42

EVERYDAY PORNOGRAPHY

◆ Jane Caputi

As my title indicates, this chapter is not about X-rated porn. Rather, it is about advertising images that we encounter every day, in magazines such as *TV Guide*, *Vibe*, *Vogue*, *Seventeen*, *Time*, *Esquire*, and *Sports Illustrated*.[1] Influenced by a feminist perspective, I think of these types of images as everyday pornography. By pornography I do not mean simply sexually explicit materials. Rather, as I use it, pornography is material developed around exploitation, objectification, and "denigration of women and a fear and hatred of the female body" (Kaplan, 1991, p. 322). Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin (Dworkin, 1989, pp. 253-275) define pornography as the "sexually explicit subordination of women." Pornography and everyday pornography construct feminine and masculine subjectivities based in gender inequality, conditioning us to eroticize domination, subordination, violence, and objectification, even when, as in some contexts, a woman takes the masculine role or a man the feminine.

Feminist criticism of pornography is not the same thing as moralistic postures, based in ridiculous notions of sex as sinful and "dirty"—unless it is confined to marital heterosexual intercourse. Let me be very clear. I think that we need and deserve resistant sexual images and pictures to both instruct us and arouse us, ones that represents nonphallocentric sexualities, ones that challenge the definition of sex *as* intercourse, ones that describe and shape "eroticism in ways that repudiate phallocentrism" and recognize women as desiring subjects (hooks, 1994, p. 112). Such erotic imagery and narratives represent sexualities, whether lifelong and committed, brief and

recreational, same sex or not, monogamous or not, that are based in respect, and recognition of the other and the self as beings and not objects.

Pornography supports the sexual politics of the status quo. It capitalizes, literally, on the ignorance and shame induced in us through sexual repression and colonizes what Audre Lorde (1984) calls the "erotic"—the force of freedom, ecstasy, exuberance and creativity, the potency that enables us to act and create, to grow and transform, and to resist oppression. Many defenders of pornography argue that porn, which is sexually explicit and often a turn-on, is therefore automatically liberating and "sex positive." Yet pornography is no real alternative; it emerges from the same sex-negative worldview and reinforces many of the most fundamental precepts of mainstream morality, for example, a split between spirit and sex, mind and body.

Morality demands the transcendence of the sexual body, which is conceptualized, variously, as dumb, dirty, the gateway to the devil, and the antithesis of mind, spirit, and "god." Pornography does not challenge this but exploits it. This is abundantly clear in a 1977 poster for the New York Erotic Film Festival: the bare outline of a woman's body is shown. Her genital area, though, is highly detailed. It is the face of the devil, replete with protruding tongue and horns. Of course, the more sex becomes linked with evil, the more "the forbidden" beckons with erotic allure. The more "the good" is rendered asexual, the more "evil" (a vast rubric in this absurd moral system, including not only murder but also sex outside of marriage) is charged with sexual dynamism. Think *Natural Born Killers* (Caputi, 1999b).

On November 19, 1994, unknown vandals defaced bound volumes of women, gay, and gender studies journals at the library of the University of New Mexico. Some journals had "bitch propaganda" scrawled on them. The cover of an issue of *Lesbian Ethics* had the name crossed out and replaced with "God's Ethics." Underneath that was a swastika and the pronouncement: "God made women for men." Both pornography and godly morality ordain women (and indeed all of creation) to have been created for men—as objects of service, whether nurturant or sexual. Both endorse sexualities based in dominance and submission, whether found in marriages where women are promised not only greater saintliness but also hotter sex if they will just shut up, graciously submit, and surrender (Doyle, 2000) or in sadomasochistic pornography where women are literally bound and gagged before they are fucked.

In a pornographic culture, images of extreme domination and violence—Nazism, torture, nuclear weaponry, imperial conquest—are laden with sexual subtexts (Caputi, 1993; Dworkin, 2000; Griffin, 1981; Sontag, 1980). Pornography sexualizes, variously, the humiliation, capture, possession, occupation, objectification, and destruction of another human being, of animals, of the land, and even of the planet (Collard, 1988). Thus, such forms of masculinized aggression against feminized targets, such as enslavement of "primitive" peoples, imperialist conquest of a "virgin land," scientific penetration of the "mysteries" of the universe, and technological assaults against (Mother) Earth, acquire an undeniably sexual component. The worldview of what I term "everyday pornography" underlies not only the oppression of women and sex negativity, but infuses practices of consumerism, racism, homophobia, abuse of animals, militarism, and environmental devastations.

It is not always so easy to recognize the oppressive character of pornography and its popular culture manifestations precisely because it is so normal. These notions have exerted enormous pressure in shaping our sense of ourselves as women or men, teaching us to become aroused in and by oppressive situations: for example, men who use women as disposable objects and are terrified by intimacy; women attracted only to "bad boys." Pornography depends on very conventional notions of masculinity and

femininity. Male and female are defined as inevitably oppositional and inherently unequal, yet ineluctably attracted to each other. The male partner is supposed to be taller, stronger, richer, older, and colder—in short, more powerful. The female partner is supposed to be shorter, weaker, better looking, vulnerable, younger, and warmer—in short, socially powerless (if privately a goddess of nurture, support, and sexual prowess (Think *Pretty Woman*; Caputi, 1991). I will begin my tour of everyday porn by looking at these very ordinary understandings of gender roles.

◆ *Gender Porn*

Over and over, we are told not simply that men and women are biologically different but that we are different in ways that ordain and justify social inequality. The headline of the January 20, 1992, cover of *Time* magazine reads: "Why Are Men and Women Different? It isn't just upbringing. New studies show they are born that way." The cover image is of a (probably) Latino boy and a girl, about 8 years old, standing in front of a brick wall. The boy, wearing the pants, takes up most of the frame. Pulling up his sleeve, flexing his right bicep, and admiring his small swollen muscle, he turns away from the skirted girl and focuses entirely on his performance. She gazes indulgently on him and places one hand under his elbow, offering support. We learn, visually, that males and females are utterly different, with self-absorbed males defined primarily by superior upper-body strength. His placement in the bulk of the available space connotes dominance, both physical and social. The girl is subordinated, yet acquiescent. Viewers might come away thinking she is the superior one; after all, her expression suggests she sees through the foolishness of his display. Nonetheless, she props him up and directs all her energy into the boy. Perhaps it is more worth it to her that he be strong/potent, than that she have a life. Finally, there is that brick wall they are up against. As this image has it, there is no way out; our biological destiny is male dominance and female subordination, male self-centeredness and female acquiescence and self-denial.

A grown-up version of this pornographic couple appears in a Calvin Klein underwear ad from 1992. The ad is spread out over two pages. On the first page, Markie Mark appears clad only in his underpants, with a threatening look on his face and grabbing his penis in a bullying gesture. On the next page, Markie is relaxed and sitting on the floor; he faces front; turning toward him, and wrapping a supportive arm around his waist, is the notoriously slender "waif" Kate Moss (also dressed only in her Calvins).

A fashion spread in *Today's Black Woman* (October 2000) features a man and a woman—well, their bodies anyway because the figures are cut off at the head. He wears a jacket (unzipped to show his naked chest), pants, and sensible walking boots. She wears only an unzipped jacket, leather bikini underwear, one stocking, and high-heeled boots. His hand is tensed, held away from his body, and ready for action. Hers is limp, closed, and rests on her thigh. The man's other arm is wrapped around her naked waist and she leans into him.

The primal couple appears again in a 1999 ad for L'Oréal "straight up" hair straightener: A white woman with long hair gazes up, sweetly and trustingly, at her stern-faced boyfriend who towers over her. He is literally "in her face," visually dominating her. The ad commands them to "play it straight." Certainly, that command refers as much to conformity to male-overseer/female underling heterosexuality as it does to chemically altered locks.

Sexual, gender, and racial projections abound in all of these depictions. In the first, Latino children are used to illustrate the alleged biological determinism of unequal gender characteristics.[2] Racist/sexist ideology has it that people of color, like children and women, are "closer to nature"

and more subject to instinctual drives than the "civilized," and, hence, better able to illustrate those purportedly mindless biological drives. The white people keep their heads; the black people are pure body. The females wear fetish garb and are positioned to suggest vulnerability, stasis, and service. The males are active, incipiently violent, and in control. The eroticism exuded by the adult couples is clearly based in their inequality. These gender-porn images point to domination, violence, and control of space as intrinsic and defining components of masculinity: Not only hard male musculature but also the penis is graphically associated with violence and power. Femininity, on the other hand, is represented as contained, sidelined, insubstantial, intrinsically supportive, controlled, and fundamentally powerless. Moreover, as this one-way power dynamic implies, the feminine counterpart might well soon find herself at the other end of hardened muscle or hostile penis.

Violence Objects ◆

The sexualization of conquest, and indeed, apocalyptic devastation, is a common theme both in pornography and the pornography of everyday life. A 1987 porn feature, *Mr. MX*, features a man with a monstrously long penis: "Take a long look at the real weapon of the '80s. . . . See his 16 1/2-inch missile." How different is this overtly pornographic notion of male sexuality from everyday notions. Support for the notion of men as violence objects and the Freudian understanding of the penis as lethal weapon, driving machine, space rocket, and so on is found everywhere in popular culture (Caputi, 1987, 1993), suggesting a huge investment of male sexual self-esteem in these products. An ad for the Nissan Patrol GR in British *Esquire* (June 1995) sells itself by promising a rapist thrill. A stick-on replica of the SUV is provided as well as a panorama of "unspoiled" mountain wilderness. The caption reads: "Stick it where the hell you like." A 2000 ad for Candies fragrances positions a man in front of a computer monitor. His fingers manipulate the keys, but he turns to smirk at the viewer. On the screen, we see the Space Shuttle zooming upward. A woman with spread legs sits atop the monitor. Is she even aware of the rocket that is aiming directly into her vagina?

Popular conceptions of masculinity suggest that men, like machines, must always be ready and "hard" (they even have to "die hard"). At the same time, this masculinity can always be called into question. Real men must have no trace of femininity. It's far better to be a nuclear missile than a pussy. When boys and men sexually harass other boys and men with words, they call them *woman*, *whore*, *candy-ass*, *weak sister*, *faggot*, *pussy*, *bitch*. A cartoon in the *New Yorker* by P. Byrnes (2000) shows a white man about to receive a rectal exam. He asks his doctor, another white man: "Does this make me your bitch?" Here the slur is both sexist and racist; in contemporary black slang, *bitch* and *ho* are misogynist slurs. The patient gets to entertain a pornographic fantasy of the twin degradations of being a black woman and being penetrated. According to gender conventions, being receptive, sexually or otherwise, is connoted as feminine and as deeply shameful for men. This includes practices of homophobic homosexuality, when the man who plays the "masculine" inserter role in anal sex considers himself "straight" but his partner gay. We might also ask what does this contempt for the feminine role simultaneously reveal about common male attitudes toward intercourse with women? *Fucking*, *screwing*, *banging*, *having*, *taking*, *possessing*, *scoring*, *nailing*: all these terms indicate an association of penetrative sex with violence, humiliation, conquest, and domination. Andrea Dworkin (1987) argues that, to the pornographic mindset, intercourse itself becomes a ritual of domination.

The ideal of permanently hard, penetrative, and purely masculine manhood is, of course, an impossible one. Men never rest

secure in their masculinity, but must prove it over and over (Beneke, 1997). And, not surprisingly, violence, both physical and psychological, is the most basic and universal method of proving manhood. An ad for "Bitch Skateboards" appeared in 1994 in the teenage-boy magazine *Big Brother*. It depicts the public-bathroom stick figures for a man and a woman. The "man" holds his right arm outstretched, pointing a gun at the head of the "woman." Surely, this ad is about hating girls and women, but it is also about hating the "feminine" within the male self. To successfully attain patriarchal manhood, the teenage boy must execute his "inner bitch."

Instructive here is another *Time* magazine cover (April 24, 2000). A pumped-up white man is photographed from the top of his nose to midthigh. (The absence of his eyes suggests a dearth of those feminine-marked traits of empathy and soul.) He clenches his fists and bares crooked and dangerous looking teeth. Across his pumped up chest is the word *Testosterone*. Most men, of course, no matter how much testosterone they have, look nothing like this model and never will. Ironically, the dangerous pursuit of hypermasculinity (often through abusing artificial testosterone and other steroids) is spurred by fear of being perceived as feminine and/or gay.

James Gilligan (1996) suggests that most male violence is caused not because men are hormonally driven to aggression, but because perpetrators are shamed, most commonly by an insult to their "manhood." Because violence is so definitive to patriarchal manhood, many respond to this threat to their self-esteem with some form of violence, particularly if they have no other social resources (education, money, position) to assert dominance. With this in mind, I want to go back to the same cover of *Time*. In the top left-hand corner, a blurb announces an inside story: "Columbine a Year Later: Can You Spot a Killer Kid?" Probably not. But I can spot a killer notion of manhood: The very one embodied by "Testosterone Man" on *Time*'s cover. The two mass murderers at Columbine were not hormonally driven to kill. Rather, they had been bullied and mocked as "faggots" and "wimps" by boys who, no doubt, were trying to prove their own manhood by projecting the feared femininity onto designated scapegoats. The scapegoats then responded with mass violence, ironically, to prove *their* manhood.

Anti-Bitch Propaganda ◆

Standard images of masculine power suggest that men oppress women because men are naturally stronger and smarter. Nawal El Saadawi (1977), the Egyptian novelist and political theorist, suggests that actually it is male insecurity and terror in the face of "the innate resilience and strength of the woman" that first led men to oppress and subjugate women, trying to "conquer the indomitable vitality and strength that lay within women, ready to burst out at any moment" (p. 100). Understanding men's fear of female potency helps us to identify the common denominator among such superficially diverse practices as the pornographic capture and display of female bodies; sexual bondage; corseting (encouraged in the August 2000 issue of *Vogue*); veiling; fashion-mandated thinness; feminizing makeup; crippling footwear; depilation of the legs, face, underarms, and genitals; cosmetic surgery (including laser surgery to tighten the vagina and diminish the size of the labia); and clitoridectomy and other forms of genital mutilation. All such practices (and the imagery that promotes them) represent the fear-based masculine project to contain, control, infantilize, and defeat female potency, what I call *cunctipotence*.[3] In the pornographic view, whenever there is a strong woman, there is a weak and castrated man—male potency veritably requires female impotence. Bob Guccione, editor of the glossy porn magazine *Penthouse*, admits as much in a comment on Viagra when he whines: "Feminism has

emasculated the American male, and that emasculation has led to physical problems" (quoted in Roof, 1999, p. 5). Yet many women and men reject this equation and yearn for recognitions of female power, social as well as sacred, historical as well as mythic.

Barbara Walker (1983, p. 109) reveals that *Bitch* was "one of the most sacred titles of the Goddess Artemis-Diana," who often appeared as a dog herself, or in the company of hounds. Indeed, around the world, the Lady of the Beasts assumed the full or partial form of an animal; for example, she appeared with horns or carrying horns, or appeared with characteristic animals—birds, fish, pigs, snakes (Neumann, 1963, p. 268). This ancient, powerful Bitch is the sacred archetype behind the contemporary profanity, reflecting fear of the "bitch goddess" (as well as the sexually sovereign, creative, autonomous woman). In patriarchal religions, the Bitch is demonized. In the secular world, she is turned into pornography.

Arguably, modern pornography is a genre devoted to profaning and containing female potency. This function is evidenced in pornography's appropriation of imagery that previously signified female sacred power: sexual exuberance and activity; the honorific association of a goddess, or "Lady of the Beasts," with animals and with the Earth; nakedness to indicate potency (Marinatos, 2000); the naked dance to invoke power (Vogel, 1997, p. 59); the spread legs—a sign of yoni worship (Marglin, 1987, p. 330); the ritual revelation of the vulva to signify ultimate truth (Hurston, 1938/1983, p. 137).[4] Pornography takes all of these signs and reworks them to signify degradation. Similarly, ancient goddess imagery is demonized, subsumed into those familiar representations of the Christian devil. The horns, protruding tongue, and serpentine nature are some of the attributes of, for example, the Greek Medusa, the Aztec Coatlicue, and the Yoruban First Ancestor (Anzaldúa, 1987; Baring & Cashford, 1991; Graham, 1997; Sjöö & Mor, 1991).

In *Goddess: Myths of the Female Divine*, David Leeming and Jake Page (1994) trace an ancient history of goddess worship followed by systematic denigrations during the patriarchal era. Nevertheless, they note the continuing presence of goddess imagery, albeit abused and degraded, in the persistence of such popular figures as the *femme fatale*. Pam Keesey (1997) also finds a background of goddess worship animating contemporary images of the *femme fatale*, the vamp, vampire, and dominatrix. One image that she reproduces is a cover from the fetish magazine *Bizarre*. Here we find a contemporary version of the "Lady of the Beasts": a dark-haired seductress, her eyes lined with kohl, clad in a corset-like teddy, long black gloves, perilously high stiletto heels, and wielding a snake-like whip. A stuffed tiger sits at her feet. The message is a mixed one, of course. Female power is invoked, but immediately contained for, as her outfit and shoes indicate, she too is bound; her tiger is only a toy.

In a 1999 ad for Vassarette lingerie, we again encounter a Lady of the Beasts. Wearing a gray bra and panties, the dark-haired, kohl-eyed seductress stands under a headline reading: "Color: Shark. Note: Man eater." The *femme fatale* is a sexist and colonialist stereotype based in woman's alleged "basic instinct" for "evil"—which we can read, of course, as *resistance*. What lies beneath these stereotypes is a social recognition that *cunctipotence*, unleashed from misogynist definition, mutilation, and constraints, is a force that could not so much "castrate" men as radically upend the "man's world."

Gracious Submission ◆

In *Genesis* 4:16, God curses the rebellious Eve: "Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you." It sounds a lot like a sadomasochistic scenario, and indeed, imagery of Adam and Eve, the devil, the serpent, and the apple figure not

only in religious stories but appear prominently in advertisements for pornographic entertainment. This is really not so surprising. Through patriarchal interpretations of this influential story, sex becomes synonymous with sin and active female desire is transmogrified into masochism. Pornography and the pornography of everyday life enthusiastically affirm these same messages. The dominatrix or *femme fatale* is the unchastened Eve before the "fall." The punished submissive is the "after" shot. Regularly, fashion images display women in poses and situations that suggest bondage and eroticize submission. In an ad for Natori (2000), a young white woman is decked out in black fetish lingerie and seated in a straight-backed chair. Her eyes are demurely downcast as she offers herself to the viewer.

Pornography sexualizes hierarchy, not only between the sexes under male supremacy but also between socially unequal—and sexually fetishized, enslaved, and colonized—races. Possession of women by conquering men, celebrated in such venues as the colonial or tourist postcard, serves as a symbolic facilitator of political, ideological, and military conquest (Alloula, 1986). In such fantasies, women are either fetishized—as passive, accessible, welcoming maidens—or feared as *femmes fatales*, voracious cannibals who must be annihilated. The first part of this fantasy is epitomized in a layout featuring Naomi Campbell, a dark-skinned woman of African, Chinese, and European ancestry (*Harper's Bazaar*, April 1994). The layout uses fashion images, set off by quotes from French painter Paul Gauguin ("I had been seduced . . . by this land and by its simple and primitive people"). The first image is of an offered, cut-open tropical fruit, glistening with moisture. The second is of Campbell also offered and open—naked and face down on a bed!

In a 1999 ad for Skyy Vodka, a young, blonde white woman takes the dominant role. She lies, stomach down, on a mat, naked except for a towel over her buttocks. She props her head up, and extends one arm with a glass needing to be filled with vodka. An Asian woman is there to do the serving. She kneels alongside, her knees touching the woman's other outstretched arm. Sexual subordination is coded into her posture and downcast eyes. She is heavily made-up, elaborately coiffed, and wears a tight, red silk dress, slit up to her buttocks. The joys of sexualized/racialized domination, what bell hooks (1992) calls "eating the other" (pp. 21-39), are here offered to elite women.

Similar imagery frequently can be found in ads using men of color. An ad for Nike workout clothes (GQ, August 2000) uses a two-page spread. On the left, a dark-skinned black man, wearing only the long-tailed shirt, crouches awkwardly, legs apart. On the right, he stands, this time naked above the waist so that his prominent muscles are displayed. His arms are behind his back, as if he were handcuffed, and his head is so deeply lowered that we cannot even see his face. The body language connotes shame and submission, and invokes slavery; the black man is constructed as the submissive sex object.[5] Cultural theorist Ann duCille (1997) suggests that this "feminization" of black men is a product of white men's masked desire for black male bodies, a desire commonly denied by extreme manifestations of racism and homophobia. She recognizes a pornographic dynamic infusing such institutions as slavery, organized sports, and law enforcement, where white men discipline, gaze at, and control the bodies of dark men. In law enforcement, the black male body is disproportionately incarcerated as well as "frisked, patted down, probed, cuffed, spread and ordered to 'assume the position,' which after all, is the stance of anal intercourse" (duCille, 1997, p. 308).

Everyday Child Pornography ◆

Kaplan (1991, p. 350) argues that when women demand and express our intellectual,

sexual, and emotional freedom, society responds with both overtly woman-hating pornography and the increased sexualization of children. In pornographic videos, women are marked with clothing and hairstyles to suggest that they are children or teenagers (Jensen & Dines, 1998, p. 87). In everyday pornography, sexually objectified women are shown in poses and clothing that suggests that they are little girls, and actual girls are made-up and dressed as if they are adult seductresses—as in a recent series of ads for Chanel perfume. The now iconic JonBenet Ramsey haunting our culture demands that we recognize the pornographic object behind the "little beauty queen."

An ad from 1975 unforgettably illuminates the pornographic dynamic. It is a pitch for Love's Baby Soft Fragrance and depicts a heavily made-up child, about 5 or 6 years old. The headline reads: "Love's Baby Soft. Because innocence is sexier than you think." Pornographic sexuality is based in the notion that sex is "dirty," that sex defiles purity. Sexual gratification then becomes linked with defilement as well as transgression and conquest. Charles Stember (1976) describes standard notions of sexual pleasure: "The gratification in sexual conquest derives from the experience of defilement—of reducing the elevated woman to the 'dirty' sexual level, of polluting that which is seen as pure, sexualizing that which is seen as unsexual, animalizing that which is seen as 'spiritual'" (p. 49). The construction of childhood "innocence" does not necessarily protect children. Rather, in the pornographic paradigm, innocence *is* sexy precisely because violation itself is understood as synonymous with sex.

This notion of childhood innocence, suggesting that children's nudity has no sexual meaning to them or anyone else, also deflects our critical attention. In a 1996 pitch for funds for the Breast Cancer Research Foundation, a moppet with tousled curls is pictured from the waist up. She is naked and stands with her hands folded beneath her exposed nipples; her mouth is open and puckered, reminiscent of the mouth of a sex doll. In pornography, nakedness and an open mouth signifies accessibility. What purpose, if not that, do they serve here? The copy, written across her undeveloped breasts, reads: "Mommy, when I grow up will I get breast cancer?" In a culture where a woman' self- and socially perceived worth is all too often linked to her status as a sex object and breast size, dealing with breast cancer is particularly painful. To see this little girl sexually objectified in this context is most telling.

Specialized pornographic genres graphically focus on incest themes and pictorials (Russell, 1998). In 1979, *Playboy* too exploited incest for sexual thrills. A sequence, playfully titled "Father Knows Best," again features a young woman posing naked, but this time she is being photographed by her father. Underneath the headline, and before we get to the adult shots, is a full nude portrait of the daughter when she was three. Her backside is in view as she turns to look at her father. The accompanying copy reveals that the father would shoot nude models at home and that the little girl would take her clothes off, mimic the model's poses, and beg her daddy to photograph her too. He just had to comply for "She had the cutest little tush." Lots of parents photograph their young children naked with no harmful intent or effect. Yet photographing a child in the context of pornography shoots strikes me as a form of sexual abuse. The tongue-in-cheek title, "Father Knows Best," ironically enough, recognizes an underlying connection between family values and pornography. Patriarchal family values idealize a father's godlike authority in his home/castle, where wives and children, his dependents and, in classical form, his property, submit to his benevolent dominion. Incest and domestic abuse constitute the underside of that fundamentally unequal arrangement.

Child abuse generally is perpetrated not by strangers but by someone known to the child—a family member, priest, friend,

neighbor—someone whom the child has been led to trust. An ad, in both print and television format (airing during the 2000 World Series) from the St. Paul Insurance Company, vividly promotes child sexual abuse.[6] A little tousled-haired white girl, utterly alone and utterly beautiful, stands in a field. In the distance we something long and hard rise up in the tall grass. It turns out to be the horn of a rhinoceros and the camera alternates between the child's face as she stands frozen, the charging rhino, and captions, which read: "Trust/Is not being afraid/even if you're vulnerable." As the rhino reaches her, a cloud of dust covers them. When it clears, we see the little girl reach out her hand and stroke the horn as she plants a kiss on it. The girl's vulnerability only enhances her erotic appeal. The child sexual abuser seems ugly even to himself. But, this ad assures him, he really is loveable and desired by his victim.

◆ *Battery*

As in the *Playboy* spread discussed above, one of the most common deceptions spread in support of sexual abuse is that women and girls invite it. A 1999 ad for Spree candies (*Seventeen*) shows a female mouth open and with her tongue sticking out. A Post-it on the tongue reads: "Kick me." Ads frequently include scenarios of men striking women, or of beaten women (Caputi, 1999a). In November 2000, a student gave me two pages torn from an unidentified fashion magazine. An Asian woman sits bereft and forlorn on a bench. Red makeup is applied around one eye to suggest that she has been beaten. On the next page, she wears a backless dress and is posed to suggest that she is utterly spineless. She stands with her back to us, her arms dangling, and bending to the side. Splotches of green make-up imply that she has bruises on her back and along her arm.

Battery is a long-term process of torture and intimidation meant to break the will of the victim. This is accomplished not only by physical assault but also through repeated humiliations, death threats, and psychological attacks on the victim's sense of self (Jones, 1994). Robert Jensen and Gail Dines (1998) note that a common scenario in pornographic novels involves women who at first do not understand their need to submit. As a man forces sex on her and humiliates her, she learns "to crave sex and domination" (p. 94). The same message is conveyed by a 1994 ad for boots that appeared in *Details*, a men's magazine. In this a woman is positioned on hands and knees with her buttocks high in the air and her face down; she is licking the floor. The copy reads: "An acquired taste." The pornographic message here is that if an abuser humiliates his partner long enough, she will learn to love it. Another ad for Candies fragrances (1999) conveys a similar message. The actress, Alyssa Milano, is bending over slightly; a man bends into her from behind. The copy encourages the man: "Anywhere you dare." And he takes the dare, pulling down her T-shirt to spray the fragrance on her now partially exposed breasts. Milano's smile belies the implicit assault. The implied anal sex in these ads does not suggest that this might be consensual activity, but promotes it as a way to demean women.

Rape ◆

A 1996 ad in *Seventeen* for Bonne Bell "no shine" cosmetic products mocks the feminist insistence on a woman's right to refuse sexual relations. The ad headlines the emblazoned words "*No means NO.*" It tells its teenage readers that, when they were little, "no" meant things like "no cookie before dinner." Now, they proclaim, "NO takes on a whole new meaning." It now means: "No more greasy makeup." One 1992 study found that girls younger than 18 accounted for 62% of rape victims (Johnston, 1992, p. A9). The well-known

feminist retort "no means no" counters the pornographic insistence that a woman's *no* to sexual contact actually means *yes*. In this ad, antirape activism is grossly trivialized for the age group most susceptible to rape.

The excessive use of alcohol greatly increases the likelihood of acquaintance rape. In numerous ads aimed at men, it is suggested that drinking facilitates sex for men, whether the woman consents or not. A 1995 ad for Bacardi rum that appeared on the back cover of *Vibe* shows three men and one woman. At first glance, because her pants are the same color as one of the boys, it appears as if she is standing firmly on the ground. But, if you look closely, you clearly can see that the men are lifting her up in the air. Her legs are spread and a huge bottle of Bacardi rum is aimed into her crotch. All parties are smiling. Advertised here are the joys of (gang) rape and the uses to which alcohol can be put in facilitating it. A 2001 ad in *ESPN Magazine* for the "mudslide," a drink made with Kahlua, shows a screaming, provocatively dressed woman backed up against a pile of sandbags. The bottle, again, is poised to enter between her legs. The copy advises the reader of the ad: "Don't hold back."

◆ *Snuff*

An extreme form of violent pornography is the snuff film or photograph, images of someone actually being murdered: the killing is understood as the climactic part of the sex. A "virtual snuff" sensibility informs countless fashionable images that have appeared in advertising and fashion tableaux since the 1970s. Models (e.g., Linda Evangelista and Madonna) are showcased in positions suggesting that they are dead: suffocated under plastic bags; laid out in gift-box coffins; their heads and torsos buried under concrete; sprawled brokenly on stairs and boutique floors. Symbolic dismemberments have long been the norm in fashion photography (decapitated heads to sell us perfume, amputated legs to push pantyhose, even crowds of disembodied eyes to sell us eye shadow) (Caputi, 1987). These dismemberments usually are not recognized as such, so habituated are we to them. We might notice them if they were being done to male bodies, but they are not in any comparable way.

An ad for the Voodoo computer card (2000) shows a woman whose Medusa-like head has been blown off due to the intensity of the charge in her hair dryer. One for Diamond.com (2000) shows an unconscious or dead woman, naked save for strategic strands of diamonds; she is caught in a pseudo-spider web of similar strands. The mythic Atlantis is evoked in an ad for Finlandia Vodka (1998). It shows a drowned woman, whose see-through dress clings to her voluptuous buttocks, evoking a necrophilic voyeurism. A series of ads for Perry Ellis fashions in late 2000 through 2001 are all set in a green-tiled room (obviously like the execution chamber for Timothy McVeigh shown regularly in the news during this period). One of these (*Vanity Fair*, September 2000) shows a naked man leaning over an elegantly dressed woman, who is stretched out on the floor. Her eyes are glassy and her arms extend awkwardly over her head. A few months later, another elegantly dressed body, this time a man's, lies on the floor of the same green-tiled room. A pair of unclad, shaven legs stand over him. Is it a woman who has killed him? Whatever the sex of the fashionable killers and corpses, the fact remains: murder, including state-sponsored murder, is linked to glamour and sexual situations.

The "pornographic murder" (Durgnat, 1978, p. 499) first was sensationalized in *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) in the infamous shower scene. Such murder presents the subjectivity, desires, and point of view of the sex killer. An ad for *Law & Order* appeared in *TV Guide* (October 11, 1995). Under the headline "Coed Killer" is a drawing of a prostrate female corpse with plunging neckline and prominent breasts. When murder is so blatantly sexualized and

exploited, we might have to realize that the sex killer is not a deviant, an incomprehensible monster, but rather the logical product of a pornographic culture that ubiquitously eroticizes violence (Caputi, 1987).

◆ *Silencing Women*

Hostility to female speech is a recurring preoccupation of sexist systems, enforced through such means as religious proscriptions, codes of modesty, and the exclusion of women from powerful arenas. A comic selection from *Hustler* is unforgettably overt in its hostility. Under a caption reading "Lip Service," we view a photograph of a woman's face; her mouth has been replaced by a vulva. The text below the picture reads:

> There are those who say that illogic is the native tongue of anything with tits. . . . It comes natural to many broads; just like rolling in shit is natural for dogs. . . . They speak not from the heart but from the gash, and chances are that at least once a month your chick will stop you dead in your tracks with a masterpiece of cunt rhetoric. . . . The one surefire way to stop those feminine lips from driving you crazy is to put something between them—like your cock, for instance. (cited in Russell, 1998, p. 65)

In other words, men can shut the offending "mouth" via rape—oral and vaginal.

The pornography of everyday life is more subtle but the message is the same. Frequently, women are mocked as silent, stupid, and inconsequential by being decapitated in ads, their very heads replaced by products or simply left out of the frame. An ad for Shredded Wheat (*Esquire*, March 2001) shows only the torso of a "babe" in a bikini. Written over her midsection are the words "8% substantial." The cereal is then lauded as "100% substantial." Many visuals suggest that a woman is gagged. A 2000 ad for Lexus shows a naked white woman bound in hot pink wrappings, though with plenty of her flesh showing. Her face is wrapped; only her eyes, looking glassy and stunned, show completely. A single strip effectively gags her mouth. A vicious ad for Miller appeared on the back cover of *Sports Illustrated* (2000). It shows a man's hand resting a beer on top of an ordinary looking middle-aged white woman's head—she must be on the floor. She is grimacing, her eyes almost closed (although, if you give it just a quick glance it might seem that she is smiling). She holds the label of the beer, in the manner of a gag, over her mouth. One woman, Viviana Cintolesi, told me this ad visually transmitted a common sexist saying in her country, Chile: The perfect woman has a flat head (on which a man can place a beer), big ears (so that he can hold her tight), and a toothless mouth (so that he can orally rape her with no danger to himself).

Sex Objects ◆

> Sexuality is socially organized to require sex inequality for excitement and satisfaction. The least extreme expression of gender inequality, and the prerequisite for all of it, is dehumanization and objectification. (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 243)

An ad for Nike "air" sports shoes appeared in *Sports Illustrated* in 1999. It shows the shoe as well as an uninflated sex doll. The caption reads: "Air is what makes it good." Although pornography is rumored to be all about lust and sexual excitement, in the long run pornography is about desensitization, disconnection, the constriction of the sexual imagination, and the increasing appeal of control and sadism to the numbed sensorium (Jensen, 1998, p. 139). Pornographic objectification is a process whereby a sentient being is dehumanized, someone turned into something

that can be exchanged, owned, shown off, abused, disposed of, and used as a means to someone else's ends. And, the truth is, if you dehumanize others, you unavoidably do it to yourself as well. An article in *Men's Health* (Gutfield, 1999) warns readers that use of Internet pornography can cause men to become addicted to its engineered fix and lose their desire for real intimate interactions.

Women learn our status as objects through not only the harassment and surveillance we encounter regularly on the streets and at work but also through art, pornography, prostitution, fashion, cheesecake, beauty contests, tourist advertising, and so on. Drawing on the history of the female nude in European art, John Berger (1972, pp. 46-47) notes that such work served a pornographic function for their collectors. Moreover, in a sexist system "men act and women appear." The one who does the looking is in a position of power. Indeed those who are positioned as spectacle are reduced to slave, animal, and/or commodity status.

Patricia Hill Collins (1990, p. 168) argues persuasively that African American women are not included in pornography as an afterthought but that the history of racist enslavement and sexual exploitation of African American women forms a "key pillar on which contemporary pornography rests." Because of slavery, black women's bodies were continual objects of display on the auction block, were reduced to commodities for purchase, and forced sexually and reproductively. Collins (1990) writes: "The process illustrated by the pornographic treatment of the bodies of enslaved African women . . . has developed into a full-scale industry encompassing all women objectified differently by racial/ethnic pornography" (p. 169). Consider an ad for Moschino apparel that appeared in 1999 in *Elle* magazine. A dark-skinned black woman, with a big Afro and garbed in leopard-skin pants and halter top and high heels, stands with legs spread wide and arms flung out against the wall. Looking closely, we that she is literally stapled to fabric on that wall. She registers no resistance; her eyes are half-closed and her mouth is open. It is hard to read her expression: she could be making bedroom eyes or she could be drugged. In her critique of pornography, the novelist Alice Walker (1980) writes: "Where white women are depicted in pornography as 'objects,' black women are depicted as animals" (p. 103). In a culture where animals are considered a lower species, this marks black women not only as sex objects but as subhumans. Walker continues: "Where white women are depicted as human bodies if not beings, black women are depicted as shit" (p. 103).

Dirty Pictures ◆

A cartoon in *Hustler* shows a black man wiping himself after defecating. Where the tissue wipes clean, his skin turns white. A mainstream version of this "joke" can be found in a 2000 ad for Calvin Klein "Dirty Denim" jeans. Lisa "Left Eye" Lopes, of the music group TLC, wearing short-short "dirty denims," is posed against a chain-link fence. It is nighttime and this doesn't look like a very safe place to be. She is standing, but bending forward so her buttocks protrude.

The moralistic/pornographic association of sex with "the dirty" is based in a mind/body split. Racist and sexist "civilization" define progress by how far a culture makes it known that it is removed from body functions, sexuality, and the animal and elemental world, which is understood as inferior and feminine. All women, to a greater or lesser degree depending on factors of race, class, and sexual experience; men of color; gay men; and Jews have been figured as "dirtier" than those who conveniently define themselves as cleaner, purer, more moral, civilized, and superior (Dijkstra, 1996). Within this pornographic dichotomy, some women are denounced as particularly sexual, animalistic, and dirty—women of color, prostitutes, poor women.

Other women are designated as impossibly "pure"—for example, upper- and middle-class white woman who are installed as the closely guarded symbol of "white purity, white culture, of whiteness itself" (Doane, 1991, p. 41).

This pattern is enacted with great visual charge in two disparate magazine ads from 1994. One, appearing in *Cosmopolitan*, is for Neutrogena soap, although you could easily think you are looking at a poster for a white supremacist group. A young, blonde, smiling woman, wearing faded blue jeans and a white blouse, stands against a white background. The boldfaced word—*Pure*—obviously refers equally to the woman and the soap. We should remember that in "honor crimes," "pure" woman must bear the honor of her male relatives and community. If she transgresses against what they believe to be proper behavior, and gets "dirtied," they can righteously kill or rape her (Baker, Gregware, & Cassidy, 1999).

Just as the elite woman is constructed as "pure," others (women of color, "white trash," and colonials, poor women, prostituted women) are said to be "dirty." In a 1994 ad for Diesel jeans, appearing in *Details*, a brown-skinned woman lies on a bed covered with zebra-striped sheets. She wears a black bra, unbuttoned jeans, and a crucifix (symbolizing colonization as well as theological notions of sexual filth/evil). Obviously, this woman is available for invasion and conquest. The headline reads: "How to control wild animals." In smaller print, this advice is given:

> We all want a safer world. So, come on, let's build more zoos. 1000s of them! Right now, there are far too many dangerous animals running around, wasting space, wasting time, using the planet as a toilet! Take our advice. Don't be fooled by "natural" beauty, stick em in practical, easy-to-clean metal cages.

By stigmatizing this woman, and those she represents, as a dangerous and filthy animal, the conditions are laid for any type of abuse to be done to her with impunity.

This moralistic understanding of sex as defilement and hence "dirty" is deeply ingrained. The mind/body split ordains that the body is divided into pure (head and face) and impure (sexual and elimination) zones. Following again on this split, whole peoples can be classified as inferior (dark, savage, bestial, dirty, sexual, "shitty," dangerous) and subjected to rape, lynching, colonization, genocide, or "ethnic cleansing" (Bauman, 1989). Moreover, under this model, animals (hairy, uncivilized, sexually unashamed) are figured as inferior creatures for use, and the Earth itself, the source of humanity (*human*, from the Latin *humus*, earth or dirt), becomes our enemy.

Crimes Against Nature ◆

> The definition and use of the female body is the paradigm for the definition and use of all things; if the autonomy of the female body is defined as sacred, then so will be the autonomy of all things. (Sjöö & Mor, 1991, p. 384)

The phrase "crimes against nature" usually means "perversions," such as homosexuality. Of course, it might be more apt to recognize the true crimes against nature as the denial of our own nature, abuse of animals, and environmental pollutions. Sometimes metaphoric language implicitly recognizes the connection. The cover of *Time* magazine (September 4, 1995) depicts a gray "polluted and plundered" wasteland. The headline reads: "The Rape of Siberia." Henry Kissinger once remarked that power is the ultimate aphrodisiac. A political cartoon by David Levine in *The Nation* (February 25, 1984) visualizes Kissinger's power by showing him "fucking" the Earth (a woman's body with the Earth as her head). We have no trouble getting the joke. Rena Swentzell (1993, p. 167), a Native American scholar from

Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico, scoffs at the normative/pornographic belief in "power as an integral part of sexuality." She demands that we recognize the historical implications of that belief: "That is what the inquisition was all about. That is what the whole conquest of the Southwest was about—power and control by males."

In popular imagery, the conquest continues. Both the land and the female body are shown as conquered, rendered into property that can be owned and mapped. A 1999 ad for car stereo speakers shows a naked, curvy, and inert, perhaps dead, young white woman lying on the ground. Inscribed over every inch of her body are roadmaps. The headline reads: "Feel the raw, naked power of the road." Here men are invited to experience driving as a form of sexual conquest over the Earth. Sometimes a woman's body represents the land; other times, the image of the Earth itself is used. As I have detailed elsewhere, in all manner of advertising imagery, paralleling the pornographic treatment of women's bodies, the Earth is shown stabbed, halved, rendered partially artificial, dominated, and "snuffed" (Caputi, 1993).

An everyday image of technological snuff using (part of) a woman's body can be found in a 1993 ad for Eclipse Fax machines. The headline reads: "Eclipse Fax: If It Were Any Faster, You'd Have to Send and Receive Your Faxes Internally." We see the decapitated head of a woman, again very Medusa-like, whose snaky hair fans out around her head. Two electrodes are attached to her forehead. Jammed into her eyes, ears, and mouth are cruel-looking metal pipes with wires going in multiple directions. Every visible opening is penetrated. The last line sneers: "to fax any faster, you'd have to break a few laws. Of physics." Of course, this image flaunts that familiar pornographic delight in taboo violation by symbolically visualizing the ongoing mutilation, rape, and murder of nature (*physics* is from the Greek *phusis*, nature).

Almost everyone has heard of the movie *The Stepford Wives* (and its made-for-TV sequels). In the mythic town of Stepford, husbands kill their spouses so that they can replace them with voluptuous and acquiescent robots. The artificial sex object is a recurring symbol in pornography and popular culture. In 1951, cultural theorist Marshall McLuhan claimed that this symbol, what he called "the mechanical bride," indicated that necrophilic sexual desires were being invested into technology and bespoke a numbed sensibility that experienced sensation only through sadism, by "pluck[ing] the heart out of the mystery" (p. 101). Like the "Stepford wife," the mechanical bride is the uncanny shell that remains when life/presence has been destroyed.

The mechanical bride points to the core connection between cultural degradation of women and an overall assault on the feminine principle in nature, what Vandana Shiva (1988, p. 40) defines as the active and creative principle in which both women and men participate. That animosity, as documented by Caroline Merchant (1980), Evelyn Fox Keller (1985), and others, riddles scientific language and metaphor that regularly refers to "mastery" over nature, "penetrating" the mysteries of the universe, and so on (Caputi, 1993). When the "heart" of the mystery—the erotic—is thus plucked, we are left in a soulless, still, and deeply sterile place, veritably a Stepford World.

The images I have described here are not just selling us the individual products or fashions that they promote. Nor is their subject matter some uncomplicated notion of "sex." Rather, we are being asked, forcefully and every day, to buy into an ideology and an attendant sexuality that normalizes and promotes an interlocking series of oppressions and violences. The pornographic worldview is perhaps best epitomized by a 1985 promo from the Canned Food Information Council in both print and video versions (the latter premiered during the Super Bowl). The setting is supposedly the year 3000. The future is represented by a shiny, supine, leg-spread, open-mouthed fembot (Daly, 1987, p. 98)

replete with stiletto heels and sculpted uplift breasts. This pornographic "sex goddess" symbolizes a supposedly desirable future, one in which "dirty," that is, fertile, active, and exuberant, Nature is finally defeated and replaced by a shiny, man-made, and utterly controlled object. This vision celebrates a supposed triumph of mind over body, of men over women, of civilization over nature. Yet what it really bespeaks is a cosmic sterility (Caputi, 1998).

These visions do not remain unchallenged. A vital movement of art, literature, and ecological/feminist philosophy challenges the pornographic worldview and reclaims the erotic energies that have been appropriated (e.g., Anzaldúa, 2000; Caputi, 1998, 2001; Cisneros, 1996; Conner, 1993; Daly, 1984; Ensler, 1998; Gadon, 1989; Walker, 1983). That movement begins with the refusal of everyday pornography and a reclamation of the erotic. At its core is a recognition that the powers of mind are akin to, not opposed to, the powers of sex. I take heart from the response of a 6-year-old girl interviewed by Eve Ensler and included in the *Vagina Monologues*. When Ensler (1998) asked her, "What's special about your vagina?" she replied: "Somewhere deep inside I know it has a really really smart brain" (pp. 88-89).

◆ *Notes*

1. I want to thank friends and students who have brought some of these ads to my attention: Valentina Bruno, J. D. Checkit, Heather Stewart, Natalia Gago, Augusta Walden, and Ann Scales.

2. The ethnicity of the children is ambiguous. It was Latinos who told me that they recognized the children as Latino. This ambiguity leaves the racist message intact, but renders it with more subtlety.

3. *Cunctipotent* is a currently obsolete English word meaning "all powerful." I first encountered it in Barbara Walker's *Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (1983) while perusing the entry *cunt*. Until the 14th century, *cunt* was Standard English for the vulva and only became obscene in the 17th century. Eric Partridge (1961) writes that the word dropped out of Standard English due to its "powerful sexuality." Walker asserts that *cunt* is derivative of the Asian Great Goddess as Cunti, or Kunda, the Yoni of the Universe. Following Michael Dames, she associates *cunt* with the words *country*, *kin*, *kind*, *cunning*, and *ken*, as well as *cunctipotent*. Most linguists do not support this etymology. Nevertheless, we can accept it as a folk etymology and reclaim *cunctipotence* as a word meaning female potency, possibility, and potential—a concept sorely needed in the English language.

4. Two examples will have to suffice here of the associations of sacred power with the vulva. Among the Baule people of the Ivory Coast, the most powerful *amuin* (a power or supernatural spirit) is the *amuin bla*, the women's deities, notably Adyanun. An image of a spirit wife presents a naked woman with legs spread, signifying that she is especially close to the powers of Adyanun. In Baule culture, as in the story of Baubo, we find an association between females' naked dance and the averting of calamity: "The women dance Adyanun as a last recourse in times of impending calamity—epidemics, war, drought, a president's death—because it is more potent than all the other amuin. Adyanun may be danced after the men's *bo nun amuin* have failed, or if they are not considered strong enough. The women's *amuin* is danced naked because its locus of power is every woman's sexual organs" (Vogel, 1997, p. 59). Zora Neale Hurston (1938/1983) relates this conversation with her guide in her study of Haitian voodoo: "'What is the truth?' Dr. Holly asked me, and knowing that I could not answer him he answered himself through a Voodoo ceremony in which the Mambo, that is the priestess, richly dressed, is asked this question ritualistically. She replies by throwing back her veil and revealing her sex organs. The ceremony means that this is the infinite, the ultimate truth. There is no mystery beyond the mysterious source of life" (p. 137).

5. Thanks to Heather Stewart for pointing out this connection.

6. Thanks to Fran Chelland for alerting me to this ad and its implications.

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