and celebrate alternative sexualities by providing the most ethical and authentic kinky adult entertainment" (*Kink*). Their dedication to sex-positive discourse is evident throughout their sites, as well as in the pre- and post-play interviews that are included in nearly every video on the site.

One Kink video stands out in particular as a demonstration of the convergence of pornography, sex-positive discourse and change. *Nicki Blue's Deflowering* (January 15, 2011), which features the loss of physical vaginal virginity of a twenty-one-year-old women to three men. *Nicki Blue's Deflowering* streamed live and was so popular when it first aired that *Kink* server was shut down at least three times during the scene. The video sparked controversy, and the controversy was exclusively about the discourse being used to market the live show. The comments in *Kink*'s forum were (and are) filled with criticism about antiquated definitions of virginity, anatomical corrections to some of the language being used (hymen, instead of corona) and a frank discussion of how this video fit into Kink's

mission statement and desire to be sex-positive. In response, *Kink*, via CEO Peter Acworth, apologized in a thoughtful letter:

> Instead of showing our gratitude to Nicki for choosing *Kink* to fulfill her sexual fantasy—to break her hymen during her first vaginal sex experience in front of thousands of fans—we marketed it in a way that relied on sexist tropes and myths about the female body that we should not have perpetuated. And that fact was rightfully brought to our attention by bloggers who hold us to a much higher standard than that. We truly thank them for it and are gratified to see issues surrounding female sexuality, virginity and sexism being discussed in public forums —even if it was as a result of our screw up. ("Acworth Responds")

The controversy is particularly illuminating in terms of sex-positive discourse. Topics included Nicki Blue's agency, and fierce debate about what it means to be a virgin (there were conflicts between cultural definitions, physical definitions, and personal definitions). What stands out for me is that this uproar regarding accusations that the promotional campaign for the video was perpetuating harmful ideas about women and purity, actually produced change in the discourse used to market the video.

The potential for porn studies critics to study what I have been calling "authentic" porn, which is committed to something other than "maximum visibility," is very exciting for me and for the future of porn studies. If a critic's job is to promote what is good and beautiful, as Metz claimed in denouncing all pornography, then this porn would have to be admitted into the canon—so many of the films

discussed in this section are not only committed to creating “authentic” pornography, but they are also aesthetically beautiful—and hot!

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