

Introduction: Porn and the Industrialization of Sex

Don't Come Here Looking for Love

—Ad for Im Live, a porn Web site

It is January 2008 and I am in a cavernous convention hall surrounded by hard-core porn images of women being anally, vaginally, and orally penetrated. I am trying to have a conversation with Patricia, a middle-aged African American woman who is a security guard working for slightly more than minimum wage, but we both have difficulty hearing as our voices are drowned out by the orgasmic sounds coming from the movies being shown all around us. Patricia is distinguished from the other women in the hall not only by her age and race but by the fact that she is fully clothed. Most other women here are wearing only thongs and pasties, in stark contrast to the thousands of dressed men milling around them. Some men stand in long lines waiting to have their picture taken with scantily clad women, while others wander from booth to booth, looking for the latest movie. I am at the Adult Entertainment Expo, the pornographers' annual trade show in Las Vegas.

Patricia has a bad crick in her neck from trying to avoid looking at the porn that is being projected onto the screens. Needless to say, this is no easy feat. She expresses her frustration about being forced to work this detail, as she has never before seen porn. Divorced for many years, Patricia tells me that after doing this job for a few days, she now knows why she “can't find a good man to settle down with.” As we talk, one of the very few African American porn performers in the hall walks past us, dressed in the usual porn garb of high-heeled shoes and not much more. Patricia taps me on the shoulder and says, “Go and tell her that it is not good for her to be doing this stuff.” At that very moment a fan goes over to the porn performer and puts his hand on her crotch; his friends take a picture. Patricia groans.

As someone who studies porn, I am accustomed to these kinds of images, but Patricia is new to them, and it is through her eyes that I see this situation for what it really is: a parallel universe where the complexity of humans, the multiple pleasures of life, and the deep connections that nourish and sustain us vanish. In their place are blow jobs, erect penises, shaved vulvae, surgically enhanced breasts, distended anuses, and a limitless supply of semen. Patricia and I are in the middle of a world that reduces humans to orifices and body parts, bled dry of soul, personality, history, and future, as life in the porn world is only about the here and now, where penetrating someone or being penetrated is all humans exist for. As I am writing notes for my book, Patricia starts to plot her future far away from Las Vegas.

As I wander around the hall, talking to pornographers, it becomes very clear that they are not particularly interested in sex. What turns these people on is making money. The only time they seem excited is when they are discussing market shares, niche products, or direct marketing versus bulk

mailing in one of the many business seminars that accompany the trade show. Many of the porn producers I interview freely acknowledge that they are in the business to make money, not to further our sexual empowerment or creativity. They see themselves as caught up in a business that, thanks to the growth of the Internet, is like a runaway train. What they will admit is that porn is becoming more extreme, and their success depends on finding some new, edgy sex act that will draw in users always on the lookout for that extra bit of sexual charge. Not one of the men I talk to seems particularly interested in how these new extremes will be played out on real women's bodies, bodies that are already being pushed to the brink of their physical limits. No, these men want their piece of the pie, and their single-minded focus on the bottom line is evident.

Making money in the porn industry is not as easy as it was during the early days of the Internet; the explosion in recent years of the number of films and Web sites has produced a glut of products. Paul Fishbein, founder of *Adult Video News (AVN)*, an industry trade publication, has stated that "the laws of supply and demand have been turned upside down. We're on par to put out 15,000 new releases this year, which is just insane."¹ The other problem Fishbein points to is the enormous amount of pirated or free material on the Internet. Everyone I spoke to at the Expo was worried about this highly competitive market, and many shared the feelings of one producer who told me that "this is an industry running out of ideas." As we spoke, the latest film from this person's company played on a screen in the booth; it featured a young woman being anally penetrated as she knelt in a coffin.

In fact, images today have now become so extreme that what used to be considered hard-core is now mainstream pornography. Acts that are now commonplace in much of online porn were almost nonexistent a couple of decades ago. As the market becomes saturated and consumers become increasingly bored and desensitized, pornographers are avidly searching for ways to differentiate their products from others.

This shift in both quantity and quality has had profound implications for the ways boys and men experience porn.² To begin to understand the changes, consider how young men and boys were introduced to porn in pre-Internet days. Hormones raging, boys would most likely discover their father's *Playboy* or *Penthouse* to masturbate to. These magazines, with their soft-core, soft-focus pictures of naked women, taught boys and men that women existed to be looked at, objectified, used, and put away until the next time. Their future supply of porn was dependent on what they or their friends could pilfer from their father's stash or maybe from the local convenience store. The sexism of these images was bad enough, but compared to porn today, the porn of yesterday seems almost quaint.

Rather than sporadic trips into a world of coy smiles, provocative poses, and glimpses of semi-shaved female genitalia, youth today, especially boys, are catapulted into a never-ending universe of ravaged anuses, distended vaginas, and semen-smearing faces. When they masturbate to the stories, acts, and narratives of such porn in a heightened state of arousal, a cornucopia of messages about women, men, relationships, and sex are sent to the brain. The questions that need to be asked here are, What is the content of these images? and What do they say to ever-younger and more impressionable consumers about sex, love, and intimacy?

Making Hate: Porn Sex and the Destruction of Intimacy

Through my experience lecturing on pornography for over two decades, I have found that most women and some men have an idea of pornography that is twenty years out of date; what comes to mind is often simply a *Playboy* centerfold. It's crucial to be aware of the images that are now considered ordinary in mainstream Internet pornography. The usual way I show my audience how hard-core the industry has become is through a PowerPoint presentation featuring snapshots from well-traveled sites. I use words rather than pictures here, but I need to add that however extreme the scenes I describe sound, my descriptions are nothing compared to actually viewing porn.

Because commercially produced Internet porn is mainstream, easily accessible, and cheaply available, I have decided to focus on it here. As the Internet has become the dominant distribution system, it is now the main channel by which most men, especially young men, access porn.³ To ensure that this is an accurate reflection of all porn available on the Internet, and not one that focuses on only the most excessive, I started my search by typing “porn” into Google and clicked on some of the sites that appeared on the first page.⁴ After clicking around for a few seconds I was directed to hundreds of sites that offered a whole range of sex acts, many of which show one woman and multiple men. Some of the most popular acts advertised and depicted during my quick search are

- vaginal, anal, and oral penetration of a woman by three or more men at the same time;
- double anal, in which a woman is penetrated anally by two men at the same time;
- double vagina, in which a woman is penetrated vaginally by two men at the same time;
- gagging, in which a woman has a penis thrust so far down her throat she gags (or, in the more extreme cases, vomits);
- ass-to-mouth, in which a penis goes from a woman's anus to her mouth without washing; and
- bukkake, in which any number of men ejaculate, often at the same time, onto a woman's body, face, hair, eyes, ears, or mouth. In some of these movies, the men ejaculate into a cup, and the “money shot” is the woman drinking the semen mixture.⁵

To discern what a curious user would find if he wanted to look at porn without paying for site membership, I randomly selected some images to click on and stayed only at Web sites offering a free tour or sample video. I started by clicking on OnlyBestSex.com, which advertised itself as having a free porn search engine for “Sex Videos and Hot XXX sites.” On that site was an ad for Gag Me Then Fuck Me, featuring image after image of women being orally, anally, and vaginally penetrated by from one to three men. The introductory text on the site reads: “Do you know what we say to things like romance and foreplay? We say fuck off ! This is not another site with half-erect weenies trying to impress bold sluts. We take gorgeous young bitches and do what every man would really like to do. We make them gag till their makeup starts running, and then they get all other holes sore—vaginal, anal, double penetrations, anything brutal involving a cock and an orifice. And then we give them the sticky bath!”⁶ Viewers can click onto any number of sample videos, which act as teasers for longer movies. The one advertising “Laura” tells the reader: “The last thing we needed here was a vomiting girl—but this time it was close. Stopping is not our style, so she was grabbed by the head and

facefucked as if there was no tomorrow. She tried hard to swallow, but there was too much muck, and the bitch had no real choice but to take it all. And of course her love tunnel looked like a train passed through!”

A few more clicks and I was at GagFactor.com owned by JM Productions, a much-talked-about site in the porn trade magazines. When I clicked on it I was invited to “Join us now to Access Complete Degradation.” On the site are hundreds of pictures of young women with penises thrust deep into their throat. Some are gagging, others crying, and virtually all have faces, especially their eyes, covered in semen. The user is bombarded with images of mascara running, hair being pulled, throats in a vicelike grip, nostrils being pinched so the women can’t breathe as the penis fills the mouth, and mouths that are distended by either hands pulling the lips apart or penises inserted sideways. Below each set of pictures are “quotes” by the male porn performers. Some examples are

- “Watching the transition from civilian to cumbucket is an amazing thing to watch.”
- “Stupid, stupid whores. Gotta love ’em!”
- “I love turnin’ the screws on these dumb whores!”
- “It’s true, getting throatfucked keeps you skinny cuz all that snot that comes out of your face burns calories.”
- “I’m not sure what’s wrong with these girls but I am thankful [*sic*] for their existence.”

As a way to promote its movies, Gag Factor provides twenty- to thirty-second free clips. One of the trailers I clicked on listed the following biographical details of the woman:

name: Scarlett

age: 24

status: Long Since Vanished

“Scarlett” is blonde, dressed in revealing Victoria’s Secret–type underwear, and has a viselike contraption digging into her neck and head. The short clip opens with Scarlett sitting on a toilet having a penis thrust down her throat while the man attached to the penis manipulates her head back and forward using the handles on the vise. He drags her off the toilet onto her knees while he continues to thrust viciously into her mouth. You watch Scarlett from above begin to gag, eyes bulging, and as she tries to pull away to breathe, the man pulls the vise toward his penis with greater force so she can’t move. As all this is going on he is screaming at her: “Get off the fucking toilet, get your ass on your knees, right motherfucking now. . . . I am a fucking psychotic motherfucking bitch . . . fucking you till your fucking mama comes from the grave.”⁷ The intensity of the images and words made these twenty seconds of video feel like twenty minutes to me.

After a few more clicks I was at the Anal Suffering site, which promises, “Every week, we’ll bring you a new Suffering Slut. Weak, Destroyed, Agonizing in Anal Pain and Totally Fucked Up right in her ass. And you’ll have all the glory of watching them.”⁸ The pictures and free clips do indeed show women grimacing in pain as they are being forcefully anally penetrated by one man, and often vaginally by another at the same time. Other similar sites show close-up images of women’s red and swollen anuses, allowing the viewer to linger on the damage. On one site advertising the movie

Anally Ripped Whores, the text reads: “We at Pure Filth know exactly what you want and we’re giving it to you. Chicks being ass fucked till their sphincters are pink, puffy and totally blown out. Adult diapers just might be in store for these whores when their work is done.”⁹

From there I moved into the teen porn genre, which lists movie titles such as *Teen Hitchhikers*, *Teens for Cash*, *Teen Dirty Slut*, *Soaped Pink Teen Pussy*, and *Petite Teen Hard Fuck* as well as the whole subgenre of babysitter porn, which includes *Banged Babysitters*, *Cute Babysitter Riding Cock*, *Fuck the Babysitter*, and *Gag the Babysitter*. Predictably, there are hundreds and hundreds of images of young-looking women with small breasts and shaved vulvae, wearing adolescent markers such as school uniforms, braids, and bobby socks while hugging stuffed animals or sucking popsicles. The text on the Fuck the Babysitter site reads, “Naughty Babysitter Knows What She’s Good for: sucking cock and drinking cum.” Many of the free sample films show the “teen” being initiated by a much older man into what is supposedly her first sexual experience.

This is just a smattering of what’s available online to any person who is minimally computer literate.¹⁰ As noted, boys see their first porn on average at eleven years of age, and by then most have computer skills sophisticated enough that they can access any of the sites described above.¹¹ For the uninitiated, the scenes I have just described might seem like outliers from the extreme end of the industry, but unfortunately these images are all too representative of what is out there on the Internet and in mass-produced movies. In one of the few studies that have been conducted on the content of contemporary porn, it was found that the majority of scenes from fifty of the top-rented porn movies contained both physical and verbal abuse of the female performers.¹² Physical aggression, which included spanking, open-hand slapping, and gagging, occurred in over 88 percent of scenes, while expressions of verbal aggression, calling the woman names such as bitch or slut, were found in 48 percent of the scenes. The researchers concluded that “if we combine both physical and verbal aggression, our findings indicate that nearly 90% of scenes contained at least one aggressive act, with an average of nearly 12 acts of aggression per scene.”¹³

Even some in the porn industry are beginning to critique the violent and degrading images that are now part of mainstream Internet porn. For example, veteran porn producer Holly Randall, one of the few women producers in the industry who has had some success, wrote: “With high-end productions pushed to the side to make way for amateurish, extreme content, we created a market for what I call the Porn Olympics. . . . Now it was a question of how far you could push the envelope: how many men can you have sex with in one film, how many dicks can you fit in your orifices, how many ways can you eat cum? In the attempt to one-up the last guy, scenarios I couldn’t even dream up became, well, somewhat normal.”¹⁴ Most of the acts Randall is talking about are found in a subgenre of porn called *gonzo* by the industry.¹⁵ Often referred to as *wall-to-wall* because it contains sex scene after sex scene with no attempt at a plot or story line, this type of porn is, according to a 2005 article in *AVN*, “the overwhelmingly dominant porn genre since it’s less expensive to produce than plot-orientated features.” The features also sell well, but what makes gonzo so profitable is that it is, according to the same *AVN* article, “the fare for the solo stroking consumer who merely wants to cut to the chase, get

off on the good stuff.”¹⁶

The *AVN* article itself cuts to the chase, as getting off is, after all, what porn is all about. But what it ignores, and for good reason, is the range of messages men imbibe as they masturbate. Porn, like all other images, tells stories about the world, but these stories are of the most intimate nature, as they are about sexuality and sexual relationships. When men turn to porn to experience sexual arousal and orgasm, they come away with a lot more than just an ejaculation because the stories seep into the very core of their sexual identity. To suggest otherwise would be to see sex as just a biological urge, removed from the social context within which it is developed, understood, and enacted in the real world. No biological urge exists in a pure form, devoid of cultural meaning or expression, and in American society, porn is probably the most visible, accessible, and articulate teller of sexual stories to men.

Porn Stories

For all of its millions of images, themes, and pseudo-plotlines, the story gonzo porn tells about women, men, and sex is amazingly consistent. This is because porn images are produced by an industry and are hence scripted, formulaic, and genre-bound representations. As much as pornographers would like us to think that they are just capturing people having sex, in reality, the images are carefully crafted and choreographed. Consumers of porn have certain expectations as to how the story will unfold, and the more a movie, television show, or indeed any text follows a set pattern, the less ambiguity there is in the storytelling. This in turn means that the consumer is more likely to come away with the messages that the producer intended, and less likely to decode the story in some idiosyncratic way. So what are the stories porn tells the user?

The messages that porn disseminates about women can be boiled down to a few essential characteristics: they are always ready for sex and are enthusiastic to do whatever men want, irrespective of how painful, humiliating, or harmful the act is. The word “no” is glaringly absent from porn women’s vocabulary. These women seem eager to have their orifices stretched to full capacity and sometimes beyond, and indeed, the more bizarre and degrading the act, the greater the supposed sexual arousal for her. The women who wander through this world are, whether they know it or not, all whores by nature, as they all have a price, often as low as a few bucks (as in “Every bitch will suck cock for a few dollars” or “This slut will do anything for rent money”). Even though these women love to be fucked, they seem to have no sexual imagination of their own: what they want always mirrors what the man wants. This may explain why women in porn spend enormous amounts of time giving men oral sex, yet they rarely expect or demand reciprocity. Actually, the only demands they seem to make involve asking the man to thrust harder and harder.

In the porn world, women are never concerned about pregnancy, STDs, or damage to their bodies, and are astonishingly immune to being called cunts, whores, cumdumpsters, sluts, bitches, hot slits, fucktubes, squirty skanks, and stupid hoes. They seem comfortable with the idea that their partner(s) views their sexuality as something unclean (as in “dirty cunt,” “filthy little whore,” or “nasty

cum dumpster”) and often refer to themselves in these ways. Indeed, women of the porn world seem to enjoy having sex with men who express nothing but contempt and hatred for them, and often the greater the insults, the better the orgasm for all involved. This is an uncomplicated world where women don’t need equal pay, health care, day care, retirement plans, good schools for their children, or safe housing. It is a world filled with one-dimensional women who are nothing more than collections of holes.

The story pornography tells about men is actually much simpler. Men in porn are depicted as soulless, unfeeling, amoral life-support systems for erect penises who are entitled to use women in any way they want. These men demonstrate zero empathy, respect, or love for the women they have sex with, no matter how uncomfortable or in pain these women look. Probably the most peculiar thing about porn-world men is that they even lack the ability to express arousal, because no matter how erect their penises are, they exhibit none of the signs we normally associate with sexual excitement. The only time the men moan, grunt, or writhe is when they are about to ejaculate; the rest of the time they methodically thrust their penis into the woman’s orifices with a look of deep concentration on their faces. This can get very bizarre, especially in an oral sex scene where a stoic man gags a woman by thrusting his penis deep in her mouth, yet she is the only one having orgasmic responses. And when porn men are done, they are really done—there is not the slightest show of postcoital intimacy with the woman they have just ejaculated onto.

In a world populated by women who are robotic “sluts” and men who are robotic studs, the sex is going to be predictably devoid of any intimacy. Porn sex is not about making love, as the feelings and emotions we normally associate with such an act—connection, empathy, tenderness, caring, affection—are replaced by those more often connected with hate—fear, disgust, anger, loathing, and contempt. In porn the man makes hate to the woman, as each sex act is designed to deliver the maximum amount of degradation. Whether the man is choking her with a penis or pounding away at her anus until it is red raw, the goal of porn sex is to illustrate how much power he has over her. It is what he wants when, where, and how he wants it, because he controls the pace, the timing, and the nature of the acts.

The power that men have over women in porn sex is encoded into the sex acts and the physical and verbal abuse that accompanies them. Oral sex is more often than not played out with him standing up and her on her knees; in this superior position he can control the pace of thrusting by holding onto her face and/or neck in a viselike grip. When a woman pulls away from the penis in an attempt to catch her breath, he intensifies the thrusting, causing her to gag even more. Vaginal and anal penetration often take place with her lying on a bed, sofa, or table while he again stands above her, a good position to look her in the face and tell her just what a disgusting whore she really is. If he has his hands on her body, they are not there to caress or fondle, but to either hold her down or stretch an orifice so that her body becomes that much more accessible and vulnerable. That she is a mere object is clear in many scenes where men will suddenly grab a woman and pull her down on a sofa or to the floor so he can position his body above hers as he ejaculates onto her face or into her mouth. In some cases this is so rough that she lands on the floor with a thud and has to quickly rearrange her body so

the viewer gets a bird's-eye shot of the semen being squirted on her.

What seems surprising at first about gonzo porn is how few scenes there are with multiple women and one man, especially as for many men, having sex with more than one woman is a time-worn fantasy. When there are multiple performers it is usually one woman with any number of men. If porn is indeed about dominance and degradation, then it makes sense that the woman will be outnumbered since multiple men penetrating her suggests powerlessness. Should the tables be turned and there be more women than men in the scene, then there is always the possibility that the women, outnumbering the man, are the ones who hold the power.

Scenes where a woman is multiply penetrated also reveal the way in which much of gonzo porn is about seeing just how far you can push a woman's body before it is injured. A vagina or anus that has two penises in it is vulnerable to tearing and prolapse. A penis thrust deep into the throat can also cause damage, as can a penis thrust in sideways so the woman's mouth is stretched to almost inhuman proportions. The volume of porn produced today means that a frenzied competition has begun, as producers not only push the sexual envelope but place their women actors at higher and higher levels of risk in the process. In this race to the bottom, the fantasy cruelty of porn spills over into the real world.

One of the most degrading acts in porn is called the "money shot," where the man ejaculates on the face or body of the woman. This usually marks the end of a scene and is central to the construction and marketing of the porn movie. While this has been a staple of porn for many years, recently it has taken a new turn in gonzo: the woman either drinks the collective ejaculate of any number of men (bukkake) or holds it in her mouth and the camera lingers on the ejaculate dribbling down her chin. Another relatively new twist is "cum swapping," where a woman passes the semen into the mouth of another woman. There are now porn movies that specifically focus on this, as *Cum Swapping Bitches* and *Cum Swapping Cheerleader*, as well as movies that promise to show women swallowing the semen.

The ejaculate also marks the woman as used goods, as owned by the man or men who just penetrated her. Veteran porn actor and producer Bill Margold explained the money shot like this: "I'd like to really show what I believe the men want to see: violence against women. I firmly believe that we serve a purpose by showing that. The most violent we can get is the cum shot in the face. Men get off behind that, because they get even with the women they can't have. We try to inundate the world with orgasms in the face."¹⁷ That viewers enjoy money shots is evident by the postings on the Adult DVD Talk forum, a Web site for porn fans.¹⁸ Here fans talk about their favorite money shot at length, often giving a detailed account of the scene. Jim 2, for example, tells his virtual friends that "I consider gangbang scenes memorable that end with the girl a total mess, having a huge amount of cum on her face and tits,"¹⁹ while The The likes to see "the gag reflex kicking in."²⁰ Some of the posters make clear that for them, pleasure comes in watching a woman really suffer: "Kaci Starr starts retching/gagging as soon as the first drop of sperm hits her tongue—it's so great. The best scene for this (and for Kaci getting totally overwhelmed in general) is her amazing scene in *Throat Gaggers*

#10. She actually starts throwing up the cum (and some of whatever she had for lunch! lol) during the cumswallowing portion of the scene. She starts tearing up as she struggles to keep it all down. Wonderful stuff.”²¹ The money shot would seem a succinct way to deliver multiple messages about the way sex can be used as a vehicle to mark the feminine as all-powerless and the masculine as all-powerful.

I daresay that the sexual acts I have described above are not ones that most women seek out in the real world, nor ones that most men feel comfortable asking their partner to engage in. Conversely, acts that are part of many people’s sexual experience, such as kissing, caressing, cuddling, and fondling, are noticeably absent in pornography. This forces us to ask why men who view porn are so attracted to images that depict types of behavior so at odds with the real world. One obvious answer could be that men go to porn as a way to play out a fantasy, a way to conjure up mental images that are not real but nonetheless pleasurable. But if it were as simple as this, then why isn’t there an equal amount of porn that depicts women and men having great sex that involves deep connection and intimacy, with women having fabulous orgasms brought about by a highly skilled male lover who has an intuitive understanding of women’s bodies? This, too, would be a fantasy for many viewers, but it is clearly not one that porn chooses to represent with any regularity. Instead porn plays out “fantasy” sex that looks more like sexual assault than making love.

Some may argue that assault is too strong a word, but if we analyze what is actually going on in a gonzo scene in a way that speaks to the experiences of the woman in the movie, then we get some insight into what is happening to her as a human being. A living, breathing person is being penetrated in every orifice by any number of men—men she most likely has no real emotional connection with. Their penises are often longer and thicker than average, and they are sometimes fortified with Viagra, since penetration without ejaculation has to go on for some time.²² Her body, like ours, has real physical limits, yet the goal of the movie is to see just how far these limits can be pushed. At some point during all the pounding, her vagina will become sore, her anus raw and swollen, and her mouth will ache from having large penises thrust in and out for an extended amount of time. As this is occurring, she is being called every vile name under the sun. During this bodily assault, which even the industry admits is taking its toll on the bodies of the women,²³ she has to look like she is enjoying it, she has to tell the men penetrating her that she loves their big cock or whatever, and finally she has to lick the semen as if she loves the taste.

When the movie is done, she will get up from the bed or floor, go to the bathroom to wash off the sticky substance and check her orifices to see if any damage has been done. She also will need to ensure that she does not have any of the diseases or ailments for which she is now high risk, given what her body has just been through. These include, according to the Adult Industry Medical Health Care Foundation, the following: HIV; rectal gonorrhea; tears in the throat, vagina, and anus; chlamydia of the eye; and gonorrhea of the throat.²⁴ And she will endure all this again and again until she is either too worn out to continue or is disregarded by the industry in favor of “fresh meat,” of which, it seems, there is never any shortage.

Men who go looking for porn are often already aroused as they anticipate their soon-to-be-had orgasm. Clearly, in this state they are not in any mood to start doing a critical deconstruction of how the woman is being treated, but it truly doesn't take much observation to notice that her body is being used in ways that appear to be painful and degrading. Few of the women are seasoned actresses, and many are not able to conceal their discomfort and pain as they are being penetrated by multiple penises. Some of the women look exhausted and defeated by the end of the scene.

As porn becomes more extreme, and the woman's body is treated in harsher ways, one wonders how users manage to sustain an erection. No doubt there are some who enjoy watching women suffer, but I honestly do not believe that the average man is a woman-hating sadist. This is indeed the image of men the pornographers generate, but it is one that, ironically, given our man-hating reputation, feminists reject since we have never believed that men are born misogynists. And those of us who have male children refuse to accept that the little boy we birthed, fed, bathed, nurtured, and love came out of the womb with a homing device for GagFactor.com.

If we refuse to accept the easy answer that men have a natural predisposition to get off on hurting women, then we have to look to the culture for answers as to why some men seek out and enjoy gonzo. We have to ask, What is it about male socialization and masculinity that helps prepare them—or, I would say, groom them—into seeking out and masturbating to such images? The answers do not lie within individual men; rather, they are found in the culture that we all live in. Porn is not something that stands outside of us: it is deeply embedded in our structures, identities, and relationships. This did not happen overnight, and there is a story to tell about how we got to the point that mainstream Internet porn has become so hateful and cruel.

We begin the investigation with a history of the porn industry that focuses on the ways that *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Hustler* provided the economic and cultural space for today's hard-core porn. Chapter 1 specifically looks at how the competition among the three magazines pushed the envelope on what was considered "acceptable" mainstream porn in the 1970s and '80s. Today, there is a whole new range of agents pushing porn into the mainstream, and chapter 2 takes a look at some of the major individuals and companies that have succeeded in sanitizing porn.

Arguing that porn is mainstream goes beyond noting the way the images have infiltrated our lives to include an analysis of how porn has seamlessly been woven into mainstream capitalism. Chapter 3 takes a close look at what it means for the porn industry to be part of a wider corporate structure and how many mainstream industries such as hotels, banks, and cable operators make large sums of money from the porn industry. The need to create markets and offer consumers something different explains in part why porn is always on the lookout for some new bizarre sex act. What it doesn't explain is how men can be aroused by such images of women being dehumanized and debased. Chapter 4 argues that to answer this we need to look at the ways that men are socialized by the culture and the porn industry, since both have an image of men as aggressive, unfeeling, and disconnected from their emotions and from other people.

What happens to men who use porn? This is without doubt the most hotly debated issue in the discussion of porn. Rather than rehash the whole debate or delve into the numerous studies by psychologists, in chapter 5 I look at how images affect the way we perceive reality and why, given what we know about media effects, it is incorrect to argue that men walk away from porn unchanged.

Men are not the only group to be changed by the porn culture. Girls and women, while not major consumers of porn, are inundated with pop culture images that just a decade ago would have been seen as soft-core. Chapter 6 looks at how the image of femininity thrown at girls and women has become increasingly narrow, to the point that a “hot” body is the only one that meets very strict cultural standards. Some groups have celebrated this hypersexualization as empowering for women, but I argue that this is pseudo-empowerment since it is a poor substitute for what real power looks like—economic, social, sexual, and political equality that give women power to control those institutions that affect our lives.

Pornographers, always trying to add extra sizzle to gonzo sex, have developed a number of niche markets. One very lucrative niche features people of color, the topic of chapter 7. Not a genre known for its subtlety, porn produces and reproduces some of the worst racist stereotypes of past and present. Given that most of these films are made for a white male audience, the question here is, How do sexualized racist images shape the way users think about race? Another niche that is popular is called pseudo-child porn because although it uses women who are eighteen or over, they are actually made to look much younger. Chapter 8 illustrates how by using the props of childhood—socks, school uniforms, teddy bears—pornographers invite the user into a world where the sexualization of children is normalized.

The conclusion asks what is to be done about this pornographization of our culture. No easy answers jump out as obvious since this is a problem that has deep roots in the way our society is structured. Ultimately, to fight this juggernaut we will need collective action. Individual solutions are important, but social change never happens on the individual level. The pornographers did a kind of stealth attack on our culture, hijacking our sexuality and then selling it back to us, often in forms that look very little like sex but a lot like cruelty. The only solution to this is a movement that is fierce in its critique of sexual exploitation and steadfast in its determination to fight for what is rightfully ours.

Chapter 4. Grooming for Gonzo

Becoming a Man in a Porn Culture

The awkward truth, according to one study, is that 90 percent of 8-to-16-year-olds have viewed pornography online. Considering the standard climax to even the most vanilla hard-core scene today, that means there is an entire generation of young people who think sex ends with a money shot to the face.

—*Details*

One of the arguments I hear regularly is that it is perfectly natural for boys and men to like porn. Males are more visual, so the argument goes, and they need more sex than women, so porn is simply a way to satisfy a biological urge. What proponents of this argument miss is that it is anti-male to believe that there is something essential in men that leads them to desire porn, gonzo or otherwise. What feminists argue is that men are socialized by the culture into a specific type of masculinity that makes porn both normal and pleasurable. If we take seriously the notion that we are all cultural beings, then we need to think about the ways that boys become men and how this process creates a consumer base for porn that is degrading to women. What became clear when feminists started to explore male socialization is that although the type of masculinity a boy adopts will depend on multiple factors such as religion, race, and class, the dominant masculinity today is, as Robert Jensen argues, one in which “men are assumed to be naturally competitive, and aggressive.”¹

But as Jensen and a whole host of researchers show, there is nothing natural about boys being shoved, coerced, seduced, and manipulated into conformity the second they enter a world brimming with gender expectations and assumptions about how real men have to be strong, powerful, and unemotional. From parents, schools, peer groups, sports and, of course, media, boys are taught that any deviation from the norm will result in swift punishments, the worst of which is being called “a girl.” Few insults carry as much weight and few insults do as much damage to both boys and girls, since the boy is being told that the worst thing he can be is a female.

This has profound effects on the emotional lives of boys as they are, as psychiatrist James Gilligan argues, “taught that to want love or care from others is to be passive, dependent, unaggressive, and unambitious or, in short, unmanly; and that they will be subjected to shaming, ridicule, and disrespect, if they appear unmanly in the eyes of others.”² To be “unmanly” is, of course, within our gender binary system, to be feminine, and here lies the essence of gender socialization for males: they need, at all times, to distance themselves as much as possible from anything constructed by the culture as feminine. The feminine hence becomes feared—and that which we fear, we also learn to despise.

This is damaging to boys on many levels, not least because they are children who need the love

and emotional connection of caregivers, most of whom today are still women, in order to develop a healthy emotional life. But to survive in this world of masculinity and all the bullying and jockeying for power that comes with it, a boy needs to learn how to disconnect from his own emotions and those of others. Public displays of fear, empathy, and sadness—indeed, anything that suggests vulnerability—are dangerous for many boys as the alpha males of the pack are only too happy to provide a lesson on what happens to boys who fail to show sufficient manliness. This leads to many boys becoming emotionally stunted as they reach adulthood because they have learned to wear the mask of masculinity that hides their deeply felt emotions. This mask may feel like a poor fit to a young boy, but after wearing it for many years, the mask begins to mold to his skin, and after a while, it becomes almost like a second skin.³

Helping to reinforce masculinity are the massive media and toy industries, which seem to be cemented in gender apartheid. In 2008, on a trip to Toys “R” Us with my nieces and nephews, aged between eight and thirteen, I couldn’t believe how much the store had changed from when I used to go with my own son a decade earlier. While there was some gender division among the toys in the 1990s, today the store has an almost tangible gender barrier down the middle. One half was full of toy guns, knives, swords, wrestling figures, and violent computer games, and the other half magically turned pink with princess dresses, dolls, makeup, and hairdryers. My two nephews walked out with the latest wrestling figures, and my two nieces each had a pink Barbie hairdryer and a pink makeup bag, all bought by their loving feminist aunt. I did try to steer them to the few gender-neutral items, such as jigsaws and board games, but was stopped short by the look of disgust across all four faces.

When we arrived home, my nephews eagerly unwrapped their toys as they watched *Casino Royale*, with Daniel Craig playing alpha male James Bond. With his ruggedly handsome face, rock-hard body, smooth delivery of lethal violence against his opponents, and bevy of beautiful women falling over him, Craig must have seemed like a very appealing role model for my nephews, reared on pop culture. I watched their faces as Craig, now on the receiving end of the violence, was being tortured—by having his testicles whacked with a carpet beater, no less. Rather than showing pain, he responded with sarcastic quips and sneering put-downs. I wondered what my nephews were taking away from this scene and how it fit with all the other gender lessons they had learned.

Studies show that today’s children, especially boys, live in a media culture that is awash in violence. The Henry J. Kaiser Foundation lists the following statistics on its media violence fact sheet:

- Nearly two out of three TV programs contained some violence, averaging about six violent acts per hour.
- Fewer than 5 percent of these programs featured an anti-violence theme or pro-social message emphasizing alternatives to or consequences of violence.
- Violence was found to be more prevalent in children’s programming (69 percent) than in other types of programming (57 percent). In a typical hour of programming, children’s shows featured more than twice as many violent incidents (fourteen) than other types of programming (six).

- The average child who watches two hours of cartoons a day may see nearly ten thousand violent incidents each year, of which the researchers estimate that at least five hundred pose a high risk for learning and imitating aggression and becoming desensitized to violence.[4](#)

Alongside television's steady diet of violence is an enormously profitable video game industry, which generated worldwide over \$26.5 billion in 2007. While many of these games depict images of hypersexualized violence, one of the worst, and most profitable, is *Grand Theft Auto*. When *GTA IV* hit the market in April 2008, on its first day of release it sold a record 2.5 million units in North America. Sociologist Matt Ezzell describes some of the scenes from a video montage of *GTA IV* called *The Ladies of Liberty City: Very Bad Things*. These scenes focus specifically on the sexual interactions between Niko, the protagonist of the game, and women, most of whom are prostitutes and strippers.

The Ladies of Liberty City opened with graphic images of women stripping, pole-dancing, and giving the protagonist a lap-dance. The next scene showed Niko shooting a woman in the middle of the street. It went on to show Niko picking up prostitutes. . . .

He approaches one woman who says, "I'll suck your cock real nice." "Get in," he replies, before driving her to a baseball field. Once parked, he says, "You get what you pay for, right?" The woman sits on his lap. As they bounce up and down, the woman squeals, "Fuck the shit out of it! Yeah, you nasty fucker!" They finish, and Niko says, "Life is strange, don't you think?" The woman gets out of the car and walks away. As she does, Niko pulls out a gun and shoots her several times. You can hear her scream as Niko says, "Stay down or I will finish you off !" She does not get up.[5](#)

These sorts of messages targeted at boys help shape the ways they develop their masculine identity. As boys turn into men, these messages are in turn absorbed into their sexual identities, and the more media they are exposed to, the more they become desensitized to the visual depiction of violence, no matter how brutal or sexualized that violence is.[6](#) In this emotional economy, porn is appealing; it offers men a no-strings-attached, intense, disconnected sexual experience, where men always get to have as much sex as they want in ways that shore up their masculinity. The sex acts are always successful, ending in supposed orgasm for both, and he is protected from rejection or ridicule since in porn, women never say no to men's sexual demands, nor do they question their penis size or technique. In this world, men dispense with romantic dinners, vanilla sex, and postcoital affection and get down to the business of fucking. In porn, sex is the vehicle by which men are rendered all powerful and women all powerless; and for a short time a man gets to see what life would look like if only women unquestionably consented to men's sexual demands.

For some men, especially those who are overconformists to masculinity, gonzo is going to be instantly appealing because they can easily identify with the male performer's show of extreme masculinity and violence. However, it would be a mistake to assume that all men instantly and easily

take to gonzo porn since that would assume that all men are similarly socialized into a more violent masculinity. Men who adopt a less “manly” type of masculinity may well be turned off by watching a woman being called a cunt as she is roughly penetrated by any number of men, so pornographers, being the savvy businessmen they are, develop techniques to groom reluctant gonzo viewers. While these techniques vary, what they all have in common is the way they render away the humanity of women in porn.

How Porn Socializes the Users: The Bitch Loves It

The first and most important way pornographers get men to buy into gonzo sex is by depicting and describing women as fuck objects who are deserving of sexual use and abuse. It is especially important for the pornographers to shred the humanity of the women in the images, as many porn users have sustained and intimate relationships with women in the real world. Even though we live in a culture that devalues women, men still manage to develop loving connections with mothers, sisters, daughters, friends, lovers, and wives. To erode any empathy that many men may have for the women in porn—an emotion that would most likely end up derailing the porn experience as they might feel sorry for her—the porn needs to construct porn women in ways that clearly demarcate them from the women men know and love.

The most obvious technique that the pornographers employ here is to verbally segregate this group of women by calling them cunts, whores, sluts, cumdumpsters, beavers, and so on. In gonzo, a woman is never referred to as a woman; instead, she is reduced to a sexual object. But reducing women to just sex objects is not enough for gonzo, and they are further referred to as dirty, nasty, and filthy. No wonder we never see any kissing or touching in porn. Who would want to kiss or caress dirty, nasty, filthy cunts/whores/sluts?

In porn, sex is framed as not just consensual but as something that the woman seeks out because she loves to be sexually used. This also is a method for lessening any guilt the user may feel as he can reassure himself that she is not being hurt, or if she is, it is what she wants. Take for example the description of “Gauge” on the site Ass Plundering. “Gauge gives a new meaning to the word whore. Any less than 2 guys at once means she won’t be satisfied. Her tight holes need to be ravaged by big cocks at the same time for her to have fun.”⁷ The images surrounding this text show Gauge being orally, vaginally, and anally penetrated by three men at the same time. One of the images shows a red, raw, and swollen anus while others show her face contorted as she is supposedly having an orgasm. The images and the written text together, as well as the movie, which presents her begging for more, collude to seduce the viewer into believing that no matter how cruelly her body is being treated, she belongs to a special breed of women that enjoy sexual mistreatment.

Similarly, on the British Bukkake site, the text reads, “If you like horny bitches that like to drench themselves in hot jizz, this is the site for you. These girls know how to do it up right and you’re guaranteed to get off when you see their dripping faces full of cum.”⁸ These women (or rather, “horny bitches”) are not, according to the text, being coerced by anybody to participate in acts that most

girlfriends or wives would absolutely refuse to do. Rather, we are told that the “horny bitches” are different from the women the user knows because they actually seek out and enjoy being debased.

The process of dehumanizing a group as a way to legitimize and justify cruelty against its individual members is not something that porn producers invented. It has been a tried and trusted method adopted by many oppressors; the Nazi propaganda machine effectively turned Jews into “kikes,” racists defined African Americans as “niggers” rather than humans, and homophobes have an almost limitless list of terms for gays and lesbians that strip them of humanity. Once the humanness of these individuals is collectively rendered invisible by their membership in a socially denigrated group, then it is that much easier to commit acts of violence against them.

In porn, the women’s lack of human qualities often results in men’s inability to see just how violent the sex act is. No matter how cruel the sex, the one question I can always count on hearing from a man after my presentation is, “Women enjoy what they are doing, so why is porn a problem?” Of course, these men have no empirical evidence to support this, just their observations of the porn that they masturbate to. When I ask them if they would like to see their wives, girlfriends, or sisters in this position—in an attempt to humanize the porn performers—they are quick to respond that their loved ones are different from the women in porn; their women would never “choose” such a job. The image these men seem to have of women in porn is of a woman accidentally stumbling onto a porn set one day, and realizing that this is what she has been looking for all her life. That these women are acting, and may have come to porn not so much through choice but due to a lack of alternatives is rarely considered because this premise threatens to puncture the fantasy world created by both pornographer and user.

The degree to which users will fool themselves into believing that porn performers have found their one true vocation is evident all over porn discussion sites, where men swap stories about how most porn performers love what they do. On Adult DVD Talk, Nookie Monster contributes to the discussion on the “Porn chicks who Love it” thread by singing the praise of Cynthia in the movie *Exotica 6* because, by the end of a three-way scene, “she is quivering all over and her legs twitching. Halfway into the scene she goes crazy as she gets the living hell fucked out of her. Its one of the best scenes I have ever seen in porn. . . . She starts out joking with the guys, almost taunting them before they even fuck, and by the end of the scene that have broken her pride and made her like a women [sic] possessed quivering and screaming for more cock and to be fucked harder.”⁹ If we take a close look at what is happening to this woman, with lots of men treating her body in ways that even this porn user describes as getting “the living hell fucked out of her,” then no wonder she is quivering and twitching, though it could well be due to exhaustion and pain, not sexual arousal. Needless to say, no one participating in the thread mentions this possibility.

The men¹⁰ who post to these porn discussion boards also buy into the myth that doing porn is not something a woman does for money, but that it’s a calling, and it is their love of sex—not the need to earn a living—that drove these women to the industry. Some of the men on the porn sites do acknowledge that these women get paid for what they do, but they assume that the money is seen as a

kind of icing on the cake, since they would choose to do this even if no money was involved. Take, for example, a recent discussion on the Sir Rodney porn review site. The reviewer (Sir Rodney) is discussing the site West Coast Gang Bangs, which he finds “especially exciting because it’s real, featuring real amateurs (mostly swingers) fulfilling a fantasy. Honestly, we get extra hard just writing about it.” Well, it turns out that some of the users aren’t getting hard enough as they recognize some of the women from other porn movies and feel angry that they have been deceived. But Anonymous chimes in with a post to salvage the “real amateurs” fantasy by offering the helpful insight that even though they are porn stars, it doesn’t mean that they “cant [sic] swing on the side!”¹¹

The more ardent fans who post on Adult DVD Talk attend porn promotion shows (such as the Adult Entertainment Expo) and talk about how these women are so hot for sex that they just spontaneously started making out with each other or talked dirty to the customers. Malte Decker, for example, evidently had firsthand experience of just how much Ava Devine is “hungry for cok [sic]” since during a signing and interview he was at “she grabbed most of the man’s [sic] dicks . . . and she was rubbing my dick throughout the whole interview and started sucking it after the last question.”¹² Irrespective of whether this story is true or not, the point of the post is to reinforce just how much porn stars supposedly love their job.

Pornstarlover is particularly perturbed about a movie featuring one of his favorite porn stars, Delilah Strong, where she “fucks two black guys and has them cum into ‘shot’ glasses. She ends up swallowing 5 loads but after the first 3 she looks pretty uncomfortable. In fact, she looks like wanting to throw up at the last cumshot. In the end she is all sunshine again and it may have been just acting.”¹³ The way this fan, and indeed many others, talk themselves into believing what they want to believe is to construct an argument that Delilah was acting when she looked “uncomfortable,” and not acting when she was “all sunshine.” It is hardly worth pointing out here that it could well be the other way around and the real acting was managing to look happy after drinking five different ejaculates.

If porn performers truly don’t like what is happening to them, then the fantasy that users have erected about women and porn begins to crumble, and they are left with the stark reality that maybe these women are not “fuck dolls,” but are instead human beings with real emotions and feelings. If this is the case, then users would have to admit to becoming aroused to images of women being sexually mistreated. For those men who are not sexually sadistic or cruel, this could well be psychologically intolerable, so they have to work very hard at maintaining the fantasy that porn women are indeed unlike most women they meet in the real world.

Ultimately, however, the ability to keep porn women separate from the women they date and hook up with is eroded as the more men watch porn, the more the stories become part of their social construction of reality. Men may think that the porn images are locked in that part of the brain marked fantasy, never to leak into the real world, but I hear over and over again from female students how their boyfriends are increasingly demanding porn sex from them. Whether it be ejaculating on their partner’s face or pounding anal sex, these men want to play out porn in the real world. And from male students I increasingly hear how they thought that they could separate the two worlds, only to find out

that industrially produced porn images do indeed seep into their intimate lives.

Boring Porn

Once the user has been socialized into gonzo porn, there is an abundance of images for him to choose from. At first these images may well be exciting, but the more seasoned user will soon find that porn, because of its formulaic nature, becomes predictable. There are X number of minutes given over to oral sex, often leading to the woman gagging, then anal, then double penetration, and then ejaculation. And while the next film may have a few more minutes on one particular act, or may have anal before oral, the story unfolds in much the same way as it did in the previous films, and the images begin to look the same. Missing from porn is anything that looks or feels remotely like intimacy and connection, the two ingredients that make sex interesting and exciting in the real world. Drained of these, porn becomes monotonous and predictable to the point that users need to eventually seek out more extreme acts as a way to keep them interested and stimulated. This is why, Robert Jensen argues, pornographers “offer men sexual gymnastics and circus acts that are saturated with cruelty toward women; they sexualize the degradation of women.”¹⁴

Realizing that heightening the level of degradation is what keeps men interested in and aroused by porn helps us to understand why today’s porn looks the way it does. The acts that porn amplifies are designed to deliver the maximum amount of degradation. Probably the most degrading of acts in contemporary porn is ass-to-mouth (ATM), where a woman is expected to put a penis in her mouth that has just been in her anus (or in another woman’s anus). What heightened sexual enjoyment is to be had for the man from going from an anus to a mouth outside of the actual degradation of the woman? That some fans enjoy watching this debasement is evident on the Adult DVD talk; in a thread called “Dirty A2M & Messy Anal-Bloopers & Unexpected Leak,” fans post their favorite scenes and discuss them in detail, with some listing hundreds of scenes where women were clearly shown having to suck a penis covered in visible fecal matter. Mediasmart 2, one of the most energetic of posters on this thread, describes a scene from *Assault that Ass #1* in vivid detail:

There is intense anal pounding followed by the guy pulling out, sticking the dick in poor Paris’s face to cum, and as he cums the dick rubs on her chin and lips and lo and behold it smears brownness all over her. There’s no ambiguity whatsoever to this scene, it is crap, and lots of it. To cap it all, having seen the dirtiness on his cock, the guy then mutters “suck” in a low guttural voice, and Paris, perhaps not even realizing yet that her chin is entirely brown, sucks away. It’s the closest thing to a moment of Zen you can ever get in porn, your eyes are just glued to the screen just waiting for her to figure out what is going on.

Similarly, Balou shares his favorite scene: “At 1:54:17 Rocco pulls his cock out of the ass of a dark haired hungarian amateur slut and makes ATM to a blond girl. He doesn’t hit her mouth at once, so his cock is first at her nose. When he slides into her mouth, you see a very little dark piece of shit

remaining on her nose. . . . Gentlemen, this thread must never die, I love dirty anal so much.”[15](#) The pleasure for many of these fans seems to be in watching the real looks of disbelief, disgust, and distaste flash on the women’s faces when they realize just what they are going to have to put in their mouths. It is a pleasure gained from watching somebody totally dehumanized and humiliated.

The desire to see women utterly degraded and powerless explains in part why anal sex has become so popular in porn. In the real world this act is becoming more common,[16](#) but I doubt that many women are seeking out the type of anal sex that the pornographers depict. What generally makes anal sex so appealing in porn is the potential pain and harm that robotic and mechanistic thrusting can cause women. One porn executive explains why users like anal: “Essentially it comes from [every man] who’s unhappily married, and he looked at his wife who just nagged at him about this or that or whatnot, and he says, ‘I’d like to fuck you in the ass.’ He’s angry at her, right? And he can’t, so he would rather watch some girl taking it up the ass and fantasize at that point he’s doing whatever girl happened to be mean to him that particular day.”[17](#) Similarly, one producer at the Expo told me that he was specializing in anal-themed movies because “men like to see just how far the women will go with the cocks up her ass. I like to see them pushed to the edge, so I make films I like to watch.”

A quick glance at the Adult DVD Talk forum suggests that fans are indeed on the lookout for scenes where the woman is suffering real pain. A popular thread—called Painful Anal—has numerous posts where fans list their favorite scenes and discuss at great length their enjoyment at watching the woman cry, scream, or simply become too overwhelmed to do anything. Nunsploitation, for example, especially likes a scene from *Dirty Anal Kelly in Rome* where the male performer Rocco is very rough with “Kelly.” At one point, “he takes her arms, holds them behind her back and just plows her ass mercilessly showing no concerns for her yelps and howls. Her face goes from angry and defiant to overwhelmed.” For Nunsploitation, this is an “awesome anal scene.” Another post, this time by AC Cream, illustrates how users are quick to point out that they normally don’t get off on violence, but these scenes are especially appealing:

The most real painful scene I’ve ever seen is Gang-Bang Auditions #3 from Diabolic. The scene with Aspen Brock. When it gets to where Lexington is in her pu\$\$y & Mr. Marcus is in her a\$\$.

The guys start asking her questions like “You like that dick in your a\$\$?,” but she is in such pain her answers are hard to understand. She tried to say something like “I loooove iiiit,” but then the tears started flowing. I think 1 of the other guys in the scene said “aaaah look, she’s crying.” . . . In this scene combined with the humor & the rareness of a porn chick not handling dick gave me major Bone-age I recall.[18](#)

For those men who really like to see pain and suffering, nobody is better to watch than performer Max Hardcore. I have seen many Max Hardcore movies, and it is hard to believe that he is anything but a sexual sadist. In a 2005 interview, he outlined the type of acts he “pioneered”: “Positions like pile driver, where I would gape the girls [sic] asses wide open, and provide a clear view for the

camera, was unknown before I came along. I also created the technique of cumming in a girl's ass, having her squeeze it out into a glass, and then chuck the load down." He continued by boasting that over time he "developed many other unique maneuvers, most notably, vigorous throat fucking, creating gallons of throat slime over a girl's upside down face, and even causing them to puke. A little later, I started peeing down their throats several times during a scene, often causing them to vomit uncontrollably while still reaming their throats."¹⁹ The story of Max Hardcore is really the story of contemporary porn. Once considered an outlier by the industry for his extreme porn, he is now increasingly being brought back into the fold. A sign of his newfound status was an October 2007 appearance on *The Howard Stern Show*. As porn becomes more extreme and cruel, men like Hardcore move from the margins to the center of the porn world. Although he was found guilty on ten counts of federal obscenity charges in June 2008 and was sentenced to forty-six months in prison, Hardcore remains a major figure in the porn world, not least because he was one of the founding fathers of gonzo. Veteran of well over a hundred movies, possessed of a large fan base and a well-traveled Web site, Hardcore will likely find that his stay in prison has little impact on his popularity.

At the 2008 EXPO, I walked over to Hardcore's booth, which was surrounded by male autograph seekers. It was easy to spot him in his signature cowboy hat, but as I approached, hoping for an interview, I froze. There was the real Max Hardcore doing what he does best, raging at a woman. Red in the face, sweating profusely, walking up and down like a caged animal, and speaking through gritted teeth, Hardcore let a female porn performer have the full force of his fury. The woman, who, I later found out, was his "girlfriend" Layla, sat perfectly still, not moving a muscle. At one point, Max Hardcore shook with rage and Layla began to cry. The scene was frightening, and she clearly was intimidated as she went to the bathroom to get away from him. I followed her to see if she was okay, only to watch a Max Hardcore security guard take her by the arm and firmly walk her around the convention hall, controlling her every move.

The scene reminded me of *Hardcore*, a British documentary that follows "Felicity" from London to Los Angeles as she attempts to break into porn.²⁰ Felicity is shown being cajoled and manipulated by her pimp-agent to perform anal sex. Felicity steadfastly refuses, and we watch her pimp become increasingly angry, telling her that to make real money in porn you have to be willing to do anal. In the end, the pimp sets up a meeting between her and Hardcore, obviously in an attempt to get Hardcore to do the grooming necessary to persuade Felicity to agree. While she is clearly frightened about meeting him and has heard he is abusive to women, Felicity nonetheless agrees to go to Hardcore's house. What follows is a dreadful scene where Hardcore walks into the room and within a few seconds is anally raping her. Felicity tries to defuse the situation by joking with him, and all the while he is thrusting his penis into her anus. She tells Hardcore repeatedly that she is scared of him, and he tells her to relax, that he is not really scary at all.

The next scene shows her agreeing to make a film with Hardcore, and while we don't see what he does to her, we hear him gagging her with his penis. Felicity then runs up the stairs, crying hysterically. Hardcore runs after her and soothes the crying Felicity, stroking her hair and telling her

that she is special and unique. As she begins to calm down, he suddenly changes his tone and becomes abusive, calling her “a fucking loser” and “fucking pathetic.” His rage builds to the point that he is red in the face as he accuses her of shirking her responsibility as a single mother. Thoroughly intimidated, Felicity agrees to continue filming, at which point the documentary crew members step in and talk her into leaving. But by then it is too late, as Felicity has been thoroughly brutalized.

The methods that Hardcore used to groom Felicity are the very ones he adopts in his best-selling series *Cherry Poppers*. The series features Max Hardcore bullying, coercing, and seducing women dressed as schoolgirls into agreeing to perform oral, anal, and vaginal sex. The techniques Hardcore uses in his movies to debase women are still among the most extreme in gonzo, and many porn fans who post to Adult DVD say he is too violent for their tastes. Another Porn Addict, for example, shares his current distaste for Hardcore movies:

A couple of days ago I took delivery of a couple of Max Hardcore discs . . . which I viewed soon after in anticipation. Until this point I hadn't seen any of Max's releases for a long time. Previous to this I had seen maybe 8 or 9 of Max's films (all seen around 1997). . . . All I can say is this. His films are not the same as they used to be. One of the titles that I bought—*Max Faktor 11*—is so extreme in parts that I've actually forced myself to destroy it so I don't watch it again. Yes there were parts here and there which I enjoyed seeing, and I loved Max previously for what I perceived to be his anal porn excellence/dolly-girl themed movies. But this was something else. I've heard some say that the girls in his movies are acting, but certainly with girl number 3 in this flick I'm sure that this can't have been the case. In real tears in parts it was obviously too much for her and I hate to think of the mental mark it has probably left on her. Nobody deserves that Max. Also, girls giving head is one thing. But ramming your cock into their throats so that they have to suffer such obvious physical discomfort and unease? Hey Max, that's really not right dude.

VirginSurgeon attempts to explain to Another Porn Addict how some women actually enjoy the treatment handed out by Hardcore.

You have to understand a'lot [*sic*] of these porn performers enjoy sex, enjoy being dominated to the point of tears.

Something tells me you didn't [*sic*] have this problem until after you “popped your load” why else would you destroy the tape, you liked it, and that scares you.

This is a problem with your guilt, not Max Hardcore!!

Another Porn Addict responds by stressing that he did not feel guilty but rather disgusted, even though he makes clear that he did enjoy parts of the movie. To which VirginSurgeon responds:

Fair enough, you drew your line in the sand and don't wish to cross.

You have to understand that many of the videos you watched and enjoyed may have had a woman [sic] who disliked or didn't want to be doing what she was doing, but she was a good enough actress not to show it. Therefore, is it okay to facilitate your orgasms just as long as your [sic] not intuned [sic] to the feelings of the performer, hence if you act well but don't like the sex, it's okay—you're not being disrespected, however if you're a bad actress, and don't like the sex, I'll boycott the manufacturer?[21](#)

Notice here that the debate eventually shifts away from actual violence in the real world toward how good at acting the women are. VirginSurgeon has his own line in the sand: as long as the woman is acting like she enjoys it, it's fine because then the viewer can feel less guilty; that is, as long as he is not "intuned" with her real emotions.

The question here is how did VirginSurgeon, and, to a lesser degree, Another Porn Addict, end up so completely disconnected from women's pain that they can watch Hardcore gag a woman until she vomits, drench her in urine and then make her drink it, and then have a civilized debate about the pleasures involved in masturbating to such scenes? One key factor leading to this level of disconnection is that porn trains men to become desensitized to women's pain. As one fan, Anon, explains to Another Porn Addict: "A few years ago I joined Maxhardcore.com to see what all the fuss was about and, while I found a lot of the girls really hot in their teeny outfits, Max's attitude and actions in a lot of the clips left me feeling shellshock, sickened and dirty. Probably how you felt watching that batch of DVDs. But. Just as porn moves on, so did my tastes, and gradually I realised I was enjoying Max's extreme scenes more and more—whether that's [sic] corruption or desensitisation I don't [sic] know. All I do know is that I've gone from being a one time Max hater to a Max Hardcore fan."[22](#) Anon's analysis is borne out by studies that show that the more porn men watch, the more desensitized they become. The words he uses to describe his feelings when he first watched Hardcore's movies—"shellshock, sickened and dirty"—speak to a powerful negative reaction. Yet he then says his tastes moved on and he began to enjoy the scenes. It would appear that Anon became desensitized to the women's pain since it is impossible to enjoy Hardcore's images if you have any empathy for the women. They look so distressed and in such pain that it feels like you are watching actual torture.

From Fuck Dolls to Real Dolls: How Fantasy Meshes with Reality

The loathing and contempt toward women evident in Max Hardcore's videos might be more overt than in most gonzo porn, but it is only a more extreme version of what is played out on women's bodies throughout the industry. No surprise, then, that the message boards are filled with users who, like pornographers, refer to women as whores, cunts, and sluts. I was thus surprised when one day I came upon a message board that refers to women as "honey," "sweetie," "darling," "beauty," and "my love." How is it that these particular women escape the hate, I wondered.

After some research, I realized that what made these "women" special is that they never

complain, never say no, and have three orifices always available for penetration, irrespective of time or place. They don't grimace when a man ejaculates in their mouth, and their anuses and vaginas have no limits. They have absolutely no needs outside of pleasing men, they ask for nothing, they don't require dinner or conversation before sex. For their total acquiescence, these women are rewarded with outpourings of love. In fact these women are so loved that men are even willing to marry them as "a nice way to show your devotion to your lady." Perhaps unsurprisingly, these perfect "women" are not human beings at all but life-sized sex dolls.[23](#)

I interviewed one of the representatives of the company RealDoll at the Expo in Las Vegas, and he told me, with a straight face, that these dolls are "great for men who want to learn how to be with a woman." Not only do these dolls make men "feel more confident around women, they also help men to develop relationships." Advertising itself as the "home of the world's finest love doll," RealDoll has been in business since 1996. One of their products will set the buyer back about \$6,500, and he will have to wait an average of eighteen weeks to get his doll delivered. The Web site boasts:

Our dolls feature completely articulated skeletons which allow for anatomically correct positioning, an exclusive blend of the best silicone rubbers for an ultra flesh-like feel, and each doll is custom made to your specifications.

We offer an extensive list of options, including 10 female body types and 16 interchangeable [*sic*] female faces. RealDolls are completely customizable, all the way down to the make up and fingernail colors. If you've ever dreamed of creating your ideal partner, then you have come to the right place.[24](#)

On the site the prospective buyer can also purchase accessories, which include RealDoll clothing, pubic hair patches ("trimmed or natural"), extra wigs, extra tongues, extra eyes, and a labia repair kit.

RealDoll was given a boost in 2007 with the release of the popular movie *Lars and the Real Girl*. Lars, played by Ryan Gosling, is depicted as a sweet, childlike loner who has difficulty making friends with real people. He orders a RealDoll and takes her around town, introducing her as his girlfriend. During the interview at the Expo, the RealDoll representative told me that the company had served as consultants for the film and that the week it was released, their RealDoll Web site got so many hits, it crashed.

When reading men's postings on the Doll Forum,[25](#) it often feels like they have indeed found their "ideal partner." They talk at length about the personalities of their dolls and share what feels like personal details of an intimate sexual relationship. Dollylama's post on his four dolls' "style and personality" provides insight into just how real these men take their dolls to be. He starts with his description of Natasha, who is a "a sweet sensual vixen who likes to cuddle and watch movies and . . . loves to loung [*sic*] around in her black teddy and an old blue silk shirt of mine." He then compares her to his other dolls, Brandy, Tiffany, and Amber (posting printed as written):

Brandy is a southern trailer girl who loves to watch porn and go down while I play with her nice boobies. Brandy is a little sex maniac with a strong oral fixation she is not big on conversation but she usually has her mouth full.

Tiffany is very quiet and demure. she loves her french maid outfit and white fishnet body stocking. recently she borrowed brandys boots and refuses to give them back. now Tiffany prefers to lounge on the sofa and watch action flicks or sit back and stare at Brandy while she goes to town. Recently she has been sneaking in to my room to get a little more naughty. (I knew it was a matter of time before she would let out her wild side). It is usually the quiet ones that get the most freaky.

Now the girls are all jealous of the newest arrival Amber Lynne . . . Amber arrived last night. She quickly found an auburn and blond curly wig, black gartered stockings and a white tank top (what is it with girls stealing my shirts?)

Amber kicked Natasha to the foot of the bed and made herself at home. Amber has turned into a bohemian artist that like to hog the bed. I think she is wanting to take over the place as leading lady. time will tell. . . .

So this is how my girls have developed their own unique personalities. each one is very different from the rest. am curious as to how other dolls have made themselves known²⁶

Other men discuss their own particular personality preferences of their ladies, lest you think that Dollylama is the only man to anthropomorphize his dolls.

Owners swap messages about how to dress, clean, make up, and have sex with the dolls, as well as to commiserate when dolls are sent off to be repaired or cleaned. One man waiting for his doll is told that all of the forum members have been through it, and waiting doesn't get any easier with time but "its [*sic*] worth every second."²⁷ The forum is full of pornlike pictures that men take of their dolls. As one owner posts a picture, the others weigh in with words of admiration ("she's so hot") and expressions of envy ("you lucky bastard"), and never with negative or unpleasant-sounding postings about the somewhat strange behavior exhibited by an adult male dressing up a doll that he routinely sticks his penis into.

For many of the men on this message board there is a sense that the porn world and the real world have meshed into one, and they have ceased to know the difference between fantasy and reality. It is tempting to see these men as a breed apart from regular porn users, who supposedly do know the difference between the two. But, as we shall see, the fantasy versus reality debate is itself dogged by the fantastical thinking that men can masturbate to porn images and walk away from them, untouched by the misogyny that makes pornography interesting and unpredictable.