

Male Reflections on the Roots of Pornography

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Many progressive and sympathetic men are confused about the appropriate role for themselves in the feminist dialectic. The major role men can play, I believe, is relentless self-examination and candid revelation. We need to tell the truth to ourselves, to each other and to women, augmenting feminist analysis by revealing from the male experience the myths, lies and deceptions which buttress the prevailing patriarchy.

I think of Geraldine Finn's excellent but difficult essay, *The Politics Of Sex*, published in Canadian Forum. The essay argues that the critical issue around pornography should not be censorship vs freedom of expression but rather sex itself and the politics of sex (note: not sexual politics) as manifest in gender differentiation, gender hierarchy, and oppression. Geraldine Finn points out that gender emerges essentially from oppression, not from anatomy or "natural functions." She sees pornography as a direct extension of the social relations of gender oppression -- a relationship and condition, not merely an "object" viewed. To try to discriminate between healthy erotic sexual imagery, and the oppressive and pathological, is pointless. It is "sex" which should be challenged -- the politics of sex and gender -- not merely good taste.

I know that many progressive women and men will read Finn's essay, recoil, and dismiss her perceptions (Is she really saying she is opposed to sex?!). Yet without accepting all that she says (I can't agree with her strategic position on censorship) I am convinced that Finn's insights and challenges are extremely valuable in moving our understanding and attitudes forward.

Sex itself, not merely its more crude and vicious representation, is the problem. Only by re-experiencing (al-

most re-creating) sexuality, and transforming our sexual unconsciousness, can we begin to reverse the cruel and deadly degeneration of human society which has unfolded over millennia. Let me reflect on this notion a little from a male perspective.

It is not a radical notion that all human relationships are an extension of identity and inner relationships. That is, love of others is a direct extension of love of self; hatred of others is an extension of self-hatred. Love is a mirror in which we see ourselves loved. We love others for loving us as the person we wish to be; we hate others for rejecting or negating us as the person we are.

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### Prevailing socialization violates and retards the emotional growth of male children

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Human society has developed in a way that prevailing socialization critically violates and retards the emotional growth of male children. (It violates female children also...) It is not outrageous to assert that generally adult males are in a state of arrested development. Most men are, in effect, aging (not maturing) adolescents, false and controlled personas grounded in profound sadness and anger at what has been taken from them, destroyed in them -- their emotional selves. Males are stunted half-creatures living a script which only reveals their own lines, not the whole drama; uni-dimensional characters who subconsciously know that the once emotionally intact child-man

has been maimed. Many feminist theorists assume that men want the lives they have, the control they have; that men want children and an owned woman. I have never met a man who really wants these things. Many, and perhaps most, men believe they want them; and there is no doubt that there is a socialized role expectation: husband, father, which men play with gusto. But sit down in any pub (alcohol is the key) with virtually any man and soon you will see the anger and confusion lurking below. Men understand less than women who they are and how they got there. Men feel victimized by life and society, but can't find a villain, except women. They don't know who they are, so they concentrate on what they are. And as persons discontinuous from their essential child-selves, they cannot mature, have nothing left to grow.

Men act not as persons but as personas. In every man there is a precious child who has not been allowed to grow, who is forever imprisoned by rejection -- by society and by self. And that child is cruelly hurt and sad. He was unacceptable and was put away, put down, hidden, and another boy manipulated to take his place, a "little man." Gradually every act and thought of the little man was calculated on what was approved behaviour -- on what was acceptable and what was not, on what worked and what did not. Finally the little man had his persona in place, controlled; and any emotions which threatened were also controlled.

Some little men are very good, and some are very bad. Most are in-between. None are real, and none are "happy." All are dangerous, to others and themselves. They do not like, let alone love, themselves; nor can they believe that anyone worth anything could love them. Because of



course the child inside, now silent and forgotten, knows that he was not acceptable, was not loveable, was not loved.

So we have adult men. They hate themselves. They hate the world that imprisons their real self. But this is not recognized consciously without extraordinary intervention or trauma. So their self-detestation is transferred -- not usually to society or other men, for this would be to reject their persona -- but to women, the mother-creature whose promise of life was not kept. Misogyny is the extension in the world of male pain, anger and self-hatred.

All men hate women. Theorists like Andrea Dworkin are quite correct when they make this assertion. Not all men hate all women all the time; but all men do hate women. The analysis is stylized here, the lines drawn simply. But I do not believe I distort: the fundamental reality remains, and on some level it is a reality that every woman knows.

I have had this discussion enough to know that few will be able to accept this assertion. Too many of us love specific women -- lovers, wives, daughters and mothers. And too many women love their men. This essay cannot fully resolve this paradox. I can say that for me the resolution lies in the fact that love and hate are not exclusive states, but in fact are co-existent manifestations of the conflicts in our identities as men and women.

Men do love those women who love and care for them, and who mediate their real selves to maintain the delicate balance of domestic and/or romantic theatre. Men can love women who are "women" and who positively stroke the fragile "male" persona. But let a woman challenge conventional roles and stereotypes, confront irrational and violent structures, refuse sexual complicity, and assert her right to share in an "absolute standard of human dignity" (Dworkin) as a human person undefined by projected roles -- dare such a woman step forward and she will be hated as a strident witch, bitch, nag, castrating butch, dyke, hag .... and there is no hate on earth as deep or as vicious as this age-old hatred.

This hostility for women who refuse to be "women", who refuse their role in the male script and who insist on authentic, free personhood, is universal. It is in this sense that men really do hate women.

My other caveat is that there is a broad spectrum of degree and scale of misogyny; the tolerance of a specific man for free, authentic and autonomous women, and the depth of his personal woman-hatred depends upon the extent to which he has been able to transcend the male pathology of self-hatred and anger. More and more (largely as a result of the feminist influence as well as other social movements) we find men who have come to know, accept, and love themselves without needing "to call upon the universe to justify their existence" (Auden); and to the degree that this transformation has taken place their potential for hate and violence has been diminished, and their potential for love of others

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### Men must come forward and affirm the feminist analysis and ethos and help promote the feminist transformation

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greatly enhanced. It is such men who I believe must now come forward to affirm the feminist analysis and ethos, and help promote a feminist transformation.

Where is sexuality in all of this? Essentially nowhere. It got left behind with the little boy. What remains is a quite ludicrous situation of sexuality being defined in remarkably limited terms; and what is most incredible is that the definition is entirely in the realm of fantasy.

Sexuality is universally associated with a "sex act", the essence of which (as Dworkin points out) is "penetration," one human being (woman) by another (man). The product of this act is supposed to be a sensory climax: orgasm! This is seen to be "natural," that is, the way things are in Nature as Nature intended it to



be. Any other acts are unnatural or "perverted."

This of course is an anthropological reality not a biological one. But this makes it no less real, and this fantasy is taken for granted as conventional wisdom in spite of the very lives that each of us lead, and the things that we do, with ourselves and each other. The reality of sexuality and why the myth of penetration is so unquestioned needs some scrutiny.

Sexuality has, in fact, little to do with sex, with orgasm, for women or for men. Sexuality has to do with love of self and identity. And it has to do with sensuality and emotion--the sense and feeling of self as one with others. Sexuality is not differentiation, one from another; it is a bonding through emotional, intellectual, and physical intercourse with others. This is true for all humans, male and female.

The biological (gender) dichotomy, male and female, is related essentially to procreation and to some extent child nurturance. It has little to do with sexuality although relying on sexuality as its impetus. Sexuality itself includes the capacity for parenting but it is not essentially a parenting capacity.

Sexuality, finally is not merely or essentially a relatingness-male-to-female; and as physically expressed sexuality need not have anything to do with penetration. Penetration is a convenient sexual option for men; sexual intercourse for women neither requires nor presumes penetration.

If anything demonstrates the validity of this re-examination of sexual essence it is the age-old prevalence of homosexuality, male and female. Homosexuality has, through the ages, been cast as the great perversion, and in fact, all sex not directly manifest in heterosexual coital penetration has been cast as less than natural. Yet the fact is that all of us know that a preponderance of sexual orgasm is achieved without

coital penetration. In fact masturbation is probably the single most common source of orgasm. Coital penetration is the norm, but it is not the only norm: variety is the norm. And key here is the fact that homosexuality itself is not only common: it is a significant norm, among both men and women.

This is not news. We all know this. Yet homosexuality is hated by society, especially by right-wing society. This is not because homosexuality is a perversion; but because it is a norm and an option which must be seen to be a perversion; if homosexuality were not strictly sanctioned then all of the sexual taboo which forms the underpinning of the male hegemony would collapse and most particularly the stricture of compulsory heterosexuality for women.

**I**n spite of the taboos around compulsory heterosexuality, taboos which are pervasively reinforced in the public image of men, male homosexuality (or bisexuality) is an integral part of the male-stream infrastructure and culture, most specifically in those areas most clearly dominated by men: athletics, police and military, the Church, and the tight male networks of the Establishment and ruling class. This is not surprising -- to the contrary, if it were not so it would be remarkable. Male homosexuality in these contexts is a natural and logical extension of male socialization in society: disengagement from the female, and total identification with the male ethos. Yet it is also a rebellion against the very myths and angry pathologies of manhood and enforced mating which are pressed on individuals by the prevailing belief system.

There is nothing but convention to suggest that homosexuality is by itself unnatural or "perverted" in this context. And there is no doubt that it is a norm. Yet the taboos exist. Especially against women who quite as naturally want to express their sexuality in free ways.

What is key in all of this is that penetration of females by males remains the symbolic and concrete axis of the vicious oppression of women in society. It is also the mythic

totem which drives the fantasies and activities of men, and underscores the essentially pornographic quality of their sexual capacities and the limitations of these capacities for meaningful, mature and loving sexual relationships (with either sex).



This is in spite of the fact that all men know, although perhaps they don't know they know, that the sexual myths are lies and nonsense, that the sexual "imperative" defies both experience and rationality. And all men know that if they could choose between love and sex, between pornography and intimacy, they would always choose love and intimacy. And all men know that it is not at all sex

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By the millions.**

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which drives them (the stupidest of all myths believed by both men and women). What drives men is their sense of loss and grief for the child lost inside, who only wishes he could get himself back, and be accepted; to love and be loved.

Why do these myths persist? Why do male pornographic fantasies dominate? The pathology has gone beyond the individual and permeates culture. Male self-hatred in a male dominated society becomes a culture of death in life, morbid, violent and without compassion. The insane are normal. The lie is the truth. And men who hate themselves do not know what they know. And they fear those who challenge death by loving and living, be they women or men. Women love life; men, hating themselves, love death. Men fear life, and fearing life, fear women. To kill their fear men kill women: figuratively, sexually and really. By the millions.

Many women will say to theorists like Geraldine Finn, "Thank you, what you have said is true and helpful." But many more will say "Silence! This is not the way it is...."

But we men could say to the few and the many, "Yes we hate you because we hate ourselves; and yes, we could kill you if we don't change..." And we men could begin to say to each other that we can liberate the imprisoned children in our souls, and free ourselves of our pornographic mortification, our fear of life, and our violent ways.

Then we could begin to live and let live; to love and let love. And a real social transformation could and would begin.

A final word about the political context of this imperative. Many of us are involved in promoting social and political change. And in this on-going struggle we share the polemics of activism and transformation. In this regard I believe that feminism offers the most radical present critique of our society, and the most radical prescription. This position is not essentially about equal opportunity within prevailing oppressive structures but about transforming these structures more fundamentally than any prevailing ideology envisages. Central to most movements, including contemporary socialism, is the tenet that feminist concerns, while critical, must be integral to, but secondary to, and merged with the larger social analysis and political project.

**F**eminists know that this is not possible. A feminist transformation, with a progressive rehabilitation of men from their historic sexual and social pathology must precede any socialist transformation. It is the only way an authentic transformation can take place. A safe world for women based on one "absolute standard of human dignity" is no more likely to emerge from a socialist reality than from a capitalist/fascist one unless it is preceded by and based on a fundamental feminist transformation as its historic impetus.

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