

IMAGES OF WOMEN IN PORNOGRAPHY AND MEDIA†

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If a solution is to be found to the culture-wide violence towards women that we accept as part of our normal everyday society, we must first characterize this violence as a problem and then change the attitudes we hold towards men, women, and violence. We can begin to change our attitudes by changing the images with which we surround ourselves that teach, reinforce, and perpetuate these attitudes.

Physical and psychological violence towards women is the norm in our culture. Many men clearly believe that they should commit these acts, whether to enjoy themselves or to assert their masculine identity. But where do these men learn that violence towards women is a form of enjoyment or a way to assert masculinity? Feminists believe that today the primary source of images of such violence is the mass media, especially pornography.

The purpose of the slideshow you are about to see is to help the audience recognize the hatred of women expressed in pornography, and to increase understanding of the destructive consequences of these images. Many feminists believe that portrayals of women being bound, raped, tortured, killed, or degraded for sexual stimulation or pleasure create a psychological association of sexuality and violence, and teach men that women are easy targets and fair game, that women enjoy being pushed around, and that violence itself is a sexual turn-on. In addition, such images teach women to accept victimization as inevitable, and to feel helpless and passive.

The important thing to watch for throughout the slideshow is the repetition of certain themes: the association of sexuality and violence, the macho image projected as appropriate for men, the weak, passive image projected as appropriate for most women, the joking attitude in many of the images of rape or battering, and finally, the constant suggestion that women are less than human. Particularly try to remember what the real-life scene would look like so you can form a mental contrast to the glossy advertising and pornographic images.

These three slides you have just seen are the reality of what women and children look like when they are beaten up. For example, this fifteen-month-old child was killed by parental violence. Here you do not see the mutilation of the genitals which often occurs in child abuse. Violence towards women and children, once it starts, tends to take on a sexual or genital focus. The bruises here

† These remarks and the slide presentation that accompanied them comprised a revised version of a slide show prepared by Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media (WAVPM), P.O. Box 14614, San Francisco, California 94114.

are four to twelve weeks old, showing the progression of the violence. Note the bite mark on the arm, made when one of her parents bit her.¹

Everyone has had the experience of being angry and of wanting to commit violence. You can expect a flicker of identification, therefore, when you see the act or the results of violence. But violent behavior itself is a continuing and progressive emotional disease. It is done by people over a period of time because of lack of other behavioral mechanisms with which to cope with anger and frustration.² Evidently, there is a lot of sexual frustration in our society which makes people, particularly men, angry. Yet sexual frustration cannot be relieved by violence.³ Still we see pornography selling physical and psychological degradation and violence towards women as a way to relieve sexual needs. These slides of two women and a child injured or killed by violence show the reality. Now we will look at the lie which pornography sells as sexual expression, and which the media have adopted to sell consumer goods.

Here, a female model stands in a soft focus landscape. She wears only a blouse which is open in the front. This is a pretty picture and it looks innocent enough. Yet the text, typical of pornography, tells us that she is a prostitute. It says that although she used to have sex freely with anyone capable of appreciating her, she recently met a man who "saw different possibilities, and I began to see them too. I have never realized that a beautiful, healthy body was such a versatile and valuable commodity."⁴ A major theme in pornography is that all females are natural prostitutes, unless their animal lust gets in the way of their good business sense and they just give it away, as this woman is presented as having done.

This color picture is from a magazine called *Little Girls*.⁵ In the United States there are over 250 publications of this type devoted entirely to children and adolescents.⁶ Although the model in this picture is probably of legal age, she looks young because of her small breasts, saddle shoes and knee socks, and awkward pose bespeaking the awkward age of adolescence. The text explains that on the way home from her parochial school she falls and skins her knee. A man helps her up and takes her to his house. Although previously a virgin, she has sex all afternoon with him and enjoys it ecstatically. She de-

1. Slide and commentary from Barry Pike, Odyssey House, 24 W. 12th Street, New York, New York.

2. *Id.*

3. Sexual frustration cannot be relieved by violence unless one defines violence as sex, which feminists do not. Violence causes physiological excitement, but the idea that having a female target turns violence into sex is a smoke screen for woman-hatred. For example, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) states that "[t]he average rapist . . . rarely admits his aggressive motives, either during or after the offense; he prefers to accept his act as evidence of sexual need which other men will understand. The purely sexual aspect of rape is more congenial to the perpetrator's inner feelings than his basic desire to demean women." NAT'L INST. OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE, LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMIN., FORCIBLE RAPE FINAL PROJECT REPORT 14 (1978) [hereinafter cited as FORCIBLE RAPE].

4. ESCAPADE, publication date unavailable, at 53.

5. LITTLE GIRLS, Winter 1974-75.

6. *Hearings before the Subcomm. on Select Education of the House Comm. on Educ. and Labor*, 95th Cong., 1st Sess. 113 (1977) (statement of Robin Lloyd).

scribes her departure, saying, "He handed me some money as I left; far out, that'll buy a lot of cookies." Again, the natural prostitute.

By constantly portraying women as natural, lustful animals and natural whores, pornography provides men with a ready exculpatory rationale for rape and other forms of sexist aggression. After all, if she is a *natural* animal or whore, she should not be offended by whatever happens to her. Pornography often urges men to force women in order to help women release their natural lust.

This is the cover of a record album called *Wild Angel*, by Nelson Slater. The woman's face is like a mannequin—smooth and almost plastic looking. The posture with head back, throat exposed, is a common motif. It says, "I'm vulnerable, I'm an easy target." You will never see John Wayne or President Carter in a position like that. The chain through the woman's mouth resembles a bit used to break horses, suggesting that women are wild beasts that need to be broken. Every detail of the graphic design is evocative. The blood red background denotes violence, passion, intense pain. The white streaks of light in the background resemble knife blades.

Here is a model with an alluring docile expression, wearing a ball gag. Her arms and breasts also are bound. Images of women gagged, silenced, and humiliated have become popular in the last decade, in response to the current wave of feminism, which is helping women to speak out against the violence and sexual abuse that so many women have endured in silence. For example, fellatio has become very popular in pornography, in part because it functions to shut women up. Again, the pictures from *Little Girls*. The black and white photo suggests a second reason for fellatio's popularity. Note the subservient posture of the girl kneeling in front of the standing man. She has her hand on his crotch, while his hands are behind her head ready to pull it toward him. Here is an excerpt from an advice column in *Genesis Magazine*. The reader complains about his wife: "[S]he only blows me in bed for five or six minutes. She won't [do it] out of bed What can I do to get her to suck me off longer and wherever I want . . . ?" The answer: "If this is what you want, then demand it! Women in general like to be dominated, so tell her to get on her knees and ram it down her throat. She'll, no doubt, know that you mean business!"⁷

Another way to shut women up and another recurrent theme in pornography is to trivialize the culture-wide terrorization of women which feminists protest, and to reinterpret efforts to protect women as invitations to assault them. For example, here is the first page of a pornographic magazine article called *Rape Me, Rape Me Not*,⁸ which ridicules women's martial arts training and explains that women take such training *not* to protect themselves, but to slow down their rapists and force them to do a better job of lovemaking.

Again women are nude, bound, and gagged. The left hand image comes from a magazine called *Roped and Raped*.⁹ The other is from a magazine

7. GENESIS, June 1978, at 22.

8. ACE, publication date unavailable, at 28-29.

9. ROPED AND RAPED, WAVPM slide show.

called *Cherry Blossoms*,¹⁰ which consists entirely of Asian women being bound and tortured.

Most pornography today combines some sort of violence with the sex. Some pornography is nothing *but* violence. There are movies in which women are kidnapped, tortured, and hung upside down like pieces of meat with no explicit show of sex at all, except that the woman is usually nude or half-clothed. One movie entitled *The Return of the Mad Doctor* shows a doctor taking a nurse by surprise and binding her into a wheelchair. He then gasses her to death, slowly but surely. The movie ends when she dies.

This is an album called *Pleasure* by the Ohio Players. A black female model is shown with her wrists chained together and suspended above her head. The woman looks dehumanized. Her head is shaved, and her face is completely expressionless. She looks like a mannequin; there is the suggestion of a lynching. Many high school kids use the album covers as wall decorations in their bedrooms. These are the images with which they surround themselves.

This album is called *Thriller*, by a group called Cold Blood. The model is sprawled on the ground, the contents of her purse are scattered, her clothes are ripped. She appears to have been mugged and sexually assaulted. The underlying message is that this attack is sexy. Although she is obviously the victim of some violence, she lies in a very seductive pose—her shirt has been pulled open just the right amount to look sexy. There is no blood, no black and blue marks, no ugliness. This image presents a sharp contrast to the first picture of real victims. The Lucky Strike cigarette package that spilled out of her purse suggests that this assault has been a “lucky strike” for the attacker.

This slide illustrates how pornography depicts female human beings as sex receptacles by focusing on the crotch as the area of importance on a woman’s body. Pornography is often devoid of tenderness, caring, or “foreplay,” all of which have been found to be an important part of a woman’s sexuality by every researcher from Masters and Johnson to Shere Hite.

One side of the coin is that women are weak, passive, and victims. The other side is the opposite stereotype—woman as aggressive witch, bitch, sexual torturess. This slide exemplifies the racism that runs through many pornographic images, playing on the myth of the black person as a sexual aggressor in our society. It is the cover of *Black Dominatrixes*.¹¹ The black female model wears high heeled black boots, long black leather gloves, and a black corset unlaced to expose her breasts. She squats facing the camera, holding a whip.

This slide shows a record album cover with a woman’s body pictorially fragmented. The focus is not on a whole woman, or a real woman, but on a piece or a part. This is a crotch in red leather briefs. Above it are the words, JUMP ON IT. Little more needs to be said. This is a clear invitation to jump on *it*—meaning on her. Here again a woman has been reduced to an object. Objectification or dehumanization of women contributes to a rape culture. Dehumanization of the woman must occur in the mind of the violent man before he can commit his violence. For example, we know that men in war can-

10. CHERRY BLOSSOMS, WAVPM slide show.

11. BLACK DOMINATRIXES, WAVPM slide show.

not kill if they regard their enemies as humans like themselves. Dr. Diana Russell, a sociologist at Mills College, has noted that often rapists refer to their victims not as "she" but as "it." They do not regard the woman as human, at least at the time of the rape.¹² Some psychoanalysts believe that our media images contribute to this problem. Dr. Natalie Shainess, an internationally known and respected psychoanalyst in New York City, says that as rape themes become more common in media, rapists stop seeing themselves as abnormal, and that they therefore resist treatment.

This picture from a record album cover focuses on a woman's body from the breasts to the buttocks. The woman is being wound up like a toy doll by a man's hand which is much bigger than her body. The key looks like a gun at first glance—a subliminal flash on violence. The hand on her hotpants looks like her own at first, but on closer examination we see that it is a male hand, coming from somewhere else. She is being wound up to go by the one hand, and pulled back into place by the other. The title, *Street Corner Symphony*, refers to prostitutes who hang out on the streetcorner. The hands are the hands of her pimps, her controllers.

This group is called The Pure Food and Drug Act and the album is called *Choice Cuts*. The picture is a close-up of a person's buttocks. The metaphor of woman as piece of ass or piece of meat is played all the way down to the facsimile on the buttocks of the government approved seal of certification which is found on beef in the supermarket. Again it is easy to see how this dehumanizes women. The producers of this album asked the authorities whether this picture would be considered pornographic in any stores. The reply was that if they ran a line down the middle of the album, covering what is "bad" or "unacceptable"—in other words, the anus—then the picture would be all right. This points up the inadequacy of our current obscenity laws—they are focused entirely on what is known as "prurient interests," but ignore the need to protect women from the violence and objectification which is an inherent part of pornography.

This is the outside of the album *Climax*, by The Ohio Players. It features a sexual word—climax—and a violent image—the knife and sheath. The two are absorbed by the mind's eye together to link sexuality and violence.

Here is the inside of the album. A black man and woman embrace. We see the man's back as he turns his face to kiss her. She rests one hand on his shoulder while she reaches around to plunge a knife into his back with the other. Some people might say, "What's your complaint—the man is getting it this time." First of all, violence against anyone, male or female, should not be glamorized. But in addition, what it is really saying is, "Trust a woman and she'll stab you in the back." The man has made himself vulnerable to the woman, but she turns her cheek away from his kiss and knifes him. It is the stereotype of the cold, cruel, calculating bitch that is so fearful to men. While

12. This dehumanization is exemplified by a case illustrating the "unplanned rape." "It was spur of the moment. I would fantasize it. My sort of planning was that I would just find a piece of ass and take it because I was only concerned for myself. . . ." *FORCIBLE RAPE*, *supra* note 3, at 12.

this couple is having genital contact in a part of the scene outside the picture, here you see a counterpart of the sexual piercing. A sexual climax is equated with sensations produced by stabbing someone or being stabbed. The couple is engaging in a reciprocal infliction of pain.

The next slide is extremely violent, so be prepared. This is from *Chic Magazine*,¹³ published by Larry Flynt Productions, the same company that publishes *Hustler*. The title is *Columbine Cuts Up*. The images show a woman stabbing herself in the vagina with a large butcher knife, and in the other two pictures, cutting her labia and breasts with a scissors. The picture is horrible, but take a minute to contemplate what is happening and why. In much pornography the camera action is done "first person." You might see a pair of male hands enter the scene from the front and torture or tie up a woman, but you never see the actual man himself. Thus, men can remain anonymous and victimize women without taking responsibility or blame for the crime. This picture takes the theme one step further. A woman is staged to mutilate herself. Men can view the mutilation, but, as long as they forget that this is merely entertainment for men, there is no way to associate a male with the actual pain, horror, and blood that this picture is all about. Notice that the model is smiling. Her make-up and hairdo are not disturbed. This tells us that violence toward women is nothing to get upset about, even for the woman involved.

The next image¹⁴ is similar in that it suggests imminent self-mutilation. We see a female torso and crotch. With her fist the model holds a knife poised next to her vulva. Her other hand rests on her crotch and holds her labia, which are posed to form a slit, like a suitable sheath for a knife. This is atypical. Pornography usually shows the labia pulled apart to create the image of a round hole suitable for use by a penis. Notice the hands. When a hand is used as a symbol of aggression, a male hand makes a fist; a female hand is shown as claw-like, for scratching and tearing. Here, the model's long fingers and fingernails are one of the dominant visual elements. The suggestion is that both hands, the fist and the claw, will be turned against her in a form of masturbation with a knife. The photography is rendered impersonal by the absence of a face or full body. It conveys a sense of urgency by the fact that the tank top is just pulled up, not taken off.

This is an album by Johnny Guitar Watson called *Ain't That A Bitch?* Johnny is sitting on a couch, with his dog beside him. The dog's profile and the couch are very phallic. On the floor at his feet lie two sleeping women, one black, one white. The women are wearing collars and leashes. The image suggests that women are animals, but lower (in man's eye) than a dog.

This is the back. The dog is gone, but the women are fawning up to Johnny for attention, just like dogs. The title of the album and the imagery bring to mind all the old associations of woman to bitch-dog in heat. The interesting thing about this album is that the title song, "Ain't That A Bitch?", is not about women or sex at all. It is about the rent going up, the landlord coming

13. CHIC, WAVPM slide show.

14. Anonymous mailing in November 1978, of miscellaneous pages from pornographic magazines sent to New York Women Against Rape, 222 E. 19th Street, New York, New York 10003.

down, the pipes leaking, and all the problems of tenant life—"ain't it a bitch." But the imagery has been chosen to attract a male eye to buy the album, thus the exploitation of women and women's bodies.

This slide is from *Vogue Magazine*, December 1975. It is from an actual fashion feature in which a couple modeled summer clothes. In this photograph, he slaps her and she cries out in pain. The text of the magazine suggested that this was chic and "in." The Los Angeles Times referred to this feature as "Decadence . . . Back in Vogue." Both the article and the commentary trivialize the battering problem we face in the United States today, which is not just "decadence," but real, calculated, and continuing violence to women.

More chic violence. A man in a tuxedo attacks a woman who appears to be his date.¹⁵ Here he pulls her backward by the hair. She wears a fragile evening dress which has already been pulled down to expose one breast. This was part of a picture story called *No Way to Treat a Lady*, in which the lady had a champagne bottle broken over her head, champagne thrown in her face, and her dress and underwear torn off. Finally she was stomped on by the man wearing formal patent leather evening shoes.

This cartoon about child molestation is from *Playboy Magazine*.¹⁶ The caption reads, "You call *that* being molested," words supposedly uttered by a young girl as she ties up the bow on her dress and readies herself to leave after this man has had sex with her. In real child molestation, the man approaches the young girl in her own house, usually in her own room. Here *Playboy* has set us up to believe that she has come to visit and seduce him in *his* own room. The suggestion is that "not only could she take what he gave her," but she could have taken a whole lot more. With real child molestation, many times a child is badly physically bruised and emotionally traumatized. The June 1977 issue of *UCLA Monthly* stated that there has been a recent "sharp increase in oral V.D. among children under five years of age who have been infected by their fathers, older brothers, or boyfriends of their mothers." Presented as humor, cartoons like this one make it easier for men to commit such crimes against young girls by legitimizing the topic, making it seem as if this is what children actually want.

Here are some pictures from *Little Nudist*¹⁷ magazine, published by the same company that puts out *Little Girls*. This is pornography because it says it is and its readers believe it is. The cover announces "adults only," "sex-color." A caption under another picture of girls about age four to six explains that "little, little girls grow into sexy little girls when they spend all their time in the warmth of the sun." Pornographic magazines nowadays carry many articles about childhood sexuality, emphasizing how natural children are about their bodies, how uninhibited they are, how they enjoy being touched. They are superior sex partners because they are too young to have been corrupted, *i.e.* inhibited, by society; they do not know yet that sex is dirty. Their natural animal nature is still intact.

15. *Id.*

16. PLAYBOY, WAVPM slide show.

17. LITTLE NUDIST, Winter 1974-75.

This cartoon from *Hustler*¹⁸ shows a doctor delivering a baby. To his right, an aide is masturbating to a book called *Fetal Positions* (which is reminiscent of the "sexual positions" books which were so popular in the 1960's). The doctor holds up the newborn child. The caption reads, "Want a piece of ass, Earl? This one's stillborn." This epitomizes the *Hustler* philosophy—everything in life is seen as a potential object to fuck.

Our last slide is from *Oui Magazine*.¹⁹ A woman is bent over Hitler's knee. Only her buttocks and legs are visible. Hitler raises his hand to slap her. He wears a Nazi uniform and the swastika on his arm. This exemplifies the terrible power imbalance between men and women. It also brings home the political battle which is being fought in the sexual arena. We see the constant humiliation, battery, and rape of women in hard-core pornography and in popular mass media, until our collective sensibility is numbed. Not only do we become desensitized to the horror of sexual violence, we develop a taste for it. Media teaches us. Men identify with male actors who rape, beat, and mutilate women on the screen and in magazines. Women are conditioned to be whatever the male society demands at that time: Victorian in one period and sexually "liberated objects" in another.

As long as we continue to allow this imagery to flourish in our society, we will be teaching people, young and old, that sexuality means women acting like whores or animals, doing things that degrade, humiliate, or injure themselves, and women being bound, raped, tortured, degraded, or killed for the sexual stimulation or entertainment of men. Feminists are working to humanize both the images and the roles of women and men in our society. It is time for men to aid in this effort, in particular to reclaim masculine sexuality from the pornographers and to redefine masculinity in a more human way, so that men's entertainment and male sexuality no longer require the objectification, degradation, and injury of women.

18. HUSTLER, WAVPM slide show.

19. OUI, WAVPM slide show.