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PORN AND ME(N): SEXUAL MORALITY, OBJECTIFICATION, AND RELIGION AT THE WHEELOCK ANTI-PORNOGRAPHY CONFERENCE

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In the Spring of 2007, I interviewed a panel of four men, who along with me, had just attended a national anti-pornography conference at Wheelock College. As we discussed topics ranging from masturbation to sexual ethics, many described their continuing struggle to reconcile their desires with deeply held moral beliefs and political convictions. This essay recounts various events from the Wheelock conference and draws on the published work of prominent male feminists such as John Stoltenberg, Robert Jensen, and Sut Jhally. I argue that, by failing to adequately account for the pleasures of objectification, the radical feminist analysis of pornography faces a dual risk: remaining marginal and irrelevant, and/or being absorbed by the much larger Christian anti-pornography movement.

INTRODUCTION

In March of 2007, Wheelock College in Boston, MA hosted a national conference entitled: “Pornography and Pop Culture: Reframing Theory, Re-Thinking Activism.” During one of the Q&A’s, author John Stoltenberg (2007) approached the microphone to speak of his pain over Andrea Dworkin’s recent death and the importance of continuing her spirited opposition to pornography and sexual violence against women.¹ Looking out over an auditorium of around 500 supporters, he then turned to

The author wishes to acknowledge Lisa Henderson, Lynn Comella, Sut Jhally, and Robert Jensen for comments made on previous drafts. This article was presented in June 2008 during the “Media, Spiritualities and Social Change” Conference hosted by the Center for Media, Religion and Culture at the University of Colorado. To view the narrated powerpoint of this talk, which includes video clips of XXXChurch and Porn Nation, please go to: <http://www.chrisboulton.org/academics/porn.html>

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address the men in the room—a conspicuous minority. Porn, he said, was our problem, too. Men needed to take responsibility and fight the very sex industry that they made possible. He pointed to three young men sitting in the back of the auditorium. He had lunched with them earlier.² They were good guys and were doing inspiring stuff. They were evangelical Christians.

It should come as no surprise that a male feminist like Stoltenberg, who holds a Masters of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary, should connect with conservative religious activists—they both share a profound distrust of masturbation. For Stoltenberg (1990), the act is too often driven by a memory of previous sexual objectification: “He remembers the body he has seen, he memorizes its details, the particular shapes of its sexual parts, and the memory continues in him vividly . . . he reviews the pictures mentally, and the reviewing helps him come” (p. 42). As for the Christians, they were at Wheelock representing XXXChurch, an online organization that declares lust to be a sin against the will of God and therefore urges Christian men to stop looking at porn and stop masturbating altogether. To date, 60 million people have visited the site and over 300,000 have downloaded porn accountability software—activity that has prompted high-profile coverage from networks like CNN and ABC (XXXChurch Website, 2007). In just 2 years, another Christian anti-pornography event called “Porn Nation” has visited 80 college campuses, surveyed over 24,000 students, and been featured on ABC’s “20/20” and “The View.” It would seem that anti-porn activists of all stripes know that sex is a sure-fire way to get attention. But in the numbers game, the feminists are coming up short.³

Perhaps sensing that the left was getting scooped on a popular issue, another prominent male feminist, Robert Jensen (2007b), implored the secular progressives at the Wheelock Conference to embrace “sexual morality,” noting that “75% of the American public self-identifies as Christian” so we all live in “an incredibly religious culture” and “churches are vehicles for organizing.” Elsewhere, Jensen insists that porn is, in fact, a left issue that, once wrested from the right-wing, could provide welcome leverage “at a time when the left is failing to find traction with the public” (Dines & Jensen, 2005, p. 1). Furthermore, like Stoltenberg, Jensen (2007b) insisted that porn is an issue that should concern both genders, reminding the Wheelock Conference attendees that it also harms men: “The process required to be able to masturbate to orgasm in pornography is self-objectification as well, you are robbing yourself of your own deeper sense of being a human being.” In his appeal to the male consumers of porn, Jensen’s language of thievery and self-destruction squares quite nicely with Rob Bell’s (2006) take on sexual objectification: “When I treat somebody as an object, I rob them of what it means to be

fully human and in the process I'm robbing myself—we both loose, we both get our full humanity stripped.” But, in contrast to Jensen, Bell is not a left-leaning academic. He is a wildly popular evangelical social conservative—founder of one of the fastest-growing mega-churches in the country and a media darling who's been described as the next Billy Graham (Falsani, 2006).⁴ Undeterred by such stiff competition, Jensen (2006) is charting a crusade of his own—joining a church as a “secular Christian” or “Christian Atheist” in an effort to mobilize the congregation around progressive issues. In other words, for Jensen, the anti-pornography movement is not just about sex. By framing pornography as a potential wedge issue—one that could split the religious right by realigning “sexual morality” with the feminist critique of patriarchy, white supremacy, and corporate capitalism—he clearly has bigger fish to fry.

Since the so-called “porn wars” of the early 1980's that split feminists into two factions, “anti-porn” and “anti-censorship,” most debates around pornography have occurred between and among women (Rubin, 1993a). But now, with the resurgence of anti-porn activities, both in academic and religious contexts, more men are speaking out against the sexually explicit media consumption of other men. Indeed, much has changed in the last 20 years. In the past, men who wanted to get their hands on pornography were often forced to venture out to “the seedy part of town” or risk ordering explicit material through the mail. Today, through a variety of personal digital devices ranging from computers to cellphones, they can get it anywhere, anytime, and often in completely private settings.⁵ So, as both male church leaders and male cultural critics pull pornography back out into the open, three important questions emerge. First, what is it about pornography in particular that inspires feminists to break bread with evangelicals? Second, what would drive men to go sit in a room where many of their heterosexual desires are both vividly evoked and actively condemned? Finally, if we accept the anti-porn argument that the bulk of mainstream pornography represents “bad” sex, then what would the “good” sex look like? To explore these questions in more depth, I attended the Wheelock Conference and later followed up with a group of men that I met there.

THE ANTI-PORNOGRAPHY AGENDA

The Wheelock Conference took place over the course of 3 days. Throughout the weekend, various speakers voiced their enthusiastic support for a radical feminist analysis which holds that pornography both cultivates and contributes to the subordination of women in general. In her opening remarks, Gail Dines (2007) described the gathering as the resurgence of a new national movement to liberate women from misogyny and

oppression. She paid homage to founding mothers Andrea Dworkin, Katherine McKinnon, Diana Russell, and Susan Brownmiller: “Women who made it possible for us today to understand pornography as a form of violence against women that degrades, humiliates and debases.” Dines was frequently interrupted by applause and, at the completion of her talk, hundreds rose to their feet to give her a standing ovation. Rebecca Whisnant (2007) later took the podium to defend the radical anti-pornography legacy of so-called “Second-Wave Feminism” against the more liberal forms of “third-wave” or “fuck-me feminism” that empower women through the “adaptive preferences” of reclaiming and embracing their own sexual objectification. To illustrate her point, Whisnant offered an anecdote of a recent talk she gave at a well-known liberal arts college. After putting forth the radical feminist critique of pornography, she fielded a question from a young woman in the audience who asked,

‘Well, what if we all just get together and we tell the porn industry, ‘This isn’t what we want? [laughter] We want something else, we want something more complex, more diverse, less hateful, less one-dimensional, and so on.’ Wouldn’t they have to change then if we all just got together and told them what we want?’

At this point, Whisnant paused for comedic effect, then continued. “Now, one hardly knows where to begin here . . . [laughter]. . . . It’s kind of sweet really, I almost hated to burst her bubble. [more laughter].” It would seem that, for Whisnant, any notion of a “pro-feminist pornography” was a contradiction in terms—the punch line to a joke—and as the story went on, the crowd knowingly chuckled and twittered at the young woman’s charming naiveté. To conclude, Whisnant declared that, since the porn industry is always “hunting for market share at any cost,” its cultural contribution “will never be equality, it will never be complexity, it will never be anything thoughtful, or reflective or meaningful, not ever.” Whisnant’s dour vision went unchallenged—perhaps because any anti-censorship feminists who might have defended pornography as a legitimate form of sexual expression were not invited to speak at the conference. As a result, the gathering came across as highly partisan, already convinced that pornography posed a clear and present danger to their collective well-being. The atmosphere at Wheelock was, in short, electric—like a spirited revival meeting of true believers.⁶

Two other events at the conference deserve special mention. First, on Saturday night, Sut Jhally (2007a) premiered *Dreamworlds 3*, a documentary critiquing sexist portrayals of women in music videos. The film, though supporting some of the central tenets of the radical feminist platform, nonetheless sparked a contentious debate during the question and

answer period, suggesting that the apparent consensus of the resurgent anti-pornography movement may be more fragile than it seems. I will return to this incident later in the essay. Sunday was largely dedicated to the demonstration of an anti-pornography slide show—a tried and true instrument of the radical feminist movement.⁷ This new, up-to-date, power-point presentation included screen-grabs of several hard-core pornography websites and was made available for attendees to take with them so that they might present the slide show to their own communities, raise awareness about pornography, and attract more people to join the feminist cause. Indeed, it seemed to me that the recruiting and training of slide show presenters was, in fact, the central purpose of the Wheelock conference.

MY AGENDA

When I first read John Stoltenberg (1990), I was ready to listen. It was the early 1990's—the height of political correctness on college campuses—and I was enrolled at a small, private liberal arts college. My professors had introduced me to a world rife with social injustice, a place where straight, middle-class, white males like me enjoyed our rights and privileges at the expense of others. It was a world that I desperately wanted to change, so I dove head-first into critical social theory and radical politics. But while my “confrontations” with racism and classism were largely limited to the polite academic exercise of studying the civil rights movement and labor history, the sexism thing hit me right between the legs. Unlearning my prejudices was one thing, but unlearning my sexual desires? Doubled over in shame, I came across *Refusing to be a Man*, a collection of essays largely adapted from speeches that John Stoltenberg delivered during the late 1970's and 1980's at various conferences and liberal arts colleges similar to my own. Thus, much of the message that so enthralled me in the 1990's was originally formulated almost a generation earlier in the context of the feminist “porn wars.” As a man, Stoltenberg confessed our collective sins of sexual objectification, but unlike any minister I had ever known, he told me that real “manhood” was, in fact, a myth and that there were more options out there—a better world was possible. I believed him then, and part of me still does. It is these two pasts, both the sexual politics of the early eighties and my later embrace of Stoltenberg's style of radical feminism in the early 1990's, which provide my prologue for the present: a political landscape of abstinence-only sex education, evangelical anti-pornography crusades on college campuses, and the academic anti-pornography revival at Wheelock College.

Before moving into the heart of my analysis, I should emphasize that I attended the Wheelock Conference as a participant observer. This is to

say that I came with my own hopes and expectations. As the son of an ordained minister who forged a career as a liberal academic, I have long-straddled the divide between faith and reason. I have absorbed Christian messages about lust and sin and then felt them reverberate with more secular notions of sexual objectification. I am also a staunch supporter of gay rights, masturbation, and sex education in the public schools. So, I came to Wheelock with a set of concerns and contradictions that I hoped the conference would help me resolve. In other words I did not, and still don't, fit neatly into either the "anti-censorship" or "anti-pornography" category. Therefore, I will not be adjudicating the re-emergence of this old debate. On the contrary, those who insist on maintaining such a stark binary strike me as being more committed to nursing the wounds of the past than fully embracing what Gibson-Graham (2006) have called "a politics of possibility in the *here and now*" (authors' emphasis, p. xxvi). So, instead of declaring a winner, I will attempt to occupy, if only for a short time, a place that is neither squarely within the confines of a particular camp, nor necessarily equidistant between the two.

METHODS

While at Wheelock, I struck up conversations with about a dozen men attending the conference. I later informed them that that I was a graduate student enrolled in a course entitled "The Politics of Sexual Representation" and that, for my final project, I was writing a paper about men's experience of the conference and porn in general. I invited the men to join in an e-mail discussion group (herein referred to as the "virtual panel") so that I might gather some of their reflections. To both minimize traffic and keep their identities confidential, I proposed a forum whereby I would moderate the discussion by compiling their responses into a digest format and protect the identity of each participant through the use of pseudonyms. I would then blind-copy the resulting message to the entire group. My stated goal was to create a safe space where the men would feel comfortable to be open about their feelings and opinions. I advised them that their participation in the study would be completely voluntary and that they would be free to leave at any time. Six men signed up.

The virtual panel lasted 2 weeks and consisted of three formal rounds and a couple of follow-ups (for a complete list of questions, see the Appendix). Each digest included a brief overview of some common themes, questions for the next round, and excerpts of their responses. I had originally hoped that the men would respond to each other's

statements and so encouraged them to make the virtual panel more like a dialogue or round-table discussion. This did not happen.⁸ Instead, each man dutifully answered each of the questions that I posed. Also, two men dropped out after the first round, leaving me with four who followed through until the end. By and large, these four men were quite dedicated to the process, often writing several paragraphs in response to a single question. In broad strokes, the four men were white, in their 20's and 30's, and included 1) Joe, an academic researching pornography; 2) Steve, an advocate for at-risk youth; 3) Zack, a college student; and 4) Mike, an Evangelical Christian representing XXXChurch. In order to get a read on their political/moral world views, I asked the group to describe their stance on a variety of sex-related issues. Joe, Steve, and Zack all supported gay rights, premarital sex, and sex education. Moreover, all three of these men tended to lean to the left on social issues. Mike, the evangelical Christian, did not respond to my query directly, but an earlier response makes it pretty clear where he stands: "I was a man, and the worst kind of man at that, a white, Republican, member of the 'religious right,' clearly the guy that many of the attendees viewed as 'the enemy.'" But Mike added an important caveat about his experience at Wheelock:

Even though I agreed with much of what was being said, the statistics, the conclusions, it was like I needed to dig in a bit because of where it was coming from. It was as if there was a little winged Rush Limbaugh over my shoulder that I had never seen before whispering into my ear. . . . I asked God to help me set aside the stereotypes that had unexpectedly surfaced. Indeed, if I was asking these feminists to be open-minded to my ministry, wouldn't it be hypocritical of me not to be open-minded to this audience? After offering up that prayer, I felt released of it and settled into the remainder of the weekend with a renewed set of eyes and ears.

It would appear that Mike thought of himself as a social conservative infiltrating a liberal event and doing his best to be an ambassador of goodwill. The other men reported a generally positive evaluation of the conference ranging from "life-changing" to "informative and thought-provoking." Like Mike, some felt challenged at times simply by virtue of being one of only a few dozen men amidst hundreds of women but also noted how powerful it was to hear first-hand testimony directly from women who have experienced various forms of sexism in their lives. Steve, who attended the conference with his wife, reported having an intense debriefing with her afterwards, as did Zack with his fiancée, as did I with my own girlfriend.

PORN AND MASTURBATION

When Stoltenberg (1990) describes masturbation, he tells a story of frantic desperation, of a man flipping through a skin magazine or recalling the memory of a sexy stranger in order to achieve an erection and ejaculate: “he is searching from picture to picture, searching from body to body, from part of body to part of body, from pose to pose, rhythmically stroking and squeezing and straining” (p. 42). But his description doesn’t stop there. After the intense surge of the orgasm, the pleasure fades quickly:

. . . and he feels a moment’s relaxation and resolution, a fleeting consolation, then gradually or suddenly, he feels unease again, disconsolate, incomplete and cut off, and the body he had imagined has vanished, there’s nobody else there, and he doesn’t want anybody else there, he wants to be utterly alone. (p. 44)

Perhaps, after the post-orgasmic crash, “the man” will swear off the stuff, but Stoltenberg knows that this cycle is doomed to repeat itself.⁹ When I first read these words in college, I felt a sharp pang of recognition. It was so terrible and yet so wonderful to have such an intimate part of my life described with such clarity. It was as though he knew what masturbation could be like—the urgency of the desire, the ecstasy of the release, and the despair of the aftermath. The switch from all-consuming passion to utter indifference was often so brutal and abrupt, it would take my breath away. Now I wanted to know, what was it like for other men?

I soon learned that, for my informants, porn was almost always a sufficient, although not always necessary, condition for masturbation. Moreover, all the men on the virtual panel had done both, most often in tandem.¹⁰ For Joe, porn provided an important, and ultimately deceptive, form of guidance:

I saw my first pornographic magazine in my early teens, and was excited and captivated by the images—and narrative stories—in the magazines. It seemed to me that these images and narratives “spoke” a truth. . . . As I was developing my own identity, sexual and otherwise, pornography seemed to be a script playing in the background . . . It gave me a false sense of security, alleviating the anxiety that I was both petrified by and inexperienced in sexual acts.

Joe no longer masturbates to pornography, but does not condemn masturbation per se. He still wonders if porn robbed him of something fundamental

about relating to another human being, like the ability to admit vulnerability by saying “I’m scared and have no idea what I’m doing.” Steve described a struggle that has clearly played a central role in his life and one that struck me as intensely familiar:

Yes, I have used pornography in the past and masturbated to it on some occasions. This is a shameful topic for me, and I experience considerable self-recrimination about it. This was a particular problem for me several years ago when my wife (then partner) was having difficulty in our relationship. At that time, pornography was not just a sexual fantasy, it was something of an emotional fantasy—that I could find some other, better satisfaction that did not require all of the emotional work and distress of a real-life relationship. I spent considerable energy trying to get at the emotions underneath—the ways that I might use pornography in anger or in order to avoid intimacy. This work was very helpful, and it allowed me to deconstruct some of my desires. Meditation was also important. At the same time, I acknowledge that there is still some secret twinge of excitement at the prospect of seeing a naked female body that I am not ‘supposed’ to see. My response to this spike is to remain vigilant and present for those reactions and to try not to judge it. I interpret this as a biological urge with a heavy dose of cultural conditioning. I expect to work at this conditioning for the rest of my life, though I doubt that it can be completely eradicated. At the same time, I continue to work towards merging emotional and spiritual intimacy (and love) with my sexual urges. I am grateful for having a life partner who is willing to engage in these topics with me, since most of the time I find few arenas where men can be open about these thoughts, feelings, and urges which are oft criticized in feminist circles (or glorified and made vulgar in male circles).

While Steve wrestled with the guilt and sense of dissatisfaction surrounding his unwieldy sexual desires, Zack had the most matter-of-fact response, noting that, living in a college dorm, he’s completely surrounded by porn. He doesn’t buy it, but he sees it all the time. So, for Zack, masturbation happens but is “not a habit” especially since, now that he’s engaged, he can “find those urges satisfied in other ways.” Mike, appearing quite comfortable in the testimonial format, told of how he and a junior high friend used to hide their “porn magazines” in a room off the sanctuary in their church. At the time, he justified his own masturbation as a way to release tension and honor God by remaining a virgin, but he knew it was a selfish act. Later, as an adult, he would explore online porn out of “curiosity,” but then “go to some compulsive place that would consume hours looking.” As predicted by Stoltenberg (1990), Mike would eventually become

consumed by guilt and disgusted with his lack of self-control and resolve to quit using pornography, “until once again I would let my guard down and find the cycle starting all over again.” Thus, for Mike, porn was an unhealthy outlet for lust—a powerful temptation and a sin against God. But beyond that, there was a far more practical reason for him to stop:

Masturbation is essentially training a guy for 60-second sex. You spend far more time with your hand than you do with a partner and consequently when you are with a spouse you’ve conditioned yourself to wrap it up in record time. So why not forego jerking off for a more pleasurable, longer lasting, experience? An experience that ultimately she will respond better to by the fact that you staying in the game will enable you to satisfy her, which will ultimately make the experience better for you as well. I know this is still a self-focused argument, and it plays out a bit self-centered, but it also makes a lot of sense that the most satisfying sexual relationship is when we give our partner our best, when we place their needs over our own. It goes back to the idea that sex was created for our ultimate enjoyment and that by pursuing it in the context that God created it in will be our most satisfying experience possible.

Thus, for Mike, sexual pleasure is a good thing, provided it takes place within the confines of marriage (“the context God created it in”)—but masturbation—an essentially solitary activity—separates him from his wife. Mike is grateful to the church for helping him to break his addiction: “it wasn’t until I admitted my fixation and found accountability that I was able to shake this free.” And Mike’s self-control did not go unrewarded. Thus, for many of the men, pornography and masturbation often conspired to displace something precious: for Joe, it was an initial sense of openness and vulnerability; for Steve, satisfaction with his spouse; and, for Mike, longer lasting intercourse.

WHAT IS SEX FOR?

During his remarks at Wheelock, Jensen (2007b) advised anti-pornography activists to steer clear of men who have “truly lost their souls” in favor of seeking out more friendly allies—namely, men who “are struggling to be decent” and trying to stop patronizing sexist institutions like the porn industry, prostitution, and strip bars. Which begs the question, if sex is not for hire, then what is it for? According to Mike, the purpose of sex is to sanctify the monogamous, heterosexual commitment of marriage and give glory to the Creator. Joe, the academic, was more ambivalent. On the one

hand, he opposed, in principle, the establishment of any single, restrictive norm of sexual morality. And yet, on the other, he still craved a solution to the problem of “bad” sex:

I am all for an ethics of sexuality, where individual desire is respected, understood, and safe, while acknowledging the need to deconstruct desire; where equality, intimacy, safety, and yes, justice, all combine towards an ethical sexuality, and where issues of power are understood as shared and common (as opposed to hierarchical).

As a theory of “good” sex, this is pretty lofty and abstract, comparable to Jensen’s (2007b) invocation at Wheelock of “a sense of connection to another person, a greater awareness of one’s own humanity and sometimes, even a profound sense of the world that can come from meaningful and deep sexual experience.” In trying to distance himself from both religious conservatives whom he sees as “very narrow, rigid, and reactionary” and sexual liberals—“if it feels good, do it”—Jensen is walking a very thin line: sex is not mandated by God, but remains special nonetheless. Critics of the anti-pornography movement such as Rubin (1993b) have questioned whether sex acts really merit such a heavy burden or “excess of significance” (p. 11). Similarly, Kipnis (1996) points out that other exploitative forms of employment (i.e., the garment and poultry industries) are shot through with domination and coercion and yet fail to attract the moral scrutiny and outrage reserved for the pornography industry (p. xi). Though no one expressed these sorts of doubts at Wheelock, Zack, the college student, shared Joe’s suspicion of enforcing some sort of arbitrary system of good vs. bad sex, for such a world would surely violate his “liberal, and especially feminist, leanings.” On the other hand, he expressed concern that “our society has drifted too much towards an anything goes type of rules with sexuality.” Mike, the conservative Republican in the group, also opposed moral relativism and called for “a collective line of demarcation” or “a standard that can be pointed to as appropriate.”

Though coming from opposite sides of the political spectrum, Zack and Mike both invoked what Rubin (1993b) has termed “the charmed circle,” a collusion of “religious, psychiatric, and popular” ideologies that deem “good” sex as, among other things, heterosexual, married, procreative, noncommercial, and done without the aid of pornography (p. 13). But since this circle is, in practice, more like a bull’s eye, much of our sexual activity fails to nail it with absolute precision thus leaving us to sort out “where to draw the line” (p. 14). For Rubin, consent is the only line that matters; provided that all parties are willing participants, anyone should be free to express their sexuality in any way they see fit. But for Joe,

Zack, Mike, and Jensen, sex is too important—too special—to be left up to the discretion of only those individuals directly involved in the act. Like Rubin, they are activists seeking a general consensus around principles of sexual justice, but their vision is more prescriptive in the sense that they seek to endorse a bounded set of sound sexual practices—standards to which they might hold others accountable.

Unlike the others, Steve did not propose a particular strategy for dealing with the problem of pornography. He was neither interested in drafting social policy nor policing other people's bedrooms, but instead turned inward.¹¹ Steve was most concerned with how porn piques his desire for other women and thus helps create "dissatisfaction with who I am or what I have or what my life is now." In other words, as a Buddhist, he experienced his sexual fantasies as a path to suffering. For some, pornographic fantasies are just a lark—exciting while they last, but of no great consequence to their lives. But for Steve, they taunt and tease, sewing seeds of discontent. And just as his longing is not directly caused by pornographic texts alone—it would surely persist without them—nor would it be satisfied by simply asking his wife to join him in some sort of kinky sex act. Steve's fantasy, by definition, is about other women who are *not* his wife and thus presents a direct challenge to his monogamous circumstance—a commitment that, for various emotional and practical reasons, he is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Thus, Steve's predicament is reminiscent of what Kipnis (1996) called "the anxious psychic balancing acts we daily perform, straddling between the anarchy of sexual desires and the straightjacket of social responsibilities" (p. 167). My point here is twofold. First, sexual fantasies often pre-exist, and far outlive, exposure to pornographic media. Second, for some, pornography provides a welcome escape while, for others, it simply casts a spotlight on the prison walls.

A LITTLE OBJECTIFICATION

On day two of the conference, Sut Jhally premiered *Dreamworlds 3*, the latest installment of a documentary series that compiles clips from music video networks like MTV in order to demonstrate a consistent pattern of sexist depictions. The film shows men throwing money at prostitutes and strippers, dousing them with water and alcohol, throwing cold cuts at naked female bodies, and even sliding a credit card through a woman's buttocks. In his somber voice-over, Jhally (2007a) pulls no punches:

The video "Tip Drill," by Nelly, achieved a great deal of notoriety because it made explicit what is implicit in much of the rest of the culture: that women's bodies are there to solely please men and be under their control. To be bought and sold like so many pieces of meat.

For Jhally, these images represent expressions of adolescent fantasy pandering to the “male heterosexual, commercial pornographic imagination based on the degradation and control of women.” The film culminates in a sequence cutting between 1) images of women being willingly doused in music videos, and 2) actual police footage of women being forcibly doused and sexually assaulted in New York’s Central Park.¹² The implication here is that the fictionalized images may have provided “scripts” of acceptable behavior that the assailants then acted out in real life. But Jhally takes care to emphasize that the images on MTV do not—in themselves—cause sexual violence. Rather, he argues that visual fantasies in music videos help shape our cultural understandings of what is considered both desirable and permissible:

While disembodied and fragmented images of women cannot directly cause sexual or violent assault, they do rob women of their humanity and create an environment where attacks against them are not treated seriously. They cultivate attitudes and values that legitimate and justify the assaults as self-deserving and provoked by the victims. (Jhally, 2007a)

Reaction to the film during the Q&A session split largely along generational lines. For example, the disclaimer that pornography does not directly cause sexual violence angered older segments of the audience. A woman identifying herself as a psychologist described the images as a toxic path to sexual addiction and pathological behavior—adding a prediction that, within 5 years, brain scans would demonstrate a direct causal link. Ann Simonton and Diana Russell, feminists who have been fighting pornography since the early 1980’s, both objected strongly to the use of so many offensive images and chastised Jhally for failing to include the voices of strong women. These protests were welcomed with applause. On the other hand, most of the college-age women in the room defended the film, noting that, as the intended audience of both MTV and *Dreamworlds 3*, they see this stuff everyday: “But that’s the reality!” Moreover, one young woman noted how the film captured “everything that’s popular right now” and added “I watch MTV and I will never watch it the same way again.”

Perhaps the most provocative line in *Dreamworlds 3* was this: “There’s nothing wrong with a little objectification” (Jhally, 2007a). The real problem, according to Jhally, is when an entire system of images, such as those circulating on MTV, is so utterly dominated by sexual images of women that any other aspects of women (professional, spiritual, athletic, intellectual, etc.) are overshadowed. This qualification was entirely too

subtle for Russell (2007), who took the opportunity to promote her book *Against Pornography: The Evidence of Harm* (1993) as a challenge to Jhally's thesis. This resulted in a heated exchange:

Russell: I believe you said that there's nothing wrong with a little bit of objectivity.

Jhally: Objectification.

Russell: Oh, objectification.

Young woman: I think he said there's nothing wrong with women being sexual.

Simonton: Oh no! It was objectification. [murmuring and laughter]

Russell: And um, I have a problem with saying 'Well, a little bit's alright.' You know—

Jhally: I'll be happy to take [your] book and look at it . . . And when I said that I wanted this to be a political critique and not a moral critique, that was precisely where I was. I mean, there's a broader discussion around this. Which is, you know, when you don't know anyone, when you first see someone, you know nothing about them, except that they're an object. The only thing you know is what they project. And then, you can go from being an object to being a subject. But in that opening moment—In fact, where I got this from, the person who convinced me of this was the feminist theorist Wendy Chapkis¹³ in her book—

Simonton: Oooh! [lots of groans]

Woman 1: That's the problem! [raucous laughter] That's that problem!

Woman 2: She's a nightmare.

Russell: You're listening to the wrong people!

Man: Was she wearing leather at the time?

Jhally: Well, I suggest you really read the book carefully—

Woman 2: We've read it. We've read it.

Jhally: Well, so have I and obviously, I've got a totally different understanding of the complexity and the depth and the contradictions that she wants to get to. And if you want to talk about sexuality and you can't talk about contradiction and you can't talk about depth, then you're not in the conversation in the culture! You're not in a conversation around sexuality! You can have a very simple conversation where you know what's right and you know what's wrong and it's a very, very comforting world—you know—I hope you

enjoy yourself in that world. But it's not the real world and it's not the real experience.

Woman 2: I don't think you should get so defensive.¹⁴ We're still—

Woman 3: We still love the film!

It's interesting to note that it was a young woman who read the film as defending her right to be sexual. Though she was quickly corrected by the group, it eventually became clear to me that her interpretation was, in fact, much closer to the intended meaning of the text: there is nothing inherently wrong with taking pleasure in objectifying others or seeking to be objectified. Indeed, Jhally argues that a world without these things would make sexuality virtually impossible. Therefore, the problem is an issue of homogeneity and scale: the same sexist images, repeated over and over again. The irony is that in order to make this immediately apparent to his audience—to make “explicit what is implicit” in the culture—Jhally needed to demonstrate what a lot of objectification actually looks like.¹⁵

It's no wonder that such a highly concentrated visual compilation of sexist music video clips would cause an anti-pornography pioneer like Russell to dig in her heels. How could she possibly assent to “a little bit of objectification” when the past 30 years of appeasement to pornography had now come to this? Hoping to debunk Jhally's (2007b) assertion that “these *are* images of pleasure,” Russell (2007) heckled him with the rhetorical question, “Whose pleasure?” I presume that, for Russell, the difference between the authentic desires of young women and what Jhally (2007a) called the “heterosexual, commercial pornographic imagination” of their male contemporaries was, indeed, self-evident. In other words, how could a self-respecting heterosexual woman possibly get pleasure from watching other women dancing around in bikinis?

While space does not permit a thorough exploration of the various ways in which audiences might read media texts in unexpected ways, two major points merit mention. First, the pleasures of sexuality are not limited to the urge for physical contact (having sex) but also include the potential to attract others (feeling sexy). Thus, heterosexual male and female viewers might both glean pleasure from the same image of a bikini-clad woman for different reasons, the former through direct physical attraction, and the latter through admiration and aspiration. Second, theorists like Berger (1977) and Mulvey (1989) have argued that visual culture has trained women to survey themselves as men do. Therefore, even if women encounter pornographic images which they find to be personally repulsive, they may also embrace the images as pleasing to the male gaze. This is, to say the least, a complicated position. As Dines (2007) confided to the crowd at Wheelock, even a seasoned media critic and anti-pornography activist such as herself can look at women's magazines like *Cosmopolitan*

and think “I hate this, I hate this, I hate this, I want to look like this, I hate it, I hate it, I hate it!” Unfortunately, such acknowledgments of what Jhally (2007b) called the “complexity” and “contradictions” of sexuality were in short supply during the rest of the conference.

In their zeal to confront Jhally—the male authority at the front of the room—Russell and Simonton ignored the opposition sitting right next to them: namely, younger feminist women for whom sexualized images are their “reality” and extremely “popular.” Rather than being curious and asking why, the older women opted to stick to their guns and protect their younger sisters from themselves: you’re being exploited by your own desires—don’t you see? The lost opportunity here is that we get no clear sense of the older feminists’ relationship to sexual desire and pleasure. One is left to wonder, have they ever enjoyed being admired merely for their physical appearance? And, more importantly, can they empathize with young people, for whom sex may still be fresh, new, scary, and exciting? But instead of turning to their neighbors and reaching across the generational divide, the older feminists in the room turned on Wendy Chapkis, casting her in the role of scapegoat-in-absentia. So, why all the bad blood?

Simonton and Chapkis have a contentious history that goes back to the late 1980’s when Chapkis hosted “Fakir Musafar’s Torture Circus” at the Bulkhead Gallery in Santa Cruz—a performance that featured queer sado-masochistic scenarios including extreme piercings and whipping. According to Chapkis (2007), “Ann Simonton bought a ticket and sat front-row-center. After the performance, she called all of our advertisers and threatened a boycott of all of them if they didn’t disassociate from the rest of the series.” (p. 4). Simonton explained her objection this way: “What’s most dangerous and damaging is when they show a woman enjoying sexual abuse . . . I’m not attacking the homosexuality involved, it’s the glamorization of sexual violence that is presented to the public” (Ann Simonton quoted in Steinberg, 1991, p. 5). Just as Simonton was not interested in learning how sado-masochism actually felt for those who participated in the “Torture Circus,” Russell did not want to hear about young women’s embrace of to images that objectify female bodies. In other words, Simonton’s and Russell’s radical feminist analysis of pornography simply could not, and apparently still cannot, allow and permit certain variations of sexual desire. The inevitable conclusion is that women who enjoy bondage or deign to hope that strangers will find them sexy are just plain wrong—perhaps due to being abused as children or simply having internalized the sexist assumptions of the reigning patriarchy. In addition to conflating mediated sexual representations with lived sexual practices, this analysis ultimately holds that these women deviate from some sort of pure, natural, a priori sexuality that exists somewhere outside of the problematic power dynamics of the culture.

Gibson-Graham (2006), writing out of a feminist critique of political economy, offers insight into how such entrenched, absolutist views of an epic battle among two—and only two—diametrically opposed ideologies have “focused the political imagination—somewhat blankly—on a millennial future revolution” (p. xxi). In other words, the present is held hostage by an as-yet-unknowable future: sex will be good again, once we get rid of sexism. And, as a corollary, you’re either with us or against us such that when a feminist ally like Jhally (2007a) allows for “a little bit of objectification,” he is quickly reclassified as a traitor to the cause. Gibson-Graham (2006) argues that such reactionary politics are a symptom of leftist intellectuals’ penchant for “strong theory,” a grand narrative that pits a vast, powerful, conspiracy of social forces against a scrappy band of rebels seeking to overthrow the entire system. Furthermore, the analysis emerges from the bitterness of past defeats where “feelings of hatred and revenge toward the powerful sit side-by-side with the moral superiority of the lowly” (p. 5). It is, in short, a dead end: “the theoretical closure of paranoia, the backward-looking political certainty of melancholia and the moralistic skepticism toward power render the world effectively uncontestable” (p. 6). This is precisely the gloomy perspective that Whisnant mobilized through her anecdote of the female college student who dared to suggest that the free market could be used to create alternative forms of sexually explicit materials. Whisnant’s “strong theory” tells her all she needs to know about what will inevitably happen next—“it will never be anything thoughtful, or reflective or meaningful, not ever”—and therefore she must quickly disabuse this potential activist of the illusion that another world is possible, much less already here. Thus, it would seem that the “tough love” of anti-porn feminists like Whisnant, Russell, and Simonton rehashes old battles in order to batten down the hatches and shore up what they still presume to be an air-tight analysis. After 20 years at sea, the anti-pornography argument is fine, they say, it still floats. Yet any stowaway who starts poking holes with “feminist pornography” or “a little objectification” will be summarily thrown overboard.

COME HITHER AND REPENT

Mike came to Wheelock on behalf of XXXChurch, an organization that hosts “Porn and Pancakes” events at churches all across the country and distributes bibles at porn conventions. Founder Craig Gross even shares the stage with former porn star Ron Jeremy, debating him on college campuses and at rock music venues. As a young, hip, and charismatic rebel with a cause, Gross breaks the mold of the traditional evangelist—repeatedly chastising church leaders for their silence on pornography and daring Christian men to come forward, confess their “Sin,” and stop masturbating—all with a

machismo reminiscent of how fraternity brothers might initiate a new pledge: “Don’t be a wuss!” (XXXChurch Website, 2007). Gross may have mastered the role of maverick rabble-rouser, but he’s not the only Christian using sex to save souls. The “Porn Nation” tour features Michael Leahy,¹⁶ a born-again, “fully recovered pornography addict” and self-proclaimed spokesperson for “the over 20 million men and women in America who are sexually addicted” (Porn Nation Website, 2007). Gross and Leahy, having publicly condemned their own past sexual practices and pledged to abide by a strict regime of restraint, are now free to tell the “Dirty Little Secrets” we all want to hear—sex, sex, and more sex.¹⁷ As Foucault (1988) observes:

By making sex into that which, above all else, had to be confessed, the Christian pastoral always presented it as the disquieting enigma; not a thing which stubbornly shows itself, but one which always hides, the insidious presence that speaks in a voice so muted and often disguised that one risks remaining deaf to it. (p. 35)

Thus, it is up to Gross and Leahy to amplify porn and masturbation in the service of what Foucault called an even greater pleasure, that of “spiritual reconversion, of turning back to God, a physical effect of blissful suffering from feeling in one’s body the pangs of temptation and the love that resists it” (p. 23). This is to say that, despite any initial “appearance of a deliberate transgression” the frank testimonials and titillating content of XXXChurch and Porn Nation remain safely nestled within the confines of spiritual discipline (p. 6).¹⁸ Jesus exhorted his disciples to be “fishers of men” (Mark 1:17) and these guys know that, in a classic bait-and-switch, porn has become one of the most attractive lures in the evangelist’s tackle box. Sex, so easily shamed, helps recruit tortured souls hoping to escape a sordid past.

Christians are uniquely positioned to understand pornography—lust’s most notorious trigger—as more than just a harmless thought: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Jesus quoted in Matthew 5:27–28). Compare this to Jensen (1998b) who reports having trained himself to deny his own feelings of lust: “I have seen women on the street and created sexual scenes with them that were taken directly from pornography I had seen. This has not happened in some time: it’s one thing I no longer allow myself.” (p. 140) Thus, for Jensen, the answer to the problem of sexual objectification is really quite simple: just don’t do it. But when asked by a colleague to catalogue what good sex might look like, Jensen (2007a) is demure: “I have no interest in telling people where their sexual imaginations must end

up It's not a question of specific acts as much as it is a question of how we relate to each other" (pp. 157–160). He then embarks on a warm and fuzzy exposition on “mystery vs. magic, and heat vs. light” as the path that “leads to a place beyond pleasure and toward joy” (pp. 160–163).¹⁹ In trying to cobble together some sort of transcendental moral directive while denying his own didactic posture, Jensen has reached the outer limits of theory and yet refuses to make the jump to theology.

In his response to *Refusing to be a Man*, Tucker (1997) describes Stoltenberg as a spiritual purist seeking out the “nirvana of diffuse sensuality” (p. 100). He argues that beneath the vagaries of Stoltenberg’s “diffuse, polymorphous eroticism” (and, by extension, Jensen’s “mystery and light”) lies a deeply religious assertion that sex is not only special but sacred (p. 87). While there is nothing inherently wrong with defining one’s sexuality in sacred terms, both Stoltenberg and Jensen attempt to generalize this idea outside the context of a bounded religious practice. Theirs is an ostensibly secular, political project, which they endeavor to apply to society at large. So, as evangelicals and feminists compete for the right to use pornography as a vehicle to mobilize a popular base in support of their wider agendas, radical feminism seems doomed to be ignored or simply absorbed by the behemoth of XXXChurch and Porn Nation. Furthermore, as both sides try to attract and convert male users of pornography through explicit appeals to shame, the Christian critique offers a more attractive out: forgiveness.

My point here is that Jensen’s call for a “sexual morality” only makes sense if there is a system in place for accountability, penance, and redemption. Anti-pornography feminist men who refuse the Christian framework are putting themselves in a pretty tough spot. Their desires shall inevitably return, putting them at odds with their political commitments. And then what? They are left alone to confront the “contradictions” of sexuality described by Jhalley and Chapkis—that there is no necessary correspondence between what one desires and what one thinks is “right” or appropriate. These contradictions are precisely where most people live. And, for some, they are places of suffering. For example, Steve experiences pornography as the desire to possess what he does not have—a feeling that sparks cycles of self-doubt and discontent.

So, what does a secular anti-pornography sexual morality have to offer men like Steve and, for that matter, me? Jensen (2007a) suggests replacing shame with guilt. He argues that, while shame creates self-loathing about what one is, men should feel guilt about what they have done—namely, committing the act of viewing, and masturbating to, pornography (p. 169). Though this semantic slight-of-hand smacks of a “love the sin not the sinner” style work-around, let’s consider it for a moment. So, I jerk-off to a porn movie. I did it. I am guilty. If it was no big deal, then it

would just blow over. But, according to Jensen, it is a crime, a moral crime against women, and I am the perpetrator. So, what's the punishment? Of course, Jensen doesn't say and herein lies the problem. A crime without punishment cultivates a permanent sense of guilt with no avenue for catharsis. Call me crazy, but I'd rather serve the time or be forgiven. Perhaps cutting out pornography will help me to recover aspects of my humanity. But condemning the depiction of certain sexual practices as misogynist or profane, while refusing to prescribe and define what is proper and acceptable is like having hell without the heaven or sin without a devil to blame it on. This strikes me as the central dilemma of the secular, progressive, anti-pornography activist. They know the "bad" when they see it but are unable (or unwilling) to define the "good." In stark contrast to the murky waters of social liberalism, conservatives offer a normative, prescriptive, and crystal clear set of guidelines: sexual pleasure is for men and women to enjoy inside marriage . . . period. Furthermore, regardless of its various (and often dubious) political applications, Christianity is a highly developed moral *system*—a compassionate program for sexual purity that offers compensation for the discipline it demands. Thus, no matter how far you stray, as long as you are heterosexual, accept Jesus, and confess your sin, the revolving door of forgiveness will never leave you out in the cold—God's grace does not diminish or expire with repeated use.²⁰ Finally, by enlisting pathological terminology such as "sexual addiction," XXXChurch and Porn Nation offer men a convenient scapegoat. If the culprit is some sort of third party—like a disease or an evil spirit—then the men are off the hook: free to get cured, forgiven, and return to their "normal" lives.²¹ Compare this to Wheelock, where a secular anti-pornography revival meeting dabbled in religion and ended up with all the guilt and none of the pleasure. No wonder there have been so few converts.

CONCLUSION: THE POLITICS OF POSSIBILITY?

Revisiting Stoltenberg, I can now see what drew a preacher's kid like me to the radical feminist analysis of pornography. It was at once both utterly familiar and totally new. It offered the moral certitude of a "strong theory" that both condemned male supremacy and resonated with my religion's most challenging commandment, "thou shall not covet thy neighbour's wife." And, unlike my more reactionary cousins on the Christian Right, this new analysis dared to publicly name and attack the desires of those in power (heterosexual white males like me), while defending the rights of the oppressed (women, gays, etc.). So, for me, anti-porn feminism has always been underpinned by a deep moral imperative—and that's a good thing. The trouble is that the anti-pornography feminists at Wheelock did

not offer me any venue for confession, promise of redemption, or even—God forbid—sex education. To wit, I had to get my advice from Mike, the conservative Republican, who proposed that I “forego jerking off for a more pleasurable, longer lasting, experience.”

I went to Wheelock with the intention of openly talking to other men about our sexual desires, but soon realized that this would not be a safe space for such disclosures. Steve later confessed that “there were moments at the conference that I felt grateful that my internal experiences and inconsistencies were not visible to others in attendance.” I can’t imagine that many of us would have wanted to stick our necks out and admit that we were aroused by some of the images in the anti-pornography slide show—remember what happened to Jhally when he mentioned Wendy Chapkis? And now, with hundreds of churches across the country abuzz with “Dirty Little Secrets” discussed over “Porn and Pancakes,” the Wheelock Conference is vastly outnumbered.²² Jensen seems to think that the left can use a secular sexual morality to infiltrate the church, and Dines and Whisnant hope to recruit missionaries to take the anti-pornography slide show on the road, but when it comes to playing the shame game, conservative Christians have got the anti-porn feminists beat, hands down. They did invent it, after all.

But all is not lost. I showed up at Wheelock because other men like Stoltenberg and Jensen had the guts to speak up about their own experiences with porn and masturbation. Their candor and empathy drew me in, particularly when they addressed the downsides of living in a hypersexualized consumer culture. This is worth exploring further, but not at the expense of acknowledging pleasure—whatever form it may take. Desire is a chaotic thing that rarely lines up perfectly with our various moral and political commitments. Since we can’t always curate our cultural environment or control our biological urges, we must learn to live with the many “contradictions” of our sexualities. It is important that we ask ourselves how to do this, but surely guilt is not the answer. Likewise, those who point out the rampant sexism of most mainstream porn should not be so quickly dismissed as “anti-sex.” Though “feminist,” “queer,” and other alternative forms of sexuality do in fact exist on the fringes of the industry, the vast majority of porn tells a very narrow story about women, casting them as nymphomaniacs who perform whatever it is that men want them to do. In this way, the problem with porn—like MTV—is not any singular representation, but rather the *system* of images—most of which resemble and reinforce each other and are repeated over and over again. For example, in the most recent systematic content analysis of pornography, Wosnitzer, Bridges, and Chang (2007) coded 50 of the most popular videos and found that male aggression against women is not the exception, but the rule. So, when men control and dominate an entire genre where

the moral of most stories is female submission, then—no matter how one defines pleasure—media critics certainly have the right to question such a predictable plot.

As for porn and me(n), I can't help but wonder, what are the possibilities? Can we create a space outside the trenches of the anti-pornography and pro-sex debate? A place where we men might gather to linger in our desires, seek to better understand them, and explore creative outlets for sexual expression without rushing to judgment by calling the question? Could we leave shame *and* guilt at the door so that we might talk about all kinds of "good" sex in exquisite detail? Could we openly share the pros and cons of masturbation, swap sex ed tips, and inspire each other to make the move from sexual spectatorship towards sexual embodiment? Moreover, could we offer the world something that conservative Christians don't? I invite Robert Jensen and John Stoltenberg to hold such a conference. I, for one, will be there.

NOTES

1. When Dworkin, perhaps the most famous champion of the feminist anti-pornography movement, died in 2005, she and Stoltenberg had been life partners for over 30 years.
2. One of the members of XXXChurch described this lunch as "easily the highlight of the conference for me" noting that Stoltenberg "was really impressed with the work that [XXXChurch] does and made the statement 'I think meeting you guys is why I'm here.' Total God-story." (XXXChurch Blog, 2007).
3. The Wheelock Anti-Pornography Conference was the first of its kind in more than a decade and yet drew little coverage in the popular press. Of the 500 people in attendance, less than half were students.
4. After helping plant Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, MI, Rob Bell has expanded his impact well beyond his own congregation: "Though Mr. Bell does not preach on Christian television and radio, his innovative series of short films called Nooma (a phonetic spelling of the Greek 'pneuma,' or 'spirit') has sold more than 500,000 DVD's in 4 years, and podcasts of his sermons are downloaded by 30,000 to 56,000 people a week. His book, *Velvet Elvis*, which combines memoir with an exploration of the Jewish traditions in the New Testament, has sold 116,000 copies in hardcover since last July" (Leland, 2006). Mr. Bell's latest book (2007) is entitled *Sex God: Exploring the Endless Connections between Sexuality and Spirituality*. According to more recent stats, Nooma has sold 1.2 million copies worldwide and *Velvet Elvis* and *Sex God* have combined to sell over a half-million copies (Hamilton, 2008).
5. The combination of wider reach plus greater anonymity has sparked an explosion in pornography use and the development of a vast and highly profitable industry worth an estimated \$13 billion per year in the United States alone (Bashir, 2007).

6. While Jensen (1998b, pp. 103–108) has acknowledged the inability of social science to definitively prove that pornography causes sexual violence against women, speaking before a friendly crowd at Wheelock he (2007b) came across as utterly confident: “One can be right, and lose. And we all know we’re right here. [laughter] But being right isn’t enough. I would like to win, for once” [hearty applause].” Thus, for Jensen, victory does not require a better analysis—the analysis is fine—it simply requires a more realistic strategy.
7. Women Against Pornography (WAP), a New York-based organization, pioneered the use of slide shows as an organizing tool in the late 1970’s (Rubin, 1993a, p. 18).
8. The lack of interaction may have been an artifact of the anonymous format—not knowing each other making them less inclined to converse—or simply a matter of each panelist wanting to do what they perceived to be the minimum amount of work.
9. Jensen (2007a) agrees: “After orgasm, many men feel the shame. That shame can lead to a declaration to oneself not to use pornography again, which is typically abandoned the next time the desire for sexual feeling without the complication of another person arises” (p. 168).
10. Jensen (2007a) reminds us that most pornography is designed to maximize its utility as a “masturbation facilitator” for men (p. 97). As such, viewing porn is an *embodied* practice designed to trigger very particular—if incredibly short-term—outcomes and behaviors such as arousal and ejaculation. This makes porn a unique and challenging medium for communication scholars who might study it. For instance, research that conceives of porn as a visual text best understood through semiotic analysis could easily overlook how audiences actually consume it through the embodied practices of visual and tactile stimulation.
11. Steve’s more personal take on pornography recalls Henderson’s (2001) observation that “to take sexuality as the subject of inquiry is thus sometimes to confront a formidable and well-organized industry, and at others to draw out the slender, tightly woven threads that form the material of everyday life” (p. 20).
12. The assault took place during the New York City Puerto Rican Day Parade in the summer of 2000.
13. Here is Chapkis explaining this argument in her own words: “there is something impossibly earnest about the demand that we feel sexual attraction only in a non-objectified, ungendered fashion. It may be impossible not to objectify an attractive stranger. Until one learns enough to fill in the blanks, the attraction can’t help but be built on the images s/he chooses to project and the fantasy which the observer then creates.” (Wendy Chapkis quoted in Jhally, 2006a, p. 172)
14. According to Steve, Jhally did, in fact, lose his cool—raising his voice and pounding the podium for emphasis. But if Jhally ran out of patience, it’s probably because he’s heard it all before. When the original *Dreamworlds* first came out in 1991, anti-porn feminists called for him to reduce the images of victimization, replace his own male, authoritative voice-over with a female one, and include more voices of strong women like Madonna (Jhally, 2006b).
15. Jhally explains his technique thusly: “Young people would watch the images. I could get their attention. Could that attention then be directed against the images that were the focus of the watching? My strategy was twofold: (a) to

- decontextualize by changing the music, re-editing, and adding narration, and (b) by relentlessly presenting one image after the other, by piling them on, to change initial pleasure into something different—overconsumption, a feeling of being full.” (Jhally, 2006b, p. 185)
16. Like Gross, Leahy also spars in public with Ron Jeremy. Promoted as entertainment for college students, the event is described as an “intelligent and multi-faceted debate” (Wolfman Productions, 2007). During the Wheelock Conference, Gail Dines complained that Ron Jeremy was being paid upwards of \$10,000 to debate anti-pornography activist Susan Cole at nearby Simmons College (Dines, 2007).
 17. The “Porn Nation” promo video, entitled “Porn’s Dark Secret,” employs rapid-fire editing, melodramatic drum rolls, and peek-a-boo glimpses of sexual material—all of the standard techniques of your typical R-rated movie trailer (Porn’s Dark Secret, 2007). To view the trailer along with some brief commentary, please see Boulton’s (2007) post on the Media Commons website In Media Res.
 18. Such a protective coating also attracts organizations like CNN, ABC, and “20/20” since, by covering XXXChurch and “Porn Nation,” they gain a more “legitimate” and newsworthy excuse to exploit pornographic images, draw more viewers, and spike ratings.
 19. Stoltenberg (1990) gets a little more specific on the details—describing a heaven on earth where intercourse is replaced by noncoital sex, ejaculation by multiple orgasms, and objectification by egalitarianism—but his *politics* are just as vague: “Let’s assume that there exists an authentic erotic potential between humans such that mutuality, reciprocity, fairness, deep communication and affection, total body integrity for both partners, and equal capacity for choice-making and decision-making are merged with robust physical pleasure, intense sensation, and brimming-over expressiveness” (p. 112).
 20. Even gays are welcome into many conservative Christian communities, provided they pledge celibacy and repent of their homosexual acts. Although this strikes me as an impossible sort of existence, it sets up an important distinction: interior gay sexual *orientations* might be forgiven so long as any external gay *behaviors* are resisted and contained.
 21. In a clever column on the political expediency of pathology, Peele (2008) notes that a laundry list of disgraced elected officials might join Elliot Spitzer (the former governor of New York implicated in a prostitution ring) in seeking out a diagnosis of “sex addiction.” In other words, the devil made them do it.
 22. Future feminist anti-pornography conferences seem destined to draw even more participation from their Christian contemporaries. As one of the XXXChurch representatives wrote after his time at Wheelock, “I’m not certain, but I think I’ve become a feminist. . . . I don’t know if I’ll be attending any marches soon, but I’m sure this is not my last feminist event and I’m looking forward to that” (XXXChurch Blog, 2007).

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APPENDIX

Virtual Panel Interview Questions

Round 1:

1. What was your overall reaction to Wheelock?
2. What was it like to be a man surrounded by women?
3. What was the most joyful moment for you?
4. What was the most challenging?

Round 2:

1. Did anyone attend Sut Jhally's film *Dreamworlds 3* on Saturday night? If so, what did you think of the film and the Q&A afterwards?
2. On a more personal note, what is your own experience with pornography?
3. And, on an even more personal note, what about masturbation?

Round 3:

1. Robert Jensen spoke of the need for the anti-porn movement to embrace sexual morality. Do you agree? If so, what would this look like?
2. On a similar note, we've seen many examples of "bad sex." So what is "good sex" exactly? And, is there such a thing as good/harmless porn?
3. What about "objectification?" We all do it, no? And not just with porn, but also checking out strangers on the street. How do you come to terms with these sorts of desires?

The future:

Since this will be the last round, I would also welcome any thoughts you might have on the "where do we go from here" question: For example, what would a healthy sexual culture look like? Would it include sex education? What would we teach our kids?

Feedback:

And, finally, I would like to get your honest feedback on this "virtual panel." Tell me about your experience. What were you expecting? What did you get out of it? What was positive, what was negative? Has the experience changed you?

Final Follow-Up:

I want to get a better sense of your political/moral worldview, so here's a couple of final follow-up questions. What's your stance on these other sex-related issues: birth control, premarital sex, abortion, divorce, homosexuality, and sex education in the public schools?
