

# Rape Crisis & *news* Women's Support Project

A newsletter from Rape Crisis Scotland & the Women's Support Project Issue 8 : Spring 2011

## ***Special Issue - Sexualisation and Sexual exploitation***

*We're delighted to present a special issue, produced jointly with the Women's Support Project, looking at the growing sexualisation of our culture, and at sexual exploitation.*

*In 2011, we do not have to look far to see how sexualised our world has become, for explicit content that objectifies women (and children). From mainstream magazines, film and television output, content uploaded to social media networks, to clothing ranges and the breathtaking expansion of the "adult entertainment" industry, the evidence is everywhere.*



*This is not a moral issue; it is not about an aversion to or condemnation of sex. It is about equality. It is about autonomy, and the ability to allow women and men to live their lives free from the straitjacket of stereotyping and the damaging messages and behavioural imperatives imposed by pornography and its infiltration of mainstream culture.*

*In this issue, we look at several aspects of this phenomenon, and at efforts to change things. For where women are objectified, they will never be equal, and often abused and exploited. If we are serious about ending sexual violence, we must also challenge the culture which is so conducive to it, and replace its insidious messages with the truth.*

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# Culture creep:

**No one who watched the 2011 X-Factor final can remain in any doubt of the extent to which our culture has become sexualised.**



*Burlesque on X-Factor*

For many, this realisation is nothing new, but the willingness of ITV to broadcast and then defend a pornographic routine billed as one of the highlights before the watershed is an indication of its confidence that such explicit content now has a place within family entertainment broadcasting output on mainstream TV, regardless of how young the viewers might be. An average of 17.2 million people watching (peaking at 18.2 million by 8.45 pm) witnessed Christina Aguilera and accompanying dancers writhing and posturing their way through a series of explicit moves clad in scanty lingerie – the kind of performance you might expect to see in a lap-dancing or sex club beamed without shame or apology into millions of homes across the country.

“We are confident that the performances given by our guest artistes on Saturday were appropriate for the show,” an ITV spokeswoman was reported as saying, when the complaints started flooding in. Within a couple of days, Ofcom and ITV had each received around 1500 complaints about the show and Ofcom is now investigating a total of 2750 complaints.

The X-factor debacle is, however, only one of the latest and, because of its viewing figures, most visible examples of a seemingly unstoppable tide of sexualised material which permeates every aspect of modern life and contemporary culture. Demonstrations of explicit sexual performance have been so relentlessly and successfully fused with notions of fulfilment and empowerment that many find it hard to see the difference or to find the time to question the roots of it all – and more importantly, its consequences.

“it’s not just crappy shops selling padded bras for 8 years olds. it’s peddling stuff like this as family viewing. kids who watch this stuff every saturday are going to think that that’s what women do. we’ve become so de-sensitised to what is, essentially, soft porn that it’s ok for pre-watershed” ‘hatwoman’ [user profile] on Mumsnet 11/12/2010<sup>1</sup>

Hatwoman’s wide-ranging desperation reflects the feelings of many parents and other concerned individuals who can see that the influence of pornography on much of what we consume has increased exponentially. We are sold in so many different ways the idea that this is not only harmless, but what constitutes attractive, appealing, and is what we should aspire both to possess and to BECOME if we want to feel “empowered”, successful – and desirable. What this amounts to is grooming on a societal scale – with a panoply of commercial artillery ranged so closely and effectively against us that it is becoming daily more integrated with our lives and for many (particularly young people, who have been exposed to little else) difficult even to see.

The diversification of Playboy from straightforward purveyor of pornography into a billion dollar industry selling branded goods such as make-up and children’s bedwear reflects exactly this blurring of boundaries between pornography and mainstream consumerism. Magazines such as Nuts and Zoo, whose content is almost indistinguishable from the “adult” pornographic titles of



*Pimp outfit marketed at children*

yesteryear are now sold in full view on the shelves of supermarket (often at the eyelevel of children) and presented as harmless entertainment. Parents buy and dress babies and children in t-shirts that declare them to be “porn stars”, or that “All Daddy wanted was a blowjob”. An increasing range of products of all kinds – pole-dancing kits, sexualised Bratz dolls, Halloween “pimp” costumes etc etc are protested one after the other by increasingly weary and frustrated individuals from parents to pressure group activists in an attempt to stem the tide.

Music videos and lyrics constantly reinforce these messages and spell out exactly where the value of women lies:

*“She work it girl, she work the pole  
She break it down, she take it low  
She fine as hell, she about the dough  
She doing her thing out on the floor  
Her money money, she makin’ makin’*



# Sexualisation & the Norming of Porn

*Look at the way she shakin' shakin'....  
She always ready, when you want it she want it  
Like a nympho, the info, I show you where to meet  
her  
On the late night, till daylight the club jumpin'  
If you want a good time, she gone give you what  
you want"* Ayo Technology – 50 Cent & Justin  
Timberlake<sup>2</sup>

And all of this has an impact.

A study of 1000 girls undertaken by the Lab TV website in 2008 revealed that 63% of girls aspired to become glamour models, and a quarter of those interviewed saw lap-dancing as "a good profession".<sup>3</sup> With TV programmes such as *Belle de Jour* not only glossing over the damage done by men who buy women for sex but glamourising prostitution as a viable career, confusion among young women as to what is empowering and what is exploitative is completely understandable. *Belle de Jour*'s TV realisation as the "Secret Diary of a Call Girl" was based on "Belle de Jour"'s blog and book, a development that very much represents the sort of 'brand development' seen previously in Playboy.

And when we consider that even Government sponsored employment agency Jobcentre Plus has in the recent past actively promoted "opportunities"



*Stalking and sexism: the doctrine according to rap*

with titles like "Webcam Performer" (with duties involving explicit sexual dialogue), "Escort", "Erotic/Pole Dancers" and the euphemistic "TV Worker" (dress code: topless) we can really begin to understand how sexualised "work" has become as legitimised and mainstream as it has. Fortunately, a recognition of and concerns about the harm caused to women involved in these activities which emerged in the course of the consultation which followed protest and lobbying by activists meant that the Government, at least, now refrains from this sort of advertising.

Representations of womanhood on display in popular culture are astonishingly uniform, with wholesale adherence to the prescribed checklist of large breasts (prominently on display), fake tan, nails, and eyelashes, hair extensions, killer heels and minimal clothing visible everywhere from high street stores to music videos, mainstream entertainment and advertising. And inevitably, this is how many young women are choosing to represent themselves on the street, on social networking sites and elsewhere. Any sense that there is a value in uniqueness of identity, expression or individuality of style is continually eroded by the onward march and relentless promotion of this stereotyped, exaggerated, pneumatic and sexually suggestive caricature of femininity. Far from being exciting, challenging or groundbreaking, the template for young women here is utterly banal and conventional, and creates pressures on young women by its sheer ubiquity to conform to by whatever means. How sexy is that?

In 2010 Linda Papadopoulos produced a report for the UK Government<sup>4</sup> on the impact of sexualisation on young people. She identified clearly the damaging consequences of a sexualised culture:

"This exposure affects all young people, regardless of their background and education. While some might argue that they are making a free choice, commentators have noted that the hyper-sexualisation of culture is beginning to co-opt the language of freedom and choice. When girls

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are told over and over again not only that their appearance is all that matters, but that exploiting their appearance is a route to success, it is little wonder that many are choosing to take this route. A monolithic view of the 'ideal' women combined with the biased portrayal of such jobs in popular and celebrity culture is limiting, rather than increasing, the choices open to young girls."

The wide-ranging report also highlights many negative consequences of a sexualised culture on young women, including poor body image and anxiety around how others perceive them leading to low self-esteem and sometimes mental health issues. These are linked in turn to a significant rise in plastic surgery (e.g. breast augmentation) among very young women and in eating disorders. A study carried out at King's College in London echoed these findings, with its own report, which suggested, the Observer reported in February 2011, that "the so-called "pornification" of modern culture may be driving up surgery rates to unprecedented levels as both men and women have increased exposure to pornographic imagery via the internet. Recent studies have shown sharp rises in the numbers of young people accessing porn."<sup>5</sup>

Marie-Claire reported in August 2010 that "According to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 12,000 American **teenagers** aged 13 to 19 received **Botox** injections in the last year."<sup>6</sup> American-style beauty pageants, which have become increasingly popular in the UK (there are over 20 of these here each year with "thousands of girls as young as five taking part" according to Marie-Claire) act as a sort of sexualisation boot-camp for the very young, with their own parents steering children towards the plastic ideal, and instilling a spirit of poisonous rivalry between them as they do so. A startling recent example of sexualisation and adultification of young girls in mainstream media can be seen in a fashion spread in the December 2010 edition of French Vogue which demonstrates clearly a grotesque conflation of children and adult sexuality which is one of the most disturbing aspects of a sexualised culture.<sup>7</sup> Very young girls direct knowing looks at the camera through heavy make-up as they adopt coquettish poses in child-sized adult glamour clothes including killer heels which dwarf their tiny frames.

"When we encourage girls to equate their self-worth with a narrow, idealised – and, for most, unachievable – representation of the female form, we are encouraging them to think of themselves as objects." says Linda Papadopoulos in her report, whose conclusions reflect closely earlier findings from the American Psychological Association in 2007<sup>8</sup> which showed that the use of sexualised images of

*Right: Exploited childhood as infantilised womanhood in French Vogue, December 2010*



women and girls has very harmful impact on their self-esteem and hampers healthy development.

In this context, with a resurgence of beauty pageants taking place even in UK Universities<sup>9</sup>, the epitome of aspirational womanhood for an increasing number of young women these days is to be found not in the science labs, athletics fields or shoulder to shoulder at the vanguard of revolutionary politics – but in the fashion pages, burlesque and lapdancing clubs and seedy "glamour" studios aping and indulging the fantasies of the men in suits and who make money from it all – and the punters who pay for it. Although let's face it, whether it's with credit cards or through the exploitation of our gender or our children's futures, we're all paying a price for this.

On the other side of the gender divide what young men often inevitably take from this is that women can and should be treated like objects – that they are there to be viewed, appraised & valued in much the same way as a car or other consumable. And across many media forums this rating phenomenon is a literal truth, with men sitting as judge and jury on panels in magazines & on groups within social networking sites to determine the relative "hotness" of various women and other burning questions of the day. Young men are under pressure by the same means to think of themselves and their relationships with the opposite sex primarily in sexual terms, and in the context of a dynamic which sees them always in control and exhibiting a sense of entitlement.

It is encouraging to see Governments demonstrating concern on these issues. Scotland, perhaps more than many other countries, is in an excellent position to take a strong stand in this area. In its 2009 document "Safer Lives, Changed Lives"<sup>10</sup>, which outlines both its definition of and strategy to combat violence against women in Scotland, the Scottish Government clearly identifies that "*Such violence cannot be understood... in isolation from the norms, social structure and gender roles within the community, which greatly influence women's vulnerability to violence.*" It is very hard to see how sexualisation as outlined above cannot be seen as a key contributor to this. The Scottish Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee did commission a report on sexualised goods aimed at children<sup>11</sup>, but the scope of this was very limited and has so far led to little further action.



# Sexualisation & the Norming of Porn

Even when attempts are made to address these issues, initial interest and concern often gives way to a dismissive attitude towards the extent of the problem, references to “moral panic” and efforts, for whatever reason, to downplay its ubiquity and damaging consequences. Hence we have claims, such as that made by Rachel Russell, an academic at Glasgow Caledonian University (who took part in a review on sexualised goods for the Scottish Government) making claims on the subject of padded bras for primary school children which are entirely unconvincing in the context, if not completely baffling:

“Young people don’t necessarily associate this with anything sexual. Quite often it’s seen in terms of comfort. They feel that the padding gives them some protection – it covers you up”. [Rachel Russell interviewed in Panorama edition looking at the sexualisation of young people broadcast on BBC1, 10<sup>th</sup> January 2011<sup>12</sup>]

The UK Government review which led to the Linda Papadopoulos report has now been superseded by a subsequent review launched in December 2010 (the 5<sup>th</sup> initiative in three years looking into the issue) the remit of which is far narrower. The new review of commercialisation and sexualisation of children<sup>13</sup> is chaired by Reg Bailey, Chief Executive of the Mother’s Union and is expected to report in May 2011.

Some of the most effective and committed action in challenging sexualisation has been undertaken by small and highly committed groups of activists whose anger and concern at its ubiquity and the harm it causes has led to increasingly vocal protest. “Object” (a London based group which has garnered considerable support and publicity across the UK) has campaigned against the objectification of women on many fronts for several years now, and has notched up some notable successes. It was largely due to pressure exerted by Object and its supporters that changes made by the UK Government to the Licensing Act 2003 (which applies to England & Wales) introduced a requirement that lapdancing clubs be licensed like sex shops and not cafes as they had been previously. This means that individual councils now set their own quotas for the number of strip clubs and sex shops they want in their area. In the case of Hackney last year, this turned out to be zero, which effectively closes down existing establishments which are unable to renew their licenses – an encouraging precedent.

Another highly successful and visible initiative from Object has been “Feminist Fridays”<sup>14</sup> – intended “to reinvigorate grassroots feminist activism against misogynistic lads’ mags and newspapers



*Player or plaything? Women as sexual objects in mainstream media for boys is not confined to Nuts, Zoo & FHM etc.*

like The Sport being sold as part of the mainstream media.”<sup>15</sup> These protests take the form of peaceful incursions into offending outlets (such as WH Smith) by feminists with paper bags emblazoned with anti-sexist slogans, into which they place copies of Nuts, Zoo, FHM and titles with similar content.

Other groups such as the online parenting forum Mumsnet also campaign on these issues. Mumsnet conducted a survey during 2010 on people’s attitudes to lads mags<sup>16</sup> and the forum sees regular debate and discussion on related subjects such as the X-Factor final.

In Scotland, The Scottish Coalition Against Sexual Exploitation (SCASE)<sup>17</sup> pursues the same objectives, with a growing membership and vibrant online presence raising awareness and campaigning vigorously. Collaborative activities with university women’s groups have included similar protests to those staged by Object, with for example lads mags sold by WH Smith receiving similar treatment at Queen Street Station and Sauchiehall Street.

The Rosey Project<sup>18</sup> and WISE Women<sup>19</sup> in Glasgow offer other examples of positive initiatives aimed at encouraging young people to examine the messages that confront them daily on every media platform – and to question their intent and impact. WISE Women’s cleverly constructed media boards featuring hundreds of cuttings and images from print media demonstrate clearly the linear

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progression of these messages from the earliest examples of gender stereotyping of young children in infant comics, to the sexualised messages and hypermasculine representations which have become wearily familiar in magazines aimed both at older children and adults, and in newspaper stories and headlines too. The Rosey Project uses images as prompts for discussion around “Popstars and Adverts” into Scottish Secondary schools, looking with pupils at the way that women and men are represented in popular culture, and inviting them to think about and discuss what this says about the status of the respective genders in our societies.

When we talk about a rape culture, we are talking not simply about a world in which rapes are committed, but about the wider context and attitudes that allow women to be viewed as objects, and sexual violence to be committed with impunity. With public attitudes a major factor in perpetuating a shockingly low conviction rate for rape, we have to give serious consideration to the reality that the relentless and increasingly blatant sexualisation of our culture (of which the foregoing offers just a few examples) may be a significant part of the problem.

*“Rape culture is the objectification of women, which is part of a dehumanizing process that renders consent irrelevant. Rape culture is treating women’s bodies like public property.”*<sup>20</sup>

Do we really buy into the view that explicit lapdance performances are fine for peak-time family viewing? That there is nothing wrong with six-year-olds photographed in sexually provocative poses for adult fashion spreads or that the relentless misogyny in song lyrics has no impact more lasting than the length of the song itself? That pole-dancing is a sport, that eight-year-olds wear padded bras as some kind of protective layer? Do we say “It’s just a pretty wee bunny” and overlook the fact that the Playboy logo & goods represent an industry monolith built on nearly 60 years of exploiting women for pornography? If we do, then the sad news is that the sexualisation of our world has become so normalised that our responses to the theft of our autonomy, to our own degradation and exploitation have been effectively neutralised and deadened. We need to wake up to this - to challenge this process and ask questions both of those who facilitate it - and of ourselves (how can we change things?) – before it’s too late.

As Joanna Eberhart observed in “The Stepford Wives” before her life and identity was obliterated and replaced by a robot:

Feminist Friday  
protest at WH Smith,  
Sauchiehall Street  
Glasgow



“If I am wrong, I’m insane... but if I’m right, it’s even worse than if I was wrong.”

Eileen Maitland

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# Sexualisation & the Norming of Porn

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## Misuse of women's images - Linda Thompson

With the long dark nights only a few weeks behind us, last year's summer holiday seems a long time ago.

It was lovely to spend a grey rainy evening recently looking back at many hundred of photos of sunnier times. A few hours passed getting out the old family albums and going through snaps capturing key points in my family history. There are the usual happy memories of firsts, the requisite gawky, gappy toothed starts at school.

Of course I cringed at the journey through my hair-styles, fashions, the stupid goofing for the camera with old friends and partners. To be honest, there were parts of my past I am more than glad to look at only if and when I choose and relief that they are kept where only certain people see them.



I love photos. I enjoy taking them, looking through folders and printing the select. The more advanced can easily edit in Photoshop to change completely the whole set up, feel and context of the photo. I am happy to make sure red eye is removed, the colours sharpened, auto focused and ultimately the choice to delete and remove them forever. With digital technology, nothing needs to be permanent and with that freedom, every second can be recorded, shared globally or deleted. Almost all of us now carry around uber-gadgets with high-resolution cameras, film recording technology, editing apps and huge storage potential. We can have near constant online access, linking to "friends" through our social networking sites, tweeting our every move, choice and action, and posting pics straight away. Now we can not only record but also instantly share our experiences with others.



# Misuse of women's images - Linda Thompson

After recently watching a crowd with mobiles, arms outstretched, film a group of young people busking, I thought, are they recording this to and save to enjoy themselves at another time. Or are they thinking – I wonder how this might look to others and will I post it online?

This recording of our lives is of course nothing new, nor is the recording of the more private and personal times. Following developments in technology, more and more people are recording themselves having sex. Polaroid cameras meant not having to leaving rolls of film into the chemist. With video cameras – we could create our own private movie to re-watch in our own spaces. Now with tiny lenses built into any number of gadgets, their unobtrusive presence means we hardly even know it is there, ready to be shared or streamed online.

But there is a darker side to all of this. The person who is being filmed doesn't always have a choice. They are no longer in control or possession of their image. If it is not your gadget, then you have potentially less control. The owner can from then on be the producer, the editor and distributor.

There is a whole host of websites that will easily allow you to upload and share photos, with just a click to confirm that they effectively have the rights



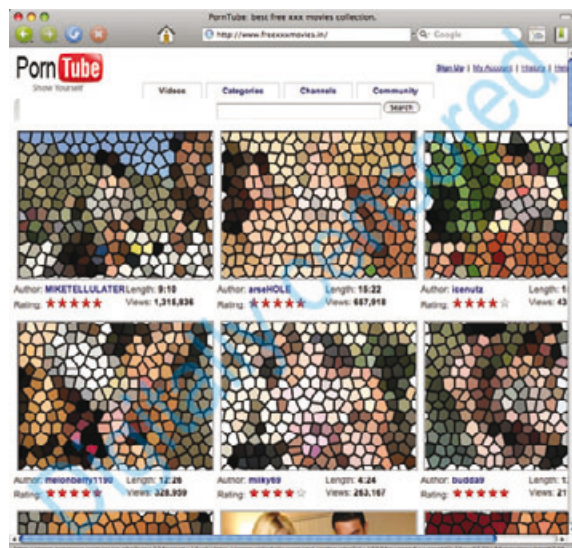
to publish these worldwide. These images can be quickly shared amongst the thousands of others, on a Facebook profile, an online photo album, and elsewhere. Some end up on the popular YouPorn/porn-tube type sites with so called "amateur" shots.

As the actual means, context and setting are impossible really to know, how can the end consumer know if everyone involved had not only enthusiastically consented to all aspects of the sex they are watching but also was keen for all of that to be viewed by them?

Imagine knowing that the person you trusted choose to Bluetooth your most intimate moments

to their friends, without ever checking that you were happy for them to film you in the first place. Imagine enjoying watching your own sexual antics, only to find out that thousands of others online were doing exactly the same thing. Imagine being told that all your family, friends and colleagues will see your naked pictures if you don't agree to send more to an ex-partner. Imagine being forced to repeat and recreate porn, knowing that it is going to be shared on popular rape-porn sites, which are actually marketed in that way to appeal to consumers. Imagine finding out that your abuse and assault had been posted and passed online, with little hope of ever being able to delete it from existence.

Services are seeing more and more women coming forward to tell of these huge violations of trust and subsequent abuse. These women



are dealing with the consequences of someone misusing their power and need support, advice and information as to what can be done.

A survey undertaken by the Women's Support Project showed this was a growing issue across the sectors and we used these findings to inform a seminar on the (Mis)use of women's images. We see this as a beginning of a process, where we need to find out more on how to best support women, and part of this is knowing how criminal investigations may proceed and where the Scottish legal system currently stands.

Meanwhile we must educate young people on the risks of taking and sharing images and offer support to families who are dealing with this. We have to work with young men to challenge whatever it is that gives them ideas that an abuse of trust and rights is ever acceptable. We have to continue to work with women, supporting them in finding their way through this and out of it.



# Anti-porn activism - Julia Long

## Supporting each other and ourselves

*From 2007-2009 I carried out ethnographic studies of two UK groups involved in feminist anti-porn activism, along with twenty-four in-depth, qualitative interviews with anti-porn activists and professionals from a number of groups and organisations across the UK. The following article draws on my research findings.*

The need for support in carrying out anti-porn work emerged strongly as a theme in my research. This kind of work carries a number of specific stress factors and emotional challenges, including: the stress of taking an oppositional stance in the context of a 'pornified' society; dealing with pornographic material; public perceptions and negative stereotypes of feminists, and the reactions of friends, families and partners. The women I interviewed were involved in a variety of anti-porn activities ranging from campaigns, petitioning, lobbying, protests and actions to delivering workshops and training, and working with multi-agency teams. Sometimes the work was carried out in the context of paid employment; often it was undertaken on a purely voluntary basis. The different contexts and kinds of work tended to have different implications in terms of the nature of the stress involved and kinds of support needed, though some challenges were common to all forms of activism. In this article, I will set out my research findings on the kinds of challenges that can arise and how activists deal with these, and then offer some brief reflections on my findings.

### Activism as empowerment

Many of the women I interviewed spoke of experiencing their greatest stress and distress *prior* to getting involved in activism. The distress experienced came about for a number of reasons, including issues with male partners using porn, workplace sexual harassment relating to porn, and by the ubiquity of porn, such as lads' mags, in mainstream culture:

*I went through a stage ... where I was crying when I saw that stuff, cos it was just so heartbreaking to me, cos it just makes me feel disgusting, it makes me feel like nothing... It is just page after page of hatred. (Belinda, 23)*

One of the most difficult aspects activists spoke of was feeling isolated and alone:



*I was surrounded by a lot of misogynist men, and other people in my life had similar attitudes, and ... I just felt so unhappy and I felt, I can't handle [porn] being everywhere, I don't want to be in a world that's like this. (Sheryl, 30)*

For these women, getting involved in activism was an extremely positive experience. Finding like-minded women and joining a group proved exhilarating:

*I remember the first time I clicked on the link for the OBJECT website and I was just so pleased that there were like-minded people out there! (Nadia, 32)*

*I feel I can just talk about [feminism] for hours, and a lot of the people I've met at the meetings doing the activism are the same, like after the meetings ...[we] can't stop talking, like missing tube stops, cos it's just like fresh air – like, 'I've finally found someone I can talk to, who understands what I'm talking about, and AGREES even!' (Sheryl, 30)*

Similarly, the activism itself was experienced as hugely empowering:

*I love activism, there's nothing more empowering! (Jenny, 17)*

*[t]he protest outside the lap dancing club was fantastic ... you just feel really so good afterwards. Cos for me, before I found OBJECT I just felt really, um, impotent... So it just feels really good to feel you've done something ... I do get a lot out of it. (Nadia, 32)*

However, taking a public stand against porn is far from easy, and challenges inevitably arise, as I shall discuss in the next section.

## Stress factors and emotional challenges

### Reactions of the general public and media

Whilst members of the public were often extremely supportive, activists also had to deal with incidents of abuse and hostility:

*'You do get told to fuck off quite a lot, and "you're only doing this cos you're ugly" ' (Roberta, 28, on her experiences of protesting outside the Playboy store in Oxford Street, London).*

This kind of hostility was also evident in dealing with the media, with activists on news programmes and talk shows being told to 'shut up' by other guests, referred to rudely as 'she', and their arguments referred to as 'feminist claptrap'. The level of rudeness and hostility that anti-porn activists can be subjected to through media appearances, public meetings and interviews often takes a particularly personal tone, with remarks about the woman's appearance and (assumed) personality traits not uncommon.

*It's about the stereotype of being ugly, like, dear god, that's the worst insult for a woman, but, like, why should it be? And it has such an impact on people's sense of self. (Haley, 23)*

The hostility often taps into negative stereotypes of feminists,

*There is an attitude in society that feminism is a joke still, that it belongs in the 1970s.... If you put yourself in that frontline position, it's quite debilitating. (Lydia, 33)*

with the figure of 'the prude' being invoked in attempts to silence and intimidate women:

*[According to the stereotypes] either you're totally liberated and you love porn, or you're repressed and a prude and you don't like it. (Sheryl, Object, 30)*

*[Women] are scared to speak up first, cos they're scared of being labelled a prude, and I've been called that many times, but that doesn't bother me. I think it's about speaking out, and you've got to be prepared to stand by what you say (Nadia, 32)*

Some activists had to deal with extremely personal, vitriolic attacks by men antipathetic to the anti-porn agenda, as in one case where a man posted abusive comments to a public news website. The woman concerned explained:

*I can't say it didn't affect me - I mean, I went out and smoked five cigarettes in a row, and I was like 'Jesus Christ!' It did affect me, that impact - it's hard, sat there going 'oh my god', and knowing that this is part and parcel of what I should expect in the job. I was waiting for it, but actually I hadn't prepared myself for how personal they could make it to me. (Sandra, 37)*

### Reactions of friends, families and partners

*Yeah, I remember [friends] making jokes about it and yeah, I didn't feel totally comfortable in it, people thought it was just - 'oh are you doing that nutter feminist thing' someone used to call it. (Annette, 26)*



Whilst some activists experienced support from families, partners and friends, others spoke of difficulties they faced in their relationships outside the feminist activist community. Typically, these difficulties included dealing with belittling, teasing and even hostile attitudes, and a general lack of respect or empathy regarding their commitment to anti-porn activism. The nature of the subject meant that some women kept their activism secret from their parents and families, or at least partly censored how much they disclosed. Silencing was a very common experience. Some activists mentioned conflicts with boyfriends over the issue, and particularly with boyfriends' friends, who often expressed misogynist attitudes. Negotiating these difficulties not only added an extra dimension of stress, it also meant that activists felt that they could not draw on the support of families and community.

### Group dynamics

Activist group dynamics had sometimes proved challenging. Women spoke of the need to manage emotions within groups, to ensure that there was an ethos of care and respect for group members, that conflicts were dealt with sensitively and effectively, and that emotions such as anger were channelled



# Anti-porn activism

constructively. Overwhelmingly, interviewees testified to a great sense of group loyalty and high levels of personal investment in their activism. Whilst this meant that group successes were a cause of great joy and celebration, correspondingly, if conflicts arose there was the potential for these to be extremely damaging, and if actions did not go quite according to plan, activists could feel guilty or uncomfortable.

## *Dealing with explicit material*

Working directly with pornographic images brought particular challenges. These included the potentially traumatic, upsetting and 'triggering' effects of dealing with violent and degrading sexualised images, as in the case of using an anti-porn slide show as a training tool:

*it's very difficult to deliver because it's - the images are very harrowing ... It's got some horrendous language in it* (Kathleen, 46)

Trainers demonstrated a highly developed sense of responsibility to the audience when they were showing the slide show, emphasising the sensitivity needed in delivering the training given that one did not necessarily know the experiences, perspectives and history of training participants.

*You know the discussions afterwards, they can lead to some apprehension because you never know quite what's going to come up in terms of questions or people taking issue, that can be quite difficult to deal with...* (Kathleen, 46)

Similarly, there was an awareness of responsibility towards the women who were portrayed in the pornographic images included the slide show, with consideration given to the ethics of using the images in this way.

## **Protective measures and support strategies**

*[T]he support! I tell you what ... the support of feminists, the feminist friends that I've made, I feel so much more supported by them mentally and when we're out in a group doing an action, I know they've all got my back. And I know full well if somebody was to upset one of them I'd be IN there, you know!* (Rita, 53)

My main finding with regard to dealing with the challenges of doing anti-porn work was the importance of support. This cannot be overemphasised. Whilst the support took different forms, the need for support emerged recurrently as a theme throughout the interviews. In this section, I will summarise the kinds of support strategies and self-protective measures that women were developing as part of their activism.



## *Demos and protests*

Group co-ordinators and members developed a range of practical strategies to ensure that activists felt supported and able to cope with the challenges of a public demonstration. These included:

- Ensuring full planning and preparation prior to the action
- Meeting up beforehand make sure new people were welcomed
- Using resources such as 'comeback sheets' to build confidence in dealing with members of the public
- Building group spirit through chant practice, banner-making sessions and sharing practical tasks
- Working as a team and 'looking out' for each other
- Providing training for dealing with the media
- Dividing up tasks and agreeing roles (eg one person to deal with media interest whilst on a demo)
- De-brief sessions after the actions
- Building informal support networks, including through phone, email and online discussion
- Socialising and celebrating!

## *Knowledge is power*

A key part of being involved in activism was the opportunity for activists to build knowledge and become more informed about the issues. Activists spoke of how this opportunity helped them to develop confidence in dealing with attitudes from work colleagues, family and acquaintances:

*Two years ago when I'd first gone into [arguments about pornography], I was really, really cautious and I was really scared, and there were two reason for that - one, because I wasn't confident about what I was talking about, and*

*secondly, because I was really concerned about how people would judge me. And here we are now, two years later, I'm much more confident in what I'm dealing with, and when people start to challenge me on it, I have the facts, I have the figures, and I love the feeling of going 'tchuh tchuh tchuh' and shooting them down in flames! (Rita, 53)*

The importance of being part of a supportive group was emphasised, as this provided a context for developing networks and gaining knowledge:

*It's very empowering all the stuff we do with OBJECT, and it's educational too. You're always learning things....It's also made me less likely to stay quiet about things, which has maybe made me more outspoken. Cos I'm more informed that helps, yeah, it's like I can quote statistics that I didn't have before, and they can get shouted down, but at least you've got them and know them. (Nadia, 32)*

## *Dealing with pornographic material*

Trainers responsible for delivering anti-porn awareness raising sessions had developed practical strategies for dealing with pornographic content and its potentially distressing and 'triggering' effects:

*We've always done it in pairs, I don't know if I'd be happy to deliver it myself without some support with the discussion afterwards, and we've found that works quite well, with two of us doing that - one delivering the presentation, and then jointly doing the discussion afterwards.... We've always done it as an 'opt out' thing, because of the nature of it, the images are so horrendous, people have to have the opportunity not to see them. (Kathleen, 46)*

Most of the women I interviewed were not generally involved in this kind of work. Nonetheless, groups tended to recognise the need for women to share and discuss feelings and experiences regarding porn in a safe space. In one group, this was built into meeting structures, with time set aside for confidential discussion and sharing, separate from the 'business' parts of the meeting.

## *Managing emotions and group dynamics*

Various practical supports, often informal, were developed for managing emotions and group dynamics. For example, Lydia spoke of 'having to have de-brief sessions' after group actions:

*I always made sure I sent round emails afterwards that were positive and upbeat.*

*Often, even when an action had gone well, there would always be a confrontation, obviously usually with a man, or there would be an incredible adrenalin crash because you really had to build yourself up to these things. (Lydia, 34)*

In other groups, there was a desire to create a structure where emotions could be explored and women could support each other. Fran spoke of her desire to run workshops:

*..which I think could be really useful, and even taking stuff from the second wave feminism, like consciousness-raising groups and support groups, that would run alongside the more political activism which I think could really make a difference. (Fran, 27)*

However, time pressures and limited resources meant that these kinds of structures did not always get beyond the ideas stage. In the meantime, activists developed personal friendships and informal support networks within groups. It was evident during my ethnographies that great attention was given to recognising and valuing the contribution of individual activists, perhaps in recognition that their activist work was not always valued by friends and family outside the group.

## *Combating isolation and seeking support*

For most of the women I spoke to, isolation was a problem that they had encountered prior to getting involved in activism, rather than an issue once they had become active. However, for some anti-porn activists isolation can be a huge problem. Most of the women I spoke to were active in London as part of a group, and therefore both gained access to group support, and could also enjoy the anonymity afforded by a big city when they took part in actions. For women in smaller communities, the situation can be very different, and feelings of isolation and the stigmatisation of the 'anti-porn' label can be acute. Whilst this issue did not emerge particularly strongly in my research –due to the location of most of my research participants - women still spoke of measures they took to combat isolation and even despair. These included online communication with other feminists, and reading online blogs and feminist books:

*...so women writers like [Andrea Dworkin] just kind of inspire me constantly and I take refuge in them... whenever I feel a bit rubbish or read something in the newspapers about something that really feels like a step back for women, I go back to those writers again and get a little bit of strength (Belinda, 23)*



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Sharing the company of other women at feminist events such as Reclaim the Night marches and conferences was also hugely valued, particularly if this was a rare opportunity.

For women in isolated situations, anonymous actions such as stickering or slipping fliers into magazines could also give a strong sense of empowerment, without putting oneself in an exposed position.

## Reflections on findings

What emerges most strikingly from my findings is the effect of the support of other feminists and activists in combating the challenges intrinsic to anti-porn work. This support – in the context of a feeling of shared struggle – had nothing less than a transformative effect on the lives of many of the women I interviewed. Whilst carrying out my ethnographies, I witnessed women gaining strength, confidence and assuredness in their arguments, and discovering a real sense of joy and shared purpose through activism. As a participant myself, this was something I also felt personally, and for which I felt extremely grateful and privileged.

As I mention above, most of the women I interviewed had ready access to group support. For those in more isolated situations, access to online communities and other kinds of networks, along with feminist ideas and literature, would appear to be vital.

Given the importance of this support, it seems to me that for women in relatively unsupported situations, an important self-protective mechanism is to respect one's limits and not necessarily push oneself beyond what one feels able to do. This does not mean never taking a risk; rather, it is a recognition of the fact that taking an anti-porn stance is a very courageous thing to do, and there can be great personal cost involved. It is important that no activist should feel unduly pressured or guilty about setting limits around what she feels comfortable with at any given point.

In my research, the women overwhelmingly found that being involved in activism had an extremely positive impact on their lives. Apart from support, participation in the activism itself emerged as something that women experienced as extremely empowering and exhilarating.

## Acknowledgements

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**Julia Long**  
**London South Bank University**  
**March 2010**

# Lapdancing - Billie Lister

Lapdancing has become so commonplace in the UK that most people know of at least one place in the area where they live when erotic dance is offered as a form of entertainment.

Everywhere we look, we can see an 'ode' to the lapdance, from pole fitness classes, to popular music videos (remember Christina Aguilera's *Dirrty*.....or Britney's 'strip' at the 2000 MTV music awards?), to lingerie photo shoots in Tabloid newspapers, to 'sexy' photo shoots in popular magazines *FHM*, *Zoo* and *Nuts*. Today's lapdance involves a topless or fully nude strip performed to music on a pole, or directly in front of a paying voyeur. Lap dancing has firmly established itself within Western popular culture. But where did it come from, and how did it evolve to what we can observe today?

Like any cultural phenomenon, lap dancing has undergone changes over time. Back in the 1920's/30's, the focus was more on the 'tease' as

opposed to the 'strip' (Egan et al, 2006;xviii) – a world apart from the somewhat more explicit nature of the work as it is performed today. In the early days, dancers performed short, titillating dances with little or even no actual nudity. Today, the context of erotic dance is very different, with topless or full nude strip work being the norm and with some performances involving massaging customer's genitals through clothing (Jeffries, 2009. 87). So why the change from performances of this nature to the growth of a \$75 billion dollar worldwide industry (Montgomery, 2005, cited in Jeffreys, 2009; 86) in which exotic dance franchises and clubs are traded on the NASDAQ exchange?

Innovations in technology during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century resulted in a growth in the ease of access to pornographic media, and this resulted in strip club attendance slumping (Egan et al, 2006; xxi), due to the privacy that viewing pornographic content could offer as opposed to visiting stigmatised, 'seedy' lap dancing venues. As with all businesses, the lap dancing industry had to devise new strategies in order to retain customers. Along with

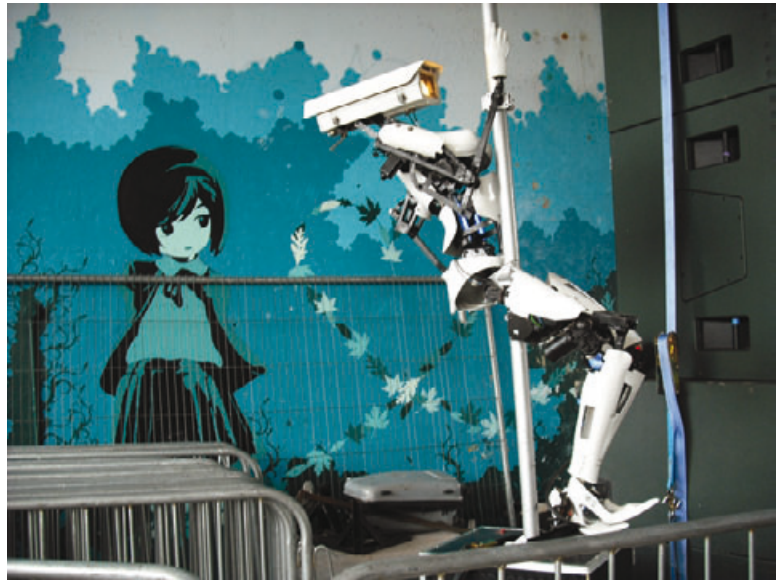
# Lapdancing - Billie Lister

the provision of restaurant services and so on, women were required to interact more with customers and provide a far more sexualised service. The arrival of 'Gentleman's Clubs', such as 'Stringfellows' and 'Spearmint Rhino' introduced the widespread corporatisation of strip clubs, with dancers becoming a brand rather than individual human beings. Take a look at any upscale lap dancing club website – there you will find women who subscribe to a certain ideal of feminised 'beauty' – always white, always slim, always youthful. The 'Gentleman's Club' re-branded lap dancing as something that should be seen as 'normal' and part of a typical night out for UK men. As a result, the stigma that attached itself to lap dancing venues evaporated, with celebrities getting in on the act, promoting the dancing style as something positive and even empowering.

Some commentators argue that lap dancing offers benefits to the women who work in venues, as an empowering form of labour, in which the dancing woman is 'clearly in charge' (Schweitzer, 1999;88). This argument has also been put forth by the Lap Dancing Association themselves. This argument is questionable when one thinks about the very process a dancer must go through to obtain working space in a club – to dance naked, or semi naked, for visual acceptance. In what other workplace, is it acceptable to obviously discriminate employees dependant upon their physical appearance?

Whatever the take on the issue – one thing is certain....the conditions that women work under are far from empowering.

The increase in venues may be initially seen to be positive with respect to the fact more jobs are on offer to women; however, the success of the venues has only resulted in women having to work harder for their money. Prior to the explosion of the industry, it was commonplace for venues to pay women to dance in them. Today, the very idea of this seems ludicrous; since the 1980's, the tables have turned – women now must *pay to work* (Jeffreys, 2009; 87). Wider cultural shifts in which women's sexuality has become more and more commodified has resulted in many women now being willing to work inside lap dancing venues. This means that managers can 'hire and fire' at will, and commonly women must compete with each other in order to secure that all-important private dance. Considering that, as a self contracted worker, women are not paid for their work on the main pole, it is crucial that they obtain as many private dances as possible. Unfortunately, increased competition for dances means that many women feel pressured to perform a somewhat



Lapdancing robot by PUMA (Andrea Pomini)

more intimate service than they would ideally feel comfortable with. This competition also helps to erode crucial dancer solidarity which is needed to challenge managers and venue operators as seen in the now famous unionisation at the Lusty Lady peep show venue in the US, in which dancers were successful in obtaining the working conditions that they expected as active labourers.

April 6<sup>th</sup> 2010 signalled a victory for the organisation Object whose 'Stripping the Illusion' campaign eventually resulted in a change in the way lap dancing venues in England and Wales are licensed. They will soon be referred to as 'Sexual Entertainment Venues'. As of yet, no such change is on the cards in Scotland, where lap dancing venues continue to be regulated under the Licensing Act 2005 and under non statutory council guidelines. Although you will always encounter a variety of arguments supporting the existence of lap dancing venues and all they represent - aside from the gender debates surrounding the activity, working conditions in these places remain problematic. It is essential then, that pressure is applied to venues, local and central government to provide humane working conditions for these women whilst the venues continue to exist in Scotland. In addition, it is important to provide support to dancers. The emotional and physical toll of the work is generally not discussed in the news, and as a result there are no support networks for dancers to approach.

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# Second Life

If you have heard of Second Life (SL), and don't use the programme, it's probable that it was a few years ago when it first generated significant interest as the next big thing; the most high profile of a range of 'virtual worlds' offering unique opportunities in education, business, art and casual use for collaboration, networking, content creation, commerce and fun.

Perhaps most likely, however, is that it came to your attention due to an infamous association with non photographic visual depictions of child sexual abuse, specially created areas (playparks, nurseries etc) for the role playing of child sexual abuse and/or the proliferation there of pornography and its associated immersive content.

Despite all of the attention, people still tend to be unsure as to what SL actually is. It can probably be best understood as a social network in which, rather than merely having a profile picture to represent ourselves, we can create an avatar that moves around, interacts with people and objects, buys things, makes things and more. We can also communicate synchronously, either through text or voice chat.

In common with other social networking tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, SL has much that is condemnable but can also be used as a powerful, positive, organising tool for connecting and activism. Last year, for the 16 Days of Action against violence against women, members of SL Left Unity Feminist Network, 4 Bridges, Social Justice, Amnesty International-e, Stop Violence Against Women and Second Life Left Unity groups (led by an experienced activist and organiser from 4 bridges) came together to stage an ambitious event which sought to raise awareness of violence against women in 'first life' and to bring to the fore the connections between the overwhelming presence of representations of sexualised violence against women in SL - and media in general - and a culture which legitimizes that violence. It felt incredibly empowering (briefly, admittedly), amid this world saturated with images and the role-playing of abuses of women, to be able to bring so many people together, from all over the real world, to challenge notions that violent pornography and its virtual enactments and equivalents are just harmless fun, and, to critique that conflation of sex with sexual violence to a varied audience.

Live music and poetry was staged within areas exhibiting work from a number of artists as well as



Gracie Kendal – Avatar and identity discussion 16 Days

information/campaigns from groups such as Rape Crisis Scotland and White Ribbon. There were panel discussions on the status of women around the world (featuring speakers from Israel, Mexico, the US and UK) and on domestic abuse; exhibitions on pornography, women in war, trafficking and the impact of the Israeli occupation on women in Palestine; presentations of the Stop Porn Culture slideshow, femicides in Mexico, Equality Now on their campaigns against the video game 'RapeLay' and to raise awareness about prostitution, violence against native women, women in Islam and violence against the trans community. In addition there were discussion groups on the war in Afghanistan and its impact on women, avatars and identity, surviving through art, law enforcement & domestic abuse and a vigil and exhibit to commemorate the Montreal massacre.

For a number of us participating in the 16 Days of Action, the most memorable and energising event was the opportunity to protest at 'Hard Alley', one of the earliest areas created specifically for the role-playing of rape and sexual violence. Hard Alley is currently advertised as

"SL's FIRST Forced Fantasy Urban RP and is still the BEST! Home of the Bimbo Cheerleaders xxx free sex rape gangbang anal cum blowjob bdsm bukkake sleazy strippers fuck porn whore kidnap slut suck orgy pussy BDSM force"

The protest generated quite a bit of interest and some small scale controversy but it represented the first feminist direct action against representations of violence against women in SL as well as the first opportunity for many of us to raise our voices against such content. SL is able to host a maximum of 50 or 60 avatars in any place at one time, and there were over 40 of us there to protest the sim.

But what did we achieve? In the grand scale of things, nothing it would seem. SL continues to be awash with depictions of brutal sexual violence and all aspects of the sexual exploitation industry, including pornography, prostitution, lap dancing, stripping and trafficking. There is a market for non

# Second Life

photographic depictions, actual pornography in video and photographic format, immersive role playing areas and devices to enhance role play (sexual torture devices, for example). There is also voice and camera link up capability so that the role playing boundaries can be further eroded.

What we did do however, was make a start at taking back the tech. We claimed many spaces where violence against women was challenged, we managed to reach over 400 people over the duration of those 16 days who attended some of the events and accessed some of the information. We generated discussion and debate inworld and through blogs, Twitter and other social media outlets on the wider web and we developed and consolidated a network of activists who caught a glimpse of the possibilities of using SL to galvanize debate and activism. Ultimately, if we are to challenge violence against women and commercial sexual exploitation in all of its forms, the internet, social media and virtual worlds afford us unique opportunities to engage nationally and internationally and as a platform for connecting, sharing and action. We can critique the problematic aspects of all of these tools whilst also harnessing their power in productive ways to raise awareness and promote change.

It is painfully apparent that there is no area of violence against women that has not somehow been sexualised or commodified, no matter how horrific or brutal. In the context of virtual worlds and some video games like 'RapeLay' it is of concern that the fantasists are no longer just passive consumers of photographs or videos. Detailed scenarios are constructed in immersive environments between real people in real time, aided by the added stimulus of standard pornography. We can't really know what the impact of such participatory interactions will be but we can be certain that at the very least they will work to maintain and reinforce the current myths and beliefs about sexual exploitation and violence against women.

Some examples of sexually violent content in SL:

**"SVU animations:** Rape and Assault headquarters: Teach that whore a lesson and SVU has everything you need to get the job done. That little cumdumpster won't know what hit her. A full range of items that will allow you to slap, choke, kick, beat, and just plain fuck her into submission" (from advert)

You can buy a copy of Slustler, the SL version of Hustler at SVU and a range of torture and sexual violence devices. A desk, for example, where an optional animation is to kick the person in the head that you're roleplaying sexually violent acts with. In case we're not clear about the gendered nature of

Right: Hard Alley Protest  
16 Days



sexual violence, there's a blue pose ball for the guy (kicker) and a pink one for females.

Another item for sale is the 'ruff n snuff driver bed', where the animation options include 'push', 'kick', 'choke', 'bend', 'slam', 'shake', 'hogtie' and 'shoot'.

It doesn't end at murder for SVU animations though, also available is the Roast Her machine, barbecue spit and meatgirl picnic table (with 3 sex poses built in) for the cooking, carving and eating of the woman you've just sexually violated. This eroticised murder and cannibalistic role playing and content in SL is called Dolcett.

**"Slut Street:** forced sex fantasies, capture, rape, kidnap, RLV'forced sex, rough sex, roleplay, rape fantasies, dark urban, victim, capture, violence, sluts slave, free sex, cum slut, humiliation, slave, bondage, fuck, blowjob, whore, bitch, pussy, torture, spanking, cum drink, bukkake, sluts, breeding, sub, BDSM" (from advert)

Immediately upon landing there I notice it has a strip club, a pole for pole dancing in the public square, a stand selling a porn magazine 'Forced' and graffiti on the walls saying 'no one will hear you scream'. The area is set up to look like a run-down street in the worst area of any city, complete with dark alleyways and abandoned buildings. Unfortunately it also provides as 'play' props the stuff of women's nightmares, animations for rape and gang rape. Various 'pose balls' are scattered around with the options to 'restrain', 'attack' or 'rape'.

**"Glass n stone rape and torture club:** The club, where clients realize any sadistic fantasy, hunt to a victim or have a dinner in the Dolcett restaurant. Anyone can be kidnapped and used as captive or slave for no limit torture, sex, pain, abuse, humiliation, rape or execution." (from advert)

The welcome area includes vendors selling, among other items, additional 'porn star' skin layers for your avatar with 'bukkake extreme' features or bruises.

[Continued on page 24]



# Sex in Second Life by Sarah Neely

## Sex in Second Life: Our World, Our Imagination?

In his book published last year, Robert Jensen considers what porn might reveal about our culture. He writes: 'If it's just fantasy, why these fantasies?

Why fantasies of men's domination over women? Of women's subordination to men? Why fantasies of cruelty and degradation? Even if it's just fantasies, what do these fantasies tell us not only about pornography, but about the world beyond pornography? Can we look in that mirror?'(p.77).

This question holds even more currency as technological developments and the affordability of technology means that consumers can, on one level, become producers of pornography - what Brian McNair all too optimistically calls the 'democratisation' of porn. Although hardly democratic, the proliferation of online spaces catering to the circulation of user-generated pornography problematises anti-pornography activism's fundamental challenge of what are considered the pornography and sex industries. The increasing difficulty, isolating the battle between 'them' and 'us', leaves us wondering if it's just us. If it's really just our culture that's to blame?

Even in utopian online spaces such as virtual worlds, the mainstream pornographication of culture is starkly evident. My recent research on the 3D virtual world, Second Life, reveals startlingly high levels of pornography and extreme sexual violence, often within the context of exaggerated representations of gender stereotypes.

Like many virtual worlds, Second Life is celebrated as a unique platform for the creative exploration of ideas and identity. You can attend live music events, go dancing at a salsa club, try out surfing, even fly. You can meet with friends on your own desert island, visit Hong Kong or Hollywood ... or, you can visit a lap-dancing club, take in a few porn films and hire a prostitute.

Sex in Second Life is big business. Not least because in Second Life your sex is not a birthright – genitalia must be purchased. If you wish to have sex you need to purchase the animated gestures to enable your avatar to act out the sex act. This means buying what's called a 'pose ball', a 'SexGen Bed', or any other kind of furniture scripted to include a variety of sexual positions. In short, this means all



sex in second life is commercial sex.

Not surprisingly, some real world stakeholders in the pornography industry have established a presence in Second Life - Jenna Jamieson and Playboy are just two examples. In many ways, the real world structures and content of the industry are replicated in the virtual world. But the utopian fantasy of Second Life, reflected in its tagline 'Your world: your imagination', highlights a key draw – the fact that it is largely user-generated content.

In theory, residents have the potential to sculpt their own unique vision of sexuality. Although arguments can be made that the freedom of expression is somewhat illusory, what does it mean if we are to read the representations of sexuality within Second Life as an expression of a utopian fantasy?

What are we to make of the acts of violence, simulated rape, simulated prostitution and sex-trafficking? Why are these things re-enacted in a world that is supposed to be freed from the material and physical constraints of the real world? How do we explain a fantasy world where sexual violence is often more extreme and commonplace than what is present in the real world?

If, as Jensen suggests, all porn holds up a mirror to culture, the user-generated content of pornographic representations in virtual worlds potentially provides the most honest and harrowing portrait. If so, what is most often projected in these online spaces is what we see everyday around us – and that is the fact that gender inequalities still exist, are grossly significant, and deeply rooted.

# Youth and Pornography - Eleanor Parris

I had always upheld the view that it was a woman's right to choose to participate in pornography and that many women found it empowering.

In my volunteer training at Rape Crisis Glasgow I was introduced to the idea that pornography was actually part of a sexually exploitative system that commodifies the humiliation, subordination and objectification of women (see Forna 1992 and Russell 1994; two particularly insightful texts that challenged my preconceptions of pornography). That choice cannot be something that is reduced to the single act of performing in a film, but must be considered in relation to 'background conditions that affect not only the objective choices (she) faces but her subjective assessment of those choices' (Jensen 2007:87). I now believe it is not possible to judge under what conditions a woman made her choice to perform and that if *some* women do not make a 'free choice' to participate, then by using pornography a demand is still being created for a product when *some* women will get hurt *sometimes*.

Developments in online pornography consumption are raising concerns about the role that it may have in shaping the sexual development of young people (Paul 2005, Mitchell et al. 2003, Wolak et al. 2007). There is a very limited portrayal of love, relationships or communication in pornography so it is imperative that we ask: do young people get accurate information elsewhere? To enable young people to make informed choices and formulate comprehensive opinions about pornography and sex, a counter message needs to be delivered through discussion and education. I would suggest that the wider media and cultural context prepares young people for an acceptance of the gendered reality presented in pornography.

The NSPCC has voiced concern about the increased sexualisation of young girls warning that 'by normalizing sexualised clothing and by normalising sexualised behaviour, it opens up young girls to being exploited' (Narducci 2009 in Gulland 2009). As a result of this increasingly 'pornified' culture, young girls are being exposed to and potentially learning to internalise the roles and attitudes that are portrayed as 'normal' in pornography from a very young age and young people are constructing their sexual identity within a culture that has increasingly prescriptive gender roles.

Whisnant (2009) believes that society is grooming children from a very young age to develop and adhere to sexualised gender roles that necessarily precede sexual exploitation, and lead adults to accept this as normal - a normality where it is desirable to present

and commodify one's sexuality and that of others. This is a useful concept but perhaps (hopefully) more indicative of the way that society is heading if young people are not encouraged to develop the tool of critical thought, rather than an absolute truth. Whilst on placement with the Women's Support Project my role was to carry out a series of workshops to begin to explore what young people thought about pornography. The pornography workshops, although extremely limited, enabled a brief insight into the way young people perceive and attribute meaning to pornography, and how it contributes towards their views on relationships, expectations of sexual experiences and perceptions of body image. One particularly important insight was a reported need for information and knowledge about sex, this suggests that PSE (Personal & Social Education) is not informed by what young people already know and would like to know; is it really any wonder that adolescents consume pornography? At least it gives them some new information in a situation that is not particularly uncomfortable or embarrassing, with the media simultaneously providing a context for that information to be understood.

Something I find most worrying is that there is almost no discussion of female desire in PSE in schools (Strange et al. 2007), how then can young people be expected to have an awareness of its false representations in the media? Boys end up with a stereotypically male perception of female desire and females end up confused due to contradictions between their cultural influences, interpersonal relationships and individual desires. In pornography and the wider media culture female desire is often expressed through the lens of male pleasure and this view is reinforced by a lack of discussion. I believe this lack of discourse could potentially facilitate the creation of situations where there is an increased risk of force or coercion. How can young people discuss or voice objections to sexual acts or situations that they do not like or feel comfortable with, if they are not even given the permission to discuss what is fun, pleasurable or exciting? Blake (2008:36) comments that a "collective failure to adequately prepare young people for their early relationships and sexual lives means that there are large numbers of young people who are not making active choices about sex- young people who do not recognise that they have any choice". Addressing pornography consumption through open discussion about the messages that are presented there and the offering of counter cultural messages are perhaps a necessary introduction into PSE. Only when young people are given the space and opportunity to discuss what they see and their need for information is met, will we really be able to deliver the counter message necessary for attitudinal change.



# Gender roles in media: interview

*A group of Glasgow University students recently undertook a survey of a range of media on behalf of the Women's Support Project in an attempt to analyse the way these communicate messages about gender roles. The results were interesting, as they revealed in an interview with Rape Crisis Scotland...*

**Rosa, could you tell me a bit about what you've been doing?**

**[Rosa]** We were analysing representations of both men and women in male and female targeted magazines, aimed at young people. Loaded, Nuts, Zoo and FHM – and then female targeted – Cosmopolitan, Glamour, More and Company. We looked at both linguistic representations and images as well, so we did kind of quantitative analysis of the number of nude, semi-nude poses of both women and men and how they're sexual or not sexual in their nature. We also looked at typical descriptions of men and women, and then the general kind of content and tone of the magazines and the specific articles within those, how those represented gender stereotypes.

**So how did you go about doing that?**

**[Rosa]** A few of them, the women's magazines are ones that we know well. We had to just take a bit of time with each of the magazines, looking through them, getting used to their content, trying to look at it from a slightly different perspective – especially with the lads' mags. It's quite a difficult thing to do – obviously that isn't familiar to us. Then we got on to the kind of proper analysis and comparison – the counting up of particular images, the analysis of the linguistic representations. We worked through that systematically, and met once a week, to talk about what we were finding, how we were finding the experience, whether it was difficult, whether we were finding things a surprise to us.

**When you say 'linguistic representations', what do you mean by that?**

**[Rosa]** We looked, specifically, just for ease of comparison, at adjectives or adjectival phrases – so for example, we had men being described as "bad boys", "heroes", "motley crew fellows" – that kind of thing, with women being described by their age... "busty babes", "brunette", "blonde", you know, very appearance-based things. And it wasn't a huge surprise, what we found, in that respect. But there were a few surprises – a few kind of subverted messages that we didn't expect, as well.

**What sorts of things were those?**



**[CJ]** The biggest surprise we kind of found is the representation of women within women's magazines. We found they had a kind of Jekyll and Hyde personality – that they would show, say, "embrace your curves", but then have adverts for plastic surgery, clothes that will make you skinnier, and underwear that will pull you in and make you that "perfect man" shape – appealing to men.

**What kind of an impact do you think those messages might have?**

**[CJ]** It's to do with self-esteem – a lot of the background research we read up on is that the way that women are portrayed – it's all very shallow: you should have this perfect job and perfect figure and you have to wear these clothes and you have to buy this jacket and this face cream and you'll be spectacular. Their entire aim was to be appealing to men, rather than for themselves – so obviously... their entire viewpoint is going to change to, "I'm going to wear this or be like this to appeal to a man," rather than for themselves.

**[Rachel]** It was the fact that they played on women's insecurities, just to sell products. They know that women worry about their weight, so it was all, "this will help you lose weight", "this will stop your cellulite", "this will make you pretty." You know? And just really devious – whereas the lads' mags were just really blatant about it – and it was not knowing which one was worse, because the lads' mags were at least being honest.

# Gender roles in media: interview

**[Rosa]** Both the men's and the women's magazines referred to an unattainable idea of gender – so the female magazines are talking about “real women”, and blah, blah, blah, but you have to be this. This will make you a better woman. But at the same time, it was happening in the men's magazines – where obviously you have exaggerated representations of what it is to be a woman, you know, kind of big breasted, European, blonde, big hair, defined only by, you know, how you look – and I think both of those are images that are unobtainable to real people, and so they're both playing on the same insecurities, that you can invest as much as you want, personally and financially in something, but you will never be good enough. And I think that was a very sad message. And it was really quite frightening.

**Where do you think these ideas coming from that you're seeing in these magazines?**

**[Rachel]** I think it's a vicious cycle – like, I think they are playing on insecurities that are already there, but at the same time, they're maybe causing them as well – so I don't really know which one came first. But they're certainly doing nothing to stop it.

**[CJ]** I think one of the most interesting things that Rosa pointed out was that, even within women's magazines, there were more images of naked or semi-naked women than men. Is it the case that it's more acceptable to see a naked woman, or for a woman to be a kind of sexual object in society? And that's why we don't see it as a feature, even when it's shown in women's magazines – we don't think it's strange?

**Why do you think that is?**

**[CJ]** I think it is just a kind of vicious cycle. They're obviously putting these images across, especially in advertising, and then we just become kind of numb to it – like it's just no longer an issue, if you see someone with no clothes on. It's like, it's fine, it's just an advert. It's fine, it's just a lads' mag. You're just kind of expecting it to be there, almost.

**[Rachel]** You would be more shocked if you saw an

advert of a normal size person, looking normal, you know, not all dolled up – that would be really shocking, which is quite strange, that you're so used to seeing something air brushed and perfect than very conventional.

**Would you say that your own perceptions of these issues changed because of the process, because of your investigations?**

**[Alison]** I'd say you sort of lose a bit of faith in the magazines you're used to reading – because when we started off with the magazines that we

read, like, occasionally, on a wee break from uni work, you come away thinking you've been a wee bit betrayed by your own gender, I guess. Because you don't realise how they're kind of painting themselves as your best friend, and something to relax with, and then they're getting under your skin and putting all these ideas in your head without even noticing it. And going through the magazines in a sort of rigorous manner kind of brought it all to the surface in ways we weren't expecting.

**[Rosa]** It's very easy to blame female targeted magazines for betraying

women and all of those kind of stereotypes of bad female behaviour, but actually, the lads' mags get away with it. They escaped without much criticism from us, which surprised me so much – and then we got into it and we're thinking, actually, no it's just because those messages are normalised and it's ok for men to look at women in this way and it's alright for that magazine to talk about women drinking and having sex. And actually, they escaped quite a lot of criticism because that is acceptable in our culture, and I think we all had to go back and question that again. So it wasn't just the things that surprised us, but why did things *not* surprise us, and is that just as bad?

**So initially you let their representations of women under your radar, as it were, but then you looked at it again and decided that it was**





# Gender roles in media: interview

**because that had been normalised that you had taken that view. Could you describe the way that the men's mags portray women?**

**[Rosa]** Entirely as sexual objects with no independent thought. Any interview that took place with any of the models, or with women were models, were completely scripted – all the women made reference to how they'd been drinking all day, they're going to carry on drinking when they get home, you know, they've then partaking in pseudo lesbian behaviour on set, and no reference to what they're interested in or, I don't know, their other aspirations – family, anything else like that.

**[Rachel]** If they asked them what they liked doing, they would just say, "oh, having sex, drinking," you know? It was never, "I want to be this. This is what I want to do with my life."

**[CJ]** In some cases, in Zoo, there were deliberate attempts to make the girls out to be stupid. Like, one of their features was a student writing in and getting her own photo shoot, and then they'd do a kind of little quiz with her and going, "ha ha, look how blonde she is," kind of thing – and it was just totally, just bizarre.

**[Rosa]** Yeah, and how young the readers are. That's when it started to become worrying. We didn't realise that the top shelf policy for those magazines is voluntary, and there are probably more fifteen-year-old boys read that than any legally sexually active men do. And that's quite frightening, if you suggest to a young boy that that's what women are like – and that actually, if you give a woman a drink she's more likely to have sex...

**[Rachel]** Especially considering they don't really get much input at school, you know? They don't have, unless their parents are really pushing the message home to them, they won't have another kind of comparison – so they'll think that's ok, that's normal. That's what you do to get a girlfriend – you take her out and get her drunk, and then she'll want to be with you.

**[Alison]** Not so much about respect – they talk about it, it's always about safety and making sure you don't catch anything or get pregnant – it's not really about respecting other people or building relationships, I guess.

**[Rachel]** I think, as well, we noticed in the magazines that, in the men's magazines, nobody was portrayed in a relationship – it was all just as objects. Even interviews with comedians and things, whereas, in the women's magazines it was, you know, "here's the actor with his family," in the interviews, and you



know, how to get a boyfriend, rather than just how to get someone to have sex with you.

**So the sex that's described in these magazines is detached from any relationship. Would you describe these as pornographic magazines?**

**[All]** Yeah. Yes.

**What makes them pornographic, would you say?**

**[CJ]** It's full of sexual images. They have, like, a couple of pages of kind of general, 'oh look, what's on TV?' But then everything else is either directly sexual or has a sexual taint to it – even if it comes to just interviewing someone, they will always manage to find a reference to sex in there somewhere.

**[Rosa]** Things that you would never, ever be allowed to use to advertise, for example, are available to children, basically – a child can go in and buy that magazine. What really shocked me is that you couldn't make those references in some other parts of the media if you were trying to sell products. That would be illegal, so why is it not illegal here?

**[Rachel]** Yeah. When you think about if you go to the cinema, you know, the strict regulations about what age you have to be to get into certain films because of the content – but then, a thirteen-year-old can go in and buy that? You know? It's quite



# Gender roles in media: interview

scary.

**[Rosa]** And the call girl pages at the back – there's a lot of sex lines, which are really, really quite sexually graphic in their descriptions. Pages and pages and pages of them – so much so, that we excluded them from our image analysis, because it would have bumped all the naked pictures of women up by hundreds. We took them into account – but they weren't a part of that general analysis.

**So having conducted your initial analysis, what did you do then?**

**[Rosa]** We have results displayed in tables and graphs. The basic numbers are – well, surprisingly, more images of men in the male targeted magazines and women in the female targeted magazines. But in terms of page space, women dominate the men's magazines, obviously, and in terms of nudity, they are way above the rest. And in the women's magazines, although there's more nudity of women than men, most of that nudity is about selling products so underwear, or in an embrace with a man, so about relationships or sex.

We've tried to deal with some of the messages and some of the content, and relate that to the articles that we read, assessing the effect of sexualisation of the media and culture on young people. We've tried to make those connections and challenge it a bit, and we've then gone on to write letters or emails, at the moment, to all of the magazines from different approaches.

**[Alison]** We took on a few different personas because we thought, if we went at them as students, then we might get a different response – so we have a concerned boyfriend writing to the girls' magazines, we have a concerned mother writing to the girls' magazines, we have an angry man writing to the lads' mags, sort of complaining about the standards slipping and sneaking our messages in throughout that.

**[Rachel]** We did an information letter, just asking, you know, "what is your standpoint? How do you feel about it?" – Give us your standards.

**[Rosa]** And then a letter to the lads' mags from our point of view, so based on the fact that we've done this study, this is what we've found, what do you have to say about it? So that's the kind of most direct, aggressive one. We thought that would get us the least responses, but actually, we haven't had any responses yet – so we're still waiting.

**Have you talked to your friends and family about this work? What kinds of responses have you had from them?**

**[Rachel]** I think everyone was quite shocked, to start with, when we suddenly came home with lads' mags – they were like, you know, it's quite funny, seeing people's reactions when they see a girl with Nuts or Zoo.

**[CJ]** My flatmate was disgusted. I had Zoo lying on our kitchen table, and she was actually disturbed that I had it in the flat – whereas I just found it quite funny to begin with. It was just kind of strange to be doing something academic, based on something that's obviously not academic at all.

**[Rachel]** I think a lot of people know that this goes on, know that lads' mags don't, you know, portray a nice, respectful view of women, and it's almost just accepted – so nobody's that shocked when we say, you know, it's really bad. You know, everyone just kind of says, "oh that's what they're there for. That's what their magazine is."

**Why do you think it's so accepted?**

**[Rachel]** I don't know.

**[Rosa]** It makes money.

**[Alison]** It just so, surrounds you without you even noticing.

**Would you describe it as mainstream?**



# Gender roles in media: interview

[All] Yeah, definitely.

**And did you ever know anyone who read these things before you did this?**

[Rosa] Absolutely...When I was younger.

[CJ] Yeah, when I was like fourteen, fifteen, maybe, but then everyone's kind of grown up a little bit.

[Rosa] I feel more shocked by what I saw now than I remember feeling at fourteen, fifteen.

**So do you think it's got worse, the content?**

[Rosa] That's what I'm not sure. I'm not sure if it's got worse or if I feel more offended by it – and actually, I think that age is a really impressionable one. When I think back to looking at those magazines then, I do remember having discussions with men and other women about who the most attractive girls were – blah, blah, blah, and I couldn't do that, now. It's much more shocking, because I think you understand what the implications of those messages are. It isn't actually about the nudity. None of this was about just the nudity. It's about the things that that nudity is connected to, regarding how you should look, how you should behave, how it's acceptable to treat people – and that's, I think that goes over your head a bit, when you're that age.

[Rachel] I think when you're younger, as well, you see what they're trying to make you see – so you see this girl who's having a great time, she's loving her job, she's having a party, getting her photo taken – you know, you don't see what's behind that and what their message is...

**Do you think there's a wider cultural impact of this sort of material on the way that women, in general, are viewed, or what that means for women in general, in our society?**

[Rachel] I think there has to be, when so many people read them – and that's the image that everyone has in their head, you know? It's not that everyone has this kind of image of these girls, and that's what men like, if you believe what the media tells you. They're put in these magazines as, you know, just objects.

**Do you think, in some ways, these magazines sort of teach men to look at women, in general, in a certain way?**

[Kate] I think men categorise.

[Rosa] I think women categorise, as well, each other and men – but I think it is easier to decide which

category you would like a woman to belong in, and some of those mean that you're not seen sexually at all – and that can be, that's just as damning, I think – and some of those can be that you have no value apart from the way you look. Even in everyday life, I think people, men, make judgements about the way a woman looks, and therefore, you must know exactly what she wants from life and what she does and what she enjoys – and I think, yeah, I think that does happen all the time.

[Rachel] I think it makes it hard, because women almost have to present themselves in these boxes, you know? This is the way I look, so you have to take me seriously – whereas, rather than, "This is what I'm saying," so you know?

[Rosa] And it goes back to the age old thing of, to be a successful woman, you have to be like a man, you know – in a job, if you show any kind of particular feminine attributes, that undermines you as a powerful and intelligent person – and I think that comes with this kind of, these images of gender. It's like the flip side of it is that you have to choose one. You can't be everything, but in reality, everyone is everything.

**Why do you think it's important to look at these things and to do the kind of work that you've been doing?**

[Alison] Raising awareness of things that you might not be aware are going on – because a lot of girls will read that and just sort of accept that this is the way the world sees them. I think a lot of people need to know more about what's going on than what they're reading.

[CJ] I don't think any of us were aware that a lot of the background reading we'd done – lads' mags and stuff, were the kind of ways in to more kind of heavy duty porn – and then that goes on to kind of violence, and there's direct links between that and sexual violence. That's kind of normalisation and acceptability. I originally just seen them as kind of harmless, like, oh, it's just what guys look at and it's fine – but I didn't realise the kind of underlying and ongoing processes that were stemming from it.

[Rosa] Male domination over women was a really big thing, and the hyper-masculinisation of men, and young men. It seems so simple and so logical when you think about portraying women as in very submissive poses, looking sexual and nothing else, would result in a man believing that in sex, you have to be dominant. In a relationship with a woman, you have to be dominant – that's your role. And it seems so simple now when you think about it, but actually, you do kind of have to work through that to really

# Gender roles in media: interview

get to that message to talk about it – and I think it's been really good for that.

**[Rachel]** And I think, as well, taking with the fact the women's magazines are saying you need to dress like this, you need to do your hair like this, this is the underwear you should wear – so taking all of that, so that's what women are being told to do, and then men are almost expecting that they will.

**It's like selling a script to both genders.**

**[Rachel]** Yeah.

**You almost spoke about these lads' mags as a sort of stepping stone to pornography – do you want to talk a wee bit more about that?**

**[CJ]** One of the articles that I looked at was kind of on the general impact on society, and it was saying how research has shown that there's direct links between people that watch violent porn and then implicating that within their relationship and thinking that's more acceptable, and just basically normalising

everything. And if they start to show women within lads' mags in submissive poses, like, I think in the issue of Zoo that I had, there were kind of screen shots from an episode of Coronation Street, I think, where there was a woman tied to a bed, and they were obviously like, "Oh look, she must be enjoying herself," kind of thing. You can see the progression between, if they think that's a good idea, then they might watch porn involving that kind of thing, and then implicating it into their actual sexual lives, and thinking it is normal.

**[Rosa]** Thinking it's acceptable, or thinking that the woman they're with or the women they know aren't living up to the ideal woman, you know? They're not doing it right.

**[Rachel]** Especially when there's women in the men's magazines saying, "I love doing this. This is what I like," you know? It's quite a confusing message. And I think the magazines are so mainstream as well - everyone knows about them – so it almost makes it more acceptable.

## Second Life (ctd.)

[Continued from page 16]

**"Human trafficking mansion: Roleplay**

- Beautiful girls kidnapped, subject to abuse, rape and forced to prostitute themselves to cruel men. Vile sex acts, BDSM, torture and humiliation are all they know. domination, skybox, slave, prostitution, Vendors, Mall, Luck Role Play" (from advert)

**"The sweatshop syndicate: Rough Sex - Slave Auctions – Trafficking Capture torture rape slut hunt forced roleplay whore drugs massage whorehouse free sex chinatown cum snuff stripper gangbang bukake orgy bondage kidnap fuck anal RLV BDSM VGS asian mafia cage chikan DCS DCS2" (from advert)**

Like most of these places, the landing area houses all the equipment needed to enhance your role play. Guns, swords, a lamppost with an option to tie up and rape and real pornography adorning the walls.

**Don't despair, take action!**

Join SCASE on facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Scottish-Coalition-Against-Sexual-Exploitation/175173580913>

Visit Rape Crisis Scotland in Second Life:

<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Aloft%20Nonprofit%20Commons/24/20/22/?title=Rape%20Crisis%20Scotland>

Visit SL Left Unity Feminist Network HQ in Second Life & join the group:

<http://slurl.com/secondlife/Flagg/239/23/107/?title=Feminist%20Network>

Check out tech harnessing feminist activism and get some ideas:

<http://www.takebackthetech.net/>



# Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation

By Rachel Durchslag

## Community Response Toolkits: Empowering Communities to End Sexual Exploitation

Up to 25,000 women and children are involved in prostitution in Chicago every year, and the FBI has designated Chicago as one of the top cities for child prostitution.

Studies have shown that substantial percentages of women in prostitution are homeless, survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, and often began selling sex at a very young age. While in prostitution, many of these women experience mental health and substance abuse issues that go untreated. They also face endemic amounts of violence and psychological harm including rape, physical assault, and mental abuse from customers, pimps, and traffickers.

Research consistently concludes that the institution of prostitution is violent and detrimental to those involved. Yet people continue to purchase sexual services, often without knowledge of how their actions negatively impact on those who are in prostitution.

Unfortunately, when communities in Chicago experience high rates of prostitution activity in their neighborhood, community members almost exclusively target those selling sex. The men coming into their neighborhoods are not held accountable for their role in fueling the sex trade.

When communities focus their intervention efforts on those selling sex rather than those purchasing, they perpetuate the existence of prostitution by not addressing its root. Until communities focus their efforts on ending the demand for sexual exploitation, no significant change can occur.

The Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation (CAASE), an organization dedicated to ending the harms of prostitution and trafficking through legal services, policy reform, and prevention work, has created a toolkit that empowers communities to address this social issue.

The toolkit is divided into two sections. The first section provides general facts on the commercial sex trade, as well as information on demand deterrence theory and strategies. The second section provides tangible actions for communities to take in addressing sexual exploitation. Below is a description of contents in the toolkit.

## Educational Section: Community Response Toolkit

1. The Importance of Focusing on Demand
2. Understanding the Connections Between Human Trafficking and Domestic Prostitution
3. Cities Engaged in Innovative Initiatives Targeting Demand
4. International Countries Focusing on Demand
5. Survivor Stories: Highlighting Individual Experiences in the Sex Trade
6. Information on Pimps: Pimp Myths Versus Realities, Signs a Person is Pimp Controlled, News Articles
7. Shared Hope International's video on "Demand" With Discussion Questions
8. Legal Statutes Pertaining to Purchasing Sex in Chicago
9. Illinois Anti-Trafficking and Pimping Laws
10. Federal Offenses for Pimps, Exploiters, and Traffickers
11. News Articles Highlighting Addressing The Demand Side Of The Sex Trade
12. Recommended Research on Demand
13. Glossary of Words Associated with the Sex Trade

## Take Action Section: Community Response Kit

1. Actions Communities Can Take Against the Demand Side of the Sex Trade
2. Using Media: Responding to Harmful Media Depictions of the Sex Trade and
3. Creating PSAs and Getting Them On the Radio
4. The Role of Communities of Faith: A Tool Kit
5. Chicago Organizations Working to End Sexual Exploitation
6. Creating a Poster Campaign Targeted At Demand Elimination

# CAASE (ctd.) - Rachel Durchslag

It's amazing how one experience can change your life forever. When a friend invited me to the international film festival five years ago to watch a film about a woman who was trafficked into the sex trade from Bosnia to Chicago, I had no idea that the trajectory of my life would soon change drastically.

The film haunted me. At the time I had already been passionately engaged in feminist work for years, but of all the injustices that I had seen perpetrated against women, none seemed to compare to the crime of sexual exploitation. And that is how I began a journey that led to me starting the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation.

When we think about the sex trade, our focus traditionally goes to those selling. We analyze why women end up as victims of sexual exploitation. We devise ways to help women exit. We advocate for resources and policy change.

Yet historically what we have not done is focus on the root cause: the men who make up the demand side of the sex trade. When thought of this way, it becomes a simple equation: eliminate the demand and, consequently, eliminate the supply.

Of course, simply getting men to stop buying sex is only one piece of the answer. Women and transgendered individuals need resources and supportive services to rebuild lives and avoid the traps of sexual exploiters. Yet no matter how many resources we give these individuals, as long as there is a demand from men to buy the bodies of vulnerable women and children the sex trade will continue to flourish.

Our culture is constantly moving towards ever harsher associations of woman as object, commodity, and sexual item. And as we move towards these constructs something else moves in parallel: the construct of masculinity as being entitled to the bodies of women. With all the pressures of what it means "to be a man", a now heightened one is the pressure to treat women as not individuals but objects.

A tide needs to be turned, and a culture needs to be shifted. As long as women are portrayed as objects and not individuals, and as long as society reinforces the dangerous stereotype that "to be a man" means to be in control of a woman's sexuality, then violence



and exploitation will thrive. It is only by addressing the demand side of the sex trade, in conjunction with the societal construction of masculinity, that we can begin to change a harmful dynamic.

Though this task seems daunting, the United States has many examples of shifting cultural norms around male behavior and male entitlement. Prior to the 1980s domestic violence was much more tolerated, sexual harassment was a normal aspect of many workplace environments, and women were disproportionately blamed for being victims of rape and sexual assault.

But through strategic activism and public awareness-raising we have shifted cultural norms around all of these issues. I deeply believe the same can be done around issues of sexual exploitation and prostitution.

By addressing the demand that fuels the trade, and by shifting constructs of masculinity from one that views men as entitled to women to one that views true masculinity as valuing women and equality, then we can begin to creatively address this deep societal problem and to create real change.

A screenshot of the Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation (CAASE) website. The header features the organization's name in a stylized font. Below the header, there is a navigation menu with links: Home, Our Work, About Us, Our Alliances, Events, Support Us, and Resources. The main content area is titled "RESOURCES" and includes a section for "Toolkits for Communities and Individuals" with a list of links: The Commercial Sex Trade Industry, Addressing the Demand, International Sex Trafficking, Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Sex Tourism, Internet Exploitation, Photography, Rape Culture, Child Sexual Abuse, and Sexual Harassment and Rape. There is also a section for "Far Everyone" with a link to "10 Actions You Can Take to End Sexual Exploitation". A graphic of a hand with the text "humans are not FOR SALE" is visible on the right side of the page.

# Disney Princesses, Gender & Sexualisation

## The Disney Princess of the 21st century: has Disney reviewed its traditional representations and ideals of gender for a new generation of viewers?

As part of one of the courses I have taken during my final year at the University of Glasgow, I have taken part in a work placement project for The Women's Support Project. Myself and other students from my course have produced projects that aim to help further the work of Challenging Demand, a scheme which aims to reduce the exploitation and abuse of women through commercial exploitation and improve service responses to women affected.

The project brief I chose to work on involved an analysis of the portrayals of gender and sexuality in Disney films. This project required me to look at how gender and gender roles are presented in these films, as to whether there are significant differences between the portrayals of male and female characters and to what extent the characters act in gender specific ways, and consider the implications that these portrayals may have upon their viewers.

As Disney's representation of gender and sexualisation is a highly discussed topic, I chose to focus my brief by making my analysis as contemporarily relevant as possible. In order to do so I have limited my discussion to the Disney Princess films of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, examining to what extent they differ from the animated classics of the twentieth-century. In my study, I compared the four princess related Disney films made since 2000, those being *The Princess Diaries* (2001), *Enchanted* (2007), *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), and *Tangled* (2011), and compared their portrayals of gender and sexuality, both to the others and to the older Disney Princess genre more generally. In doing so I attempted to determine whether these films differed in the values they promoted and their depictions of female characters from those that came before them in an attempt to be more appropriate for a new generation of child viewers.

Disney's claim that its most recent Princess film, *Tangled*, will be its last for the foreseeable future<sup>1</sup> could possibly signify the company's acknowledgement of a growing cynicism concerning the princess ideal and a need for a new generation of gender-neutral films that reflect the changing values of consumers. Yet, although those princess



films made during the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be seen as modernized interpretations and, to some extent, parodies of traditional fairy tales, two aspects of Disney's earlier portrayals of the traditional fairy tale appear to be particularly prevalent – these are a preoccupation with love and with physical attractiveness.

In her landmark work *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir wrote of the romance of fairy tales that,

[A woman] learns that to be happy she must be loved; to be loved she must await love's coming. Woman is the Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Snow White, she who receives and submits. In song and story the young man is seen departing adventurously in search of woman; he slays the dragon, he battles giants; she is locked in a tower, a palace, a garden, a cave, she is chained to a rock, a captive, sound asleep: she waits.<sup>2</sup>

Although the women in the films I reviewed are not merely the passive and helpless victims de Beauvoir refers to, they nevertheless await "true love" or else are persuaded that this is what they should be waiting for if they ever hope to be happy. For example, in *The Princess Diaries*, Mia is distracted by romance throughout the film, and, after the supposed moral integrity of her choice to become a princess, is granted her prince at the end of the film, providing a traditional happy ending. *Enchanted* also self-consciously attempts to parody the traditional gender roles of fairy tales by having the princess rescue the prince from the villain's murderous intent. Yet, this only does so

<sup>1</sup> Chmielewski, Dawn C. and Eller, Claudia, 'Disney Animation is Closing the Book on Fairy Tales', *Los Angeles Times*, November 21<sup>st</sup> 2010. Retrieved from: <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/nov/21/entertainment/la-et-1121-tangled-20101121>.

<sup>2</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (London: Vintage, 1997) pp.318.



# Disney princesses (ctd.) - Kate Vickers

much to challenge conventional gender roles, as the need for the woman to find a prince is still very much emphasised. The film scorns the cynics of the fairy tale romance by allowing Giselle's dangerously naïve perception of life and love to triumph over Robert's initial realist wariness, which is eventually overcome by his love for Giselle. Furthermore, in *The Princess and the Frog*, Tiana is faced with a conflict of interests when she is forced to choose between remaining as a frog, and therefore maintaining her relationship with Prince Naveen, and returning to her human life to continue the pursuit of her life's ambition to open her own restaurant in memory of her late father, which she worked so hard for prior to meeting her prince. Ultimately, she must choose between love and success and ambition. Although Tiana was not originally waiting for her prince, the tradition prevails and she eventually realises that she wanted and needed him all along. Granted, Tiana does magically manage to attain both a happy love-life and a successful career, but not before she is first forced to make the decision between a career and love. Finally, although *Tangled* portrays a feisty Rapunzel who in turn rescues the prince after he rescues her, the film nevertheless promotes conventional gender roles and the character's dependence on love.

The second familiar aspect of these films is the beauty of the princesses. The princesses in these films are all presented as being conventionally attractive and considerable attention is paid to this as a fundamental element of the Disney Princess brand. In *The Princess Diaries*, Mia is not taken seriously, either in her general social life or as a candidate for a princess, until she receives a make-over and she is trained by her grandmother in how to act like a "lady". Mia begins the film as the typical "geek," and she and her friends make frequent reference to individuality and not conforming to social pressures, but ultimately the film promotes conformity to old-fashioned ideals of femininity and accepted cultural models of gender (which the film attempts to justify by presenting the role of princess as being a legitimate vocation, for which image is essential). In *Enchanted*, Giselle even encourages a materialistic concern with physical appearance in Robert's six-year-old daughter by taking her on a shopping spree and to a beauty salon, courtesy of her unwitting father's credit card. This traditional portrayal of appearances is challenged most, however, in *The Princess and the Frog*, in which the princess of the film, Tiana, although attractive, is unconcerned with materialistic vanity and in fact spends most of her time in the film as a frog; yet this may account for the film's comparative lack of success, as despite the film's disappointing ratings, the Tiana princess dolls proved to be highly popular. Perhaps Disney recognized this

correlation, as in their next film, *Tangled*, the heroine Rapunzel embodies the qualities of western ideals of conventional attractiveness throughout the film. Furthermore, there are several sexual references in all of the films and the male characters all behave in a highly provocative way towards the naïve princesses of the films, who unconsciously look and act sexually appealing. In The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media's Analysis of Popular Films and TV, it is noted that

It has been argued that exposure to a thin, attractive, sex-saturated culture may be having a negative effect on youngsters' socio-emotional development. On one hand, viewing these types of portrayals may overemphasize the importance of appearance norms among developing youth. With time and repeated viewing, girls may become dissatisfied with how they look or who they are.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, there are copious numbers of studies which support the suggestion that such portrayals of women in popular culture can be detrimental to young people's development. This correlation is not limited to girls, but arguably extends to boys, as they are provided with a limited and sexualised representation of the opposite sex which may well influence their future perception of women.

Overall, I have concluded that despite the modernized features and parodying aspects of the films I have analysed, the ideals and representations of gender promoted in these films are consistent with those that came before. Whether the marketing strategy Disney used for *Tangled* is successful, as determined by box-office ratings, may determine the company's decision as to whether to return to the Princess series in the future. The company's decision will be based purely on consumer demand and as long as children continue to buy into the princess brand, Disney will continue to produce these archetypes. Therefore, so long as Disney continue to produce gendered films children will possess a gendered view of the world, and so long as we continue to accept such gender constructs Disney will continue to reproduce them – it is up to parents to decide what their children watch as to whether this cycle will end in the foreseeable future.

3 Smith, Stacy L. and Cook, Crystal Allene, 'Gender Stereotypes: An Analysis of Popular Films and TV', *The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media*, 2008, from: <[www.thegeenadavisinstitute.org](http://www.thegeenadavisinstitute.org)>.

# Gender & sexualisation in films

‘Sexualisation is defined as occurring when a person’s value comes only from her or his sexual appeal or behaviour, to the exclusion of other characteristics, and when a person is portrayed purely as a sex object.’

As research done by the American Psychological Association reports, young women’s confidence and health is being affected by the media’s portrayal of men and women. This is something that affects many girls, yet how many of them acknowledge this kind of sexualisation when it is presented to them in the form of the latest action movie or romantic comedy? Just how much has become so ingrained in our culture that it is becoming not just acceptable but an ideal to strive towards?

Film is one of the world’s biggest industries. Warner Bros studios took \$1.89 billion in ticket sales alone in 2010. It entertains and inspires us but it also has a profound impact on our lives. It’s an area where filmmakers and viewers alike can explore new worlds, ideas and aesthetics or simply mirror experiences we are familiar with. We are also all aware of the uproar that classification can cause. Adult films like *A Clockwork Orange* that feature scenes of graphic sexual violence were banned in Britain for years before they became available on popular release. It is not the general public that decides what is and what it is not acceptable. In Britain it’s the BBFC: British Board of Film Classification and in America the MPAA: The Motion Picture Association of America.

Yet, banning films for explicit content seems to have the opposite effect and creates greater interest and a cult following. Even though cinema is undeniably consumed predominantly by the younger market, it’s impossible to quantify the actual effects that films have on young people, even a Home Office report on the sexualisation of young people was only able to raise tenuous links between sexualisation in the media and domestic and sexual violence. So how much are films perpetuating an unrealistic, over-sexed image that influences and effects young people detrimentally or just telling it like it is, reflecting the ‘real world’?

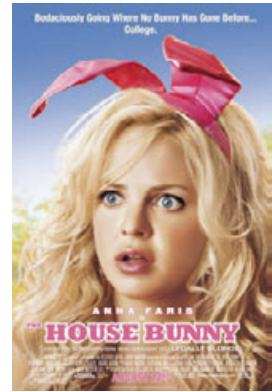
Let’s firstly look at *The House Bunny*, a 2008 romantic comedy starring Anna Faris as Shelley, a loveable, but charmingly dense, ex-Playboy Bunny, struggling to find a new job after being wrongfully kicked out of the safe-haven of Hugh Hefner’s infamous Playboy Mansion. Shelley takes a job as a house mother at a university sorority consisting of ‘misfit’ girls. These misfits being a disabled girl in a neck

brace, the ‘smart chick’, the shy black British girl, a butch girl from country and a girl who is heavily pregnant. These misfits are contrasted with the stereotypically threatening perfectly toned, beautiful ‘popular’ girls who party, have boyfriends and look down on anyone who doesn’t fit their ideal.

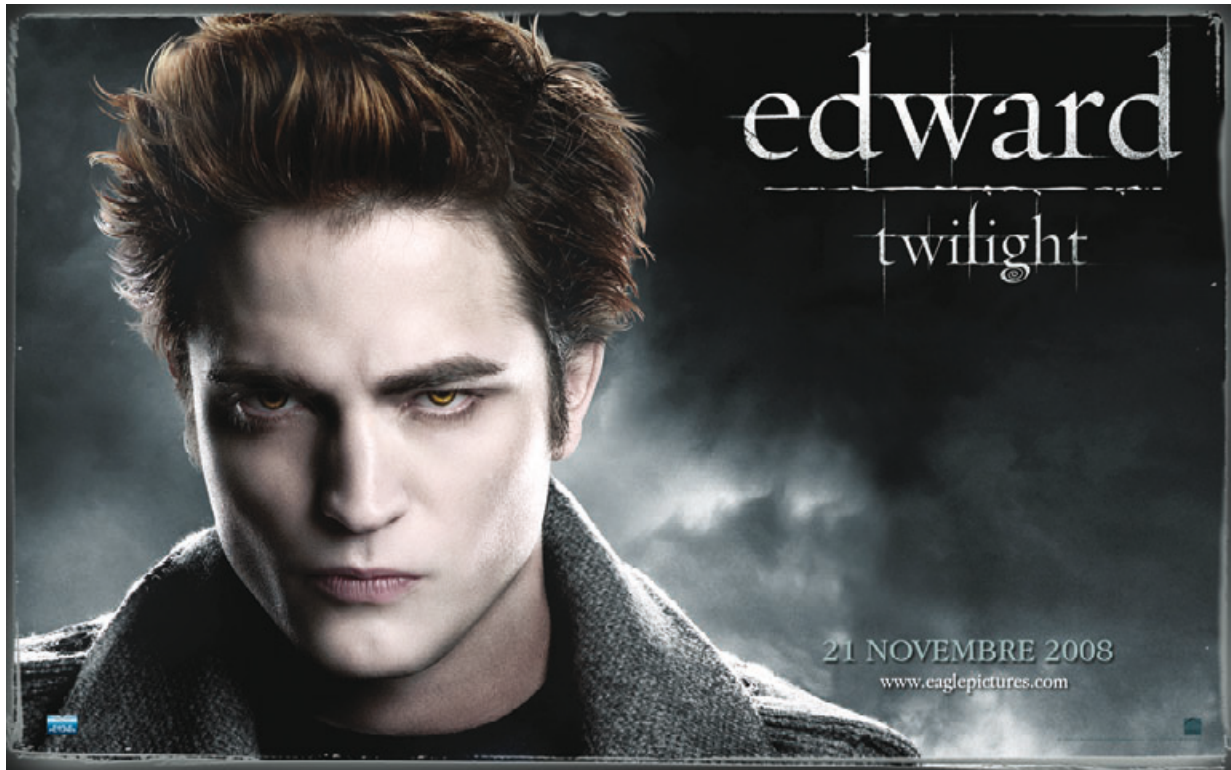
There’s a makeover ‘montage’ for the misfit girls that sees them becoming popular and sexually desirable, Shelley strives to become comfortable with her new identity and finds romance, and the bitchy, pretty girls get their rightful comeuppance. The *House Bunny* explores themes we’ve seen so many times in popular cinema and television that on first viewing, I found it comfortably familiar. It’s most definitely your typical romantic comedy, in a typical American college setting that we’ve seen in films from the seventies onwards, *American Pie* and *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, to name but a few. What’s slightly different is this film is aimed predominantly at young girls and only received a MPAA rating of PG-13, deeming it the kind of thing that’s suitable for any young child to watch.

The *House Bunny* might be clichéd and too silly to take seriously but what does it say about sexualisation and gender in our culture? The portrayal of Shelley’s job in the sex industry as a Playboy bunny appears quite harmless to the extent it appears to be a worryingly appealing career option is troubling. Shelley seeks to ‘better’ herself by education but the implicit message that women who find themselves in the very real Playboy industry are somehow stupid and lacking in intelligence is even more worrying.

The *House Bunny* plays with stereotypes and clichés to create humour, but the notion that the sex industry is an attractive, friendly career prospect and that intelligent women who don’t fit into the aesthetic mould of what’s sexually attractive must change their appearance, never seems to fit in with the film’s attempt to market itself as a motivational romantic comedy aimed at young adults. The film likens itself to *Legally Blonde* and proudly displays that it’s written by the same screenwriters on its bubbly, pink poster. There is a lot of potential, humour and charm in the girl-friendly *House Bunny* that we often forget how much of it is a worrying depiction of the pressures young women face. The *House Bunny* doesn’t so much reflect society, it distorts it, displaying an obsession with appearance and how much corporations like Playboy are the acceptable



# Gender in film - Yasmin Ayel



norm in our culture.

One film aimed at young adults that has become a global sensation is the *Twilight Saga*. Now a worldwide franchise selling posters, t-shirts, even cardboard cut outs of its most attractive characters, it is incredibly hard to avoid for anyone with an interest in popular culture. *Twilight*, unlike *The House Bunny*, is a world of total escapism. Bella, our protagonist, is trapped in a love triangle between a brooding, mysterious vampire and a protective, hunky werewolf.

Based on a series of books by Stephenie Meyer, an author who is extremely open with her strict Mormon beliefs, the movies, although modern in appearance, deal with old fashioned ideals of conventional love. The male characters must protect Bella from danger, there is very little sexual content and Bella, although involved in a love triangle, conveys strong beliefs in loyalty and modesty. *Twilight* with its PG rating is exactly the sort of movie that parents feel comfortable allowing their children to view. There are few teenage bedrooms that don't have a poster of Robert Pattinson's charming vampire Edward.

*Twilight* might be innocent in comparison with other films aimed at the same audience but is it troubling in another way? Bella is constantly being 'saved' by her love interests and even her father from danger. She is portrayed as constantly emotional and willing to forsake her education, home and even life for ideal romance. Female fans of the series, and they are mainly female, are encouraged to show their own loyalty to the 'hottest' guy with Team Edward or Team Jacob merchandise. *Twilight* is marketing genius because it appeals to the concerned parent and the young adult looking for a celebrity crush. The added morals and implicit themes of female inferiority are hidden in layers of dazzling CGI and a weak romance plot driven by an identifiably normal heroine.

The magic of cinema can make worrying ideas and beliefs appealing and exciting but worst of all, normal and inoffensive. We can watch them and switch off but what mark do they leave when we switch off? Films that represent strong minded women of many walks of life are undeniably out there but they are rarely provided to the dominant consumers of the industry, the ones who are most influenced by cinema's powers of persuasion.



# Links and Resources

The following websites provide helpful information on commercial sexual exploitation.

## General

[www.nostatusquo.com/ACLU/dworkin/](http://www.nostatusquo.com/ACLU/dworkin/) : A selection of Andrea Dworkin's writing.

[www.myrnabalk.com](http://www.myrnabalk.com) : Website of Myrna Balk, artist and campaigner against sexual exploitation.

[www.cwasu.org](http://www.cwasu.org) : Training, consultancy and research from a feminist perspective.

[www.sagesf.org/html/survivor\\_voices.htm](http://www.sagesf.org/html/survivor_voices.htm) : Standing Against Global Exploitation Project – or the SAGE Project – is a nonprofit organisation aiming to end the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adults (CSE/CSEC). SAGE is a unique collaboration between law enforcement, public health, social services, and private agencies. SAGE is also unique in that it is one of the few organisations that was created by and for CSE/CSEC survivors.

[www.object.org.uk/index.php/home](http://www.object.org.uk/index.php/home) : OBJECT challenges 'sex object culture' – the ever increasing sexual objectification of women in the media and popular culture through lads' mags, advertising or lap dancing clubs. Sex object culture has been driven by the mainstreaming of the porn and sex industries and is recognised by research, women's organisations and human rights treaties as promoting the attitudes associated with discrimination and violence against women.

We raise awareness of the links between sex object culture and sexism because of the need to tackle the attitudes underpinning inequality and violence against women.

[www.genderberg.com](http://www.genderberg.com) : Genderberg is intended to be a website resource for prostitution, pornography, trafficking and sexual exploitation activists and researchers.

## Prostitution

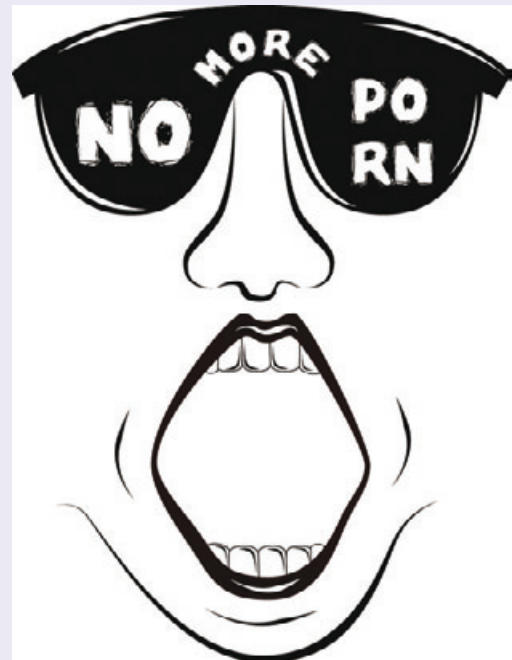
[www.prostitutionresearch.com](http://www.prostitutionresearch.com) : This site offers information and research on women abused through prostitution. Highly recommended.

[www.prostitutionrecovery.org](http://www.prostitutionrecovery.org) : A website to help people escape the life of prostitution, survive, and recover from its long-term effects, and to provide education about the effects of prostitution on those used in it, and its effects on the larger community.

<http://catwinternational.org> : Information on prostitution and trafficking.

[www.ecpat.org.uk](http://www.ecpat.org.uk) : Website of End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes.

Right: No Porn Campaign  
by Bangzul



## Pornography

<http://againstpornography.org> : Includes excellent list of links to other anti-pornography sites.

<http://swapcampaign.co.uk> : Information on the work of Scottish Women Against Pornography.

<http://stoppornculture.org/home.html> : An excellent website with research links, resources and advice on using antipornography resources.

<http://antipornfeminists.wordpress.com/> : Anti-Porn London: a group of feminists campaigning against pornography. Bin the Bunny (the protest against the Playboy store on Oxford St) was their first campaign.

<http://www.oneangrygirl.net/antiporn.html> : A collection of excellent anti porn resources, articles and links

# Coming soon: Pleasure vs Profit

## **Pleasure Vs Profit – young people in a pornified Scotland**

Concern has been increasingly expressed at the sexualisation of our culture. This concern has come directly from parents/ carers/ families who are finding it difficult to maintain boundaries around what their young people are watching, seeing, reading and hearing in relation to sex, sexuality, gender and relationships. It is also being expressed across the sectors by a number of professionals who work directly with young people in terms of their beliefs and attitudes not only to sexual relationships but also in the way young people view themselves and their value in our culture. It has also been noted in research and academic circles, with a growing need noted to interrupt the narrow norms that are being presented, especially through the mainstream media.

The Women's Support Project and Zero Tolerance decided to work together to develop a new short film as an easily accessible awareness-raising tool that can be adapted for use in a variety of contexts and settings to make people aware of the key issues around this debate.

Pleasure Vs Profit is funded through Awards for All and the Scottish Community Foundation to look at issues around sexualisation of our culture and the impact it is having on young people. It will include the opinions and experiences of professionals and workers who work on these issues along with the opinions and experiences of young people.

### **Who is it for?**

The DVD and accompanying resource / information pack will be available to parents and all those who work with young people. It is not aimed at young people themselves but we are currently applying for additional funding to develop a further resource aimed at that age group. The DVD will be made available for free to anyone working with young people through formal school based education, informal community education, youth support and information services, social and probation workers.

The DVD and pack will be also available to download for free online from The Women's Support Project and Zero Tolerance websites and their YouTube channels. The film and pack will be launched on the 21st June.

Please contact The Women's Support Project on 0141 552 2221 if you would like to find out any more information.

