resist; they disappear when the danger gets too close. The Constitution has nothing for them—no help, no protection, no dignity, no solace, no justice. The law has nothing for them—no recognition of the injuries done them by pornography, no reparations for what has been taken from them. They are real, and even though this society will do nothing for them, they are women who have resolved that the man who expects to succeed in whipping must also succeed in killing them. This changes the nature of the women's movement. It must stop slavery. The runaway slave is now part of it.

One new indulgence was to go out evenings alone. This I worked out carefully in my mind, as not only a right but a duty. Why should a woman be deprived of her only free time, the time allotted to recreation? Why must she be dependent on some man, and thus forced to please him if she wished to go anywhere at night?

A stalwart man once sharply contested my claim to this freedom to go alone. "Any true man," he said with fervor, "is always ready to go with a woman at night. He is her natural protector."

"Against what?" I inquired. As a matter of fact, the thing a woman is most afraid to meet on a dark street is her natural protector. Singular:

Charlotte Perkins Gilman,
The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography

She was thirteen. She was at a Girl Scout camp in northern Wisconsin. She went for a long walk in the woods alone during the day. She had long blond hair. She saw three hunters reading magazines, talking, joking. One looked up and said: "There's a live one." She thought they meant a deer. She ducked and started to run away. They meant her. They chased her, caught her, dragged her back to where they were camped. The magazines were pornography of women she physically resembled: blond, childlike. They called her names from the pornography: Little Godiva, Golden Girl, also bitch and slut. They threatened to kill her. They made her undress. It was November and cold. One held a rifle to her head; another beat her breasts with his rifle. All three raped her—penile penetration into the vagina. The third one couldn't get hard at first so he demanded a blow job. She didn't know what that was. The third man forced his penis into her mouth; one of the others cocked the trigger on his rifle. She was told she had better do it right. She tried. When they were done with her, they kicked her: they kicked her naked body and they kicked leaves and pine needles on her. "[T]hey told me that if I wanted more, that I could come back the next day."

She was sexually abused when she was three by a boy who was fourteen—it was a "game" he had learned from pornography. "[I]t seems really bizarre to me to use the word boy because the only memory I have of this person is as a three year old. And as a three year old he seemed like a really big man." When she was a young adult she was drugged by men who made and sold pornography. She remembers flashing lights, being forced onto a stage, being undressed by two men and sexually touched by a third. Men were waving money at her; "one of them shoved it in my stomach and essentially punched me. I kept wondering how it was possible that they couldn't see that I didn't want to be there, that I wasn't there willingly."

She had a boyfriend. She was twenty-one. One night he went to a stag party and watched pornography films. He called her up to ask if he could have sex with her. She felt obligated to make him happy. "I also felt that the refusal would be indicative of sexual quote unquote hang-ups on my part and that I was not quote unquote liberal enough.

7. See Public Hearings, Minneapolis, pp. 39–41.
When he arrived, he informed me that the other men at the party were envious that he had a girlfriend to fuck. They wanted to fuck too after watching the pornography. He informed me of this as he was taking his coat off. "He had her perform oral sex on him: "I did not do this of my own volition. He put his genitals in my face and he said 'Take it all.'" He fucked her. The whole encounter took about five minutes. Then he dressed and went back to the party. "I felt ashamed and numb and I also felt very used."8

She was seventeen, he was nineteen. He was an art student. He used her body for photography assignments by putting her body in contorted positions and telling her rape stories to get the expression he wanted on her face: fear. About a year later he had an assignment to do body casts in plaster. He couldn't get models because the plaster was heavy and caused fainting. She was a premed student. She tried to explain to him how deleterious the effects of the plaster were. "When you put plaster on your body, it sets up, it draws the blood to the skin and the more area it covers on your body, the more blood is drawn to your skin. You become dizzy and nauseous and sick to your stomach and finally faint." He needed his work to be exhibited, so he needed her to model. She tried. She couldn't stand the heat and the weight of the plaster. "He wanted me to be in poses where I had to hold my hands up over my head, and they would be numb and they would fall. He eventually tied my hands over my head." They got married. During the course of their marriage he began to consume more and more pornography. He would read excerpts to her from the magazines about group sex, wife swapping, anal intercourse, and bondage. They would go to pornography films and wet T-shirt contests with friends. "I felt devastated and disgusted watching it. I was told by those men that if I wasn't as smart as I was and if I would be more sexually liberated and more sexy that I would get along a lot better in the world and that they and a lot of other men would like me more. About this time I started feeling very terrified. I realized that this wasn't a joke anymore." She asked her mother for help but was told that divorce was a disgrace and it was her responsibility to make the marriage work. He brought his friends home to act out the scenarios from the pornography. She found the group sex humiliating and disgusting, and to prevent it she agreed to act out the pornography in private with her husband. She began feeling suicidal. He was transferred to an Asian country in connection with his job. The pornography in the country where they now lived was more violent. He took her to live sex shows where women had sex with animals, especially snakes. Increasingly, when she was asleep he would force intercourse on her. Then he started traveling a lot, and she used his absence to learn karate. "One night when I was in one of those pornographic institutions, I was sitting with a couple of people that I had known, watching the women on stage and watching the different transactions and the sales of the women and the different acts going on, and I realized that my life wasn't any different than these women except that it was done in the name of marriage. I could see how I was being seasoned to the use of pornography and I could see what was coming next. I could see more violence and I could see more humiliation and I knew at that point I was either going to die from it, I was going to kill myself, or I was going to leave. And I was feeling strong enough that I left. . . . Pornography is not a fantasy, it was my life, reality."9

At the time she made this statement, she couldn't have been older than twenty-two. She was terrified that the people would be identifiable, and so she spoke in only the most general terms, never specifying their relationship to her. She said she had lived in a house with a divorced woman, that woman's children, and the ex-husband, who refused to leave. She had lived there for eighteen years. During

8. See Public Hearings, Minneapolis, p. 41.
that time, "the woman was regularly raped by this man. He would bring pornographic magazines, books, and paraphernalia into the bedroom with him and tell her that if she did not perform the sexual acts that were being done in the 'dirty' books and magazines he would beat and kill her. I know about this because my bedroom was right next to hers. I could hear everything they said. I could hear her screams and cries. In addition, since I did most of the cleaning in the house, I would often come across the books, magazines, and paraphernalia that were in the bedroom and other rooms of the house. . . . Not only did I suffer through the torture of listening to the rapes and tortures of a woman, but I could see what grotesque acts this man was performing on her from the pictures in the pornographic materials. I was also able to see the systematic destruction of a human being taking place before my eyes. At the time I lived with the woman, I was completely helpless, powerless in regard to helping this woman and her children in getting away from this man." As a child, she was told by the man that if she ever told or tried to run away he would break her arms and legs and cut up her face. He whipped her with belts and electrical cords. He made her pull her pants down to beat her. "I was touched and grabbed where I did not want him to touch me." She was also locked in dark closets and in the basement for long periods of time.  

She was raped by two men. They were acting out the pornographic video game "Custer's Revenge." She was American Indian; they were white. "They held me down and as one was running the tip of his knife across my face and throat he said, 'Do you want to play Custer's Last Stand? It's great. You lose but you don't care, do you? You like a little pain, don't you, squaw.' They both laughed and then he said, 'There is a lot of cock in Custer's Last Stand. You should be grateful, squaw, that all-American boys like us want you. Maybe we will tie you to a tree and start a fire around you.'"

Her name is Jayne Stamen. She is currently in jail. In 1986, she hired three men to beat up her husband. She wanted him to know what a beating felt like. He died. She was charged with second-degree murder; convicted of first-degree manslaughter; sentenced to eight-and-a-half to twenty-five years. She was also convicted of criminal solicitation: in 1984 she asked some men to kill her husband for her, then reneged; she was sentenced on the criminal solicitation charge to two-and-a-third to seven years. The sentences are to run consecutively. She was tortured in her marriage by a man consumed by acting out pornography. He tied her up when he raped her; he broke bones; he forced anal intercourse; he beat her mercilessly; he penetrated her vagina with objects, "his rifle, or a long-necked wine decanter, or twelve-inch artificial rubber penises." He shaved the hair off her pubic area because he wanted, in his words, to "screw a baby's cunt." He slept with a rifle and kept a knife by the bed; he would threaten to cut her face with the knife if she didn't act out the pornography, and he would use the knife again if she wasn't showing pleasure. He called her all the names: whore, slut, cunt, bitch. "He used to jerk himself off on my chest while I was sleeping, or I would get woke up with him coming in my face and then he'd urinate on me." She tried to escape several times. He came after her armed with his rifle. She became addicted to alcohol and pills. "The papers stated that I didn't report [the violence] to the police. I did have the police at my home on several occasions. Twice on Long Island was for the gun threats, and once in Starrett City was also for the gun. The rest of the times were for the beatings and throwing me out of the house. A few times the police helped me get away from him with my clothes and the boys. I went home to my

10. See Public Hearings, Minneapolis, pp. 65-66.

mom's. [He came after her with a rifle.] I went to the doctor's and hospitals on several occasions, too, but I could not tell the truth on how I 'hurt myself.' I always covered up for him, as I knew my life depended on that." The judge wouldn't admit testimony on the torture because he said the husband wasn't on trial. The defense lawyer said in private that he thought she probably enjoyed the abusive sex. Jayne's case will be appealed, but she may well have to stay in jail at Bedford Hills, a New York State prison for women, for the duration of the appeal because Women Against Pornography, a group that established the Defense Fund for Jayne Stamen, has not been able to raise bail money for her. Neither have I or others who care. It isn't chic to help such women; they aren't the Black Panthers. Ironically, there are many women—and recently a teenage girl, a victim of incest—who have hired others to kill the men—husbands, fathers—who were torturing them because they could not bear to do it themselves. Or the woman pours gasoline on the bed when he sleeps and lights the fire. Jayne didn't hire the men to kill her husband; the real question may be, why not? why didn't she? Women don't understand self-defense the way men do—perhaps because sexual abuse destroys the self. We don't feel we have a right to kill just because we are being beaten, raped, tortured, and terrorized. We are hurt for a long time before we fight back. Then, usually, we are punished: "I have lived in a prison for ten years, meaning my marriage," says Jayne Stamen, "...and now they have me in a real prison."12

I've quoted from statements, all made in public forums, by women I know well (except for Jayne Stamen; I've talked with her but I haven't met her). I can vouch for them; I know the stories are true. The women who made these particular statements are only a few of the thousands of women I have met, talked with, questioned: women who have been hurt by pornography. The women are real to me. I know what they look like standing tall; I've seen the fear; I've watched them remember; I've talked with them about other things, all sorts of things: intellectual issues, the weather, politics, school, children, cooking. I have some idea of their aspirations as individuals, the ones they lost during the course of sexual abuse, the ones they cherish now. I know them. Each one, for me, has a face, a voice, a whole life behind her face and her voice. Each is more eloquent and more hurt than I know how to convey. Since 1974, when my book Woman Hating was first published, women have been seeking me out to tell me that they have been hurt by pornography; they have told me how they have been hurt in detail, how much, how long, by how many. They thought I might believe them, initially, I think, because I took pornography seriously in Woman Hating. I said it was cruel, violent, basic to the way our culture sees and treats women—and I said the hate in it was real. Well, they knew that the hate in it was real because they had been sexually assaulted by that hate. One does not make the first tentative efforts to communicate about this abuse to those who will almost certainly ridicule one. Some women took a chance on me; and it was a chance, because I often did not want to listen. I had my limits and my reasons, like everyone else. For many years, I heard the same stories I have tried to encapsulate here: the same stories, sometimes more complicated, sometimes more savage, from thousands of women, most of whom hadn't dared to tell anyone. No part of the country was exempt; no age group; no racial or ethnic group; no "life-style": however "normal" or "alternative." The statements I have paraphrased here are not special: not more sadistic, not chosen by me because they are particularly sickening or offensive. In fact, they are not particularly sickening or offensive. They simply are what happens to women who are brutalized by the use of pornography on them.

Such first-person stories from women are dismissed by defenders of pornography as "anecdotal"; they misuse the

word to make it denote a story, probably fictive, that is small, trivial, inconsequential, proof only of some defect in the woman herself—the story tells us nothing about pornography but it tells us all we need to know about the woman. She's probably lying; maybe she really liked it; and if it did happen, how could anyone (sometimes referred to as “a smart girl like you”) be stupid enough, simple-minded enough, to think that pornography had anything to do with it? Wasn't there, as one grinning adversary always asks, also coffee in the house? The coffee, he suggests, is more likely to be a factor in the abuse than the pornography—after all, the bad effects of coffee have been proven in the laboratory. What does one do when women's lives are worth so little—worth arrogant, self-satisfied ridicule and nothing else, not even the appearance, however false, of charity or concern? Alas, one answers: the man (the husband, the boyfriend, the rapist, the torturer—you or your colleague or your best friend or your buddy) wasn't reading the coffee label when he tied the knots; the directions he followed are found in pornography, and, frankly, they are not found anywhere else. The first-person stories are human experience, raw and true, not mediated by dogma or ideology or social convention; “human” is the trick word in the sentence. If one values women as human beings, one cannot turn away or refuse to hear—so that one can refuse to care without bearing responsibility for the refusal. One cannot turn one's back on the women or on the burden of memory they carry. If one values women as human beings, one will not turn one's back on the women who are being hurt today and the women who will be hurt tomorrow.

Most of what we know about the experience of punishment, the experience of torture, the experience of socially sanctioned sadism, comes from the first-person testimony of individuals—“anecdotal” material. We have the first-person stories of Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, of Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, of Nadezhda Mandelstam and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Others in the same or different circumstances of torture and terror have spoken out to bear witness. Often, they were not believed. They were shamed, not honored. We smelled the humiliation, the degradation, on them; we turned away. At the same time, their stories were too horrible, too impossible, too unpleasant; their stories indicted those who stood by and did nothing—most of us, most of the time. Respectfully, I suggest that the women who have experienced the sadism of pornography on their bodies—the women in the pornography and the women on whom the pornography is used—are also survivors; they bear witness, now, for themselves, on behalf of others. “Survivors,” wrote Terrence Des Pres, “are not individuals in the bourgeois sense. They are living remnants of the general struggle, and certainly they know it.” Of these women hurt by pornography, we must say that they know it now. Before, each was alone, unspeakably alone, isolated in terror and humiliated even by the will to live—it was the will to live, after all, that carried each woman from rape to rape, from beating to beating. Each had never heard another's voice saying the words of what had happened, telling the same story; because it is the same story, over and over—and none of those who escaped, survived, endured, are individuals in the bourgeois sense. These women will not abandon the meaning of their own experience. That meaning is: pornography is the orchestrated destruction of women's bodies and souls; rape, battery, incest, and prostitution animate it; dehumanization and sadism characterize it; it is war on women, serial assaults on dignity, identity, and human worth; it is tyranny. Each woman who has survived knows from the experience of her own life that pornography is captivity—the woman trapped in the picture used on the woman trapped wherever he's got her.

The burden of proof will be on those of us who have been victimized. If I [any woman] am able to prove that the picture you are holding, the one where the knife is stuffed up my vagina, was taken when my pimp forced me at gunpoint and photographed it without my consent, if my existence is proved real, I am coming to take what is mine. If I can prove that the movie you are looking at called Black Bondage, the one where my black skin is synonymous with filth and my bondage and my slavery is encouraged, caused me harm and discrimination, if my existence is proved real, I am coming to take what is mine. Whether you like it or not, the time is coming when you will have to get your fantasy off my ass.

Therese Stanton, “Fighting for Our Existence” in Changing Men #15, Fall 1985

In the fall of 1983, something changed. The speech of women hurt by pornography became public and real. It, they, began to exist in the sphere of public reality. Constitutional lawyer Catharine A. MacKinnon and I were hired by the City of Minneapolis to draft an amendment to the city's civil rights law: an amendment that would recognize pornography as a violation of the civil rights of women, as a form of sex discrimination, an abuse of human rights. We were also asked to organize hearings that would provide a legislative record showing the need for such a law. Essentially, the legislators needed to know that these violations were systematic and pervasive in the population they represented, not rare, peculiar anomalies.

The years of listening to the private stories had been years of despair for me. It was hopeless. I could not help. There was no help. I listened; I went on my way; nothing changed. Now, all the years of listening were knowledge, real knowledge that could be mined: a resource, not a burden and a curse. I knew how women were hurt by pornography. My knowledge was concrete, not abstract: I knew the ways it was used; I knew how it was made; I knew the scenes of exploitation and abuse in real life—the lives of prostitutes, daughters, girlfriends, wives; I knew the words the women said when they dared to whisper what had happened to them; I could hear their voices in my mind, in my heart. I didn't know that there were such women all around me, everywhere, in Minneapolis that fall. I was heartbroken as women I knew came forward to testify: though I listened with an outer detachment to the stories of rape, incest, prostitution, battery, and torture, each in the service of pornography, inside I wanted to die.

The women who came forward to testify at the hearings held by the Minneapolis City Council on December 12 and 13, 1983, gave their names and specified the area of the city in which they lived. They spoke on the record before a governmental body in the city where they lived; there they were, for family, neighbors, friends, employers, teachers, and strangers to see, to remember. They described in detail sexual abuse through pornography as it had happened to them. They were questioned on their testimony by Catharine MacKinnon and myself and also by members of the city council and sometimes the city attorney. There were photographers and television cameras. There were a couple of hundred people in the room. There was no safety, no privacy, no retreat, no protection; only a net of validation provided by the testimony of experts—clinical psychologists, prosecutors, experimental psychologists, social scientists, experts in sexual abuse from rape crisis centers and battered women’s shelters, and those who worked with sex offenders. The testimony of these experts was not abstract or theoretical; it brought the lives of more women, more children, into the room: more rape, more violation through pornography. They too were talking about real people who had been hurt, sometimes killed; they had seen, known, treated, interviewed, numbers of them. A
new social truth emerged, one that had been buried in fear, shame, and the silence of the socially powerless: no woman hurt by pornography was alone—she never had been; no woman hurt by pornography would ever be alone again because each was—truly—a “living remnant of the general struggle.” What the survivors said was speech; the pornography had been, throughout their lives, a means of actively suppressing their speech. They had been turned into pornography in life and made mute; terrorized by it and made mute. Now, the mute spoke; the socially invisible were seen; the women were real; they mattered. This speech—their speech—was new in the world of public discourse, and it was made possible by the development of a law that some called censorship. The women came forward because they thought that the new civil rights law recognized what had happened to them, gave them recourse and redress, enhanced their civil dignity and human worth. The law itself gave them existence: I am real; they believed me; I count; social policy at last will take my life into account, validate my worth—me, the woman who was forced to fuck a dog; me, the woman he urinated on; me, the woman he tied up for his friends to use; me, the woman he masturbated in; me, the woman he branded or maimed; me, the woman he prostituted; me, the woman they gang-raped.

The law was passed twice in Minneapolis in 1983 and 1984 by two different city councils; it was vetoed each time by the same mayor, a man active in Amnesty International, opposing torture outside of Minneapolis. The law was passed in 1984 in Indianapolis with a redrafted definition that targeted violent pornography—the kind “everyone” opposes. The city was sued for passing it; the courts found it unconstitutional. The appeals judge said that pornography did all the harm we claimed—it promoted insult and injury, rape and assault, even caused women to have lower wages—and that these effects proved its power as speech; therefore, it had to be protected. In 1985, the law was put on the ballot by popular petition in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The city council refused to allow it on the ballot; we had to sue for ballot access; the civil liberties people opposed our having that access; we won the court case and the city was ordered to put the law on the ballot. We got 42 percent of the vote, a higher percentage than feminists got on the first women’s suffrage referendum. In 1988, the law was on the ballot in Bellingham, Washington, in the presidential election; we got 62 percent of the vote. The city had tried to keep us off the ballot; again we had to get a court order to gain ballot access. The City of Bellingham was sued by the ACLU in federal court for having the law, however unwillingly; a federal district judge found the law unconstitutional, simply reiterating the previous appeals court decision in the Indianapolis case—indeed, there was a statement that the harms of pornography were recognized and not in dispute.

We have not been able to get the courts to confront a real woman plaintiff suing a real pornographer for depriving her of real rights through sexual exploitation or sexual abuse. This is because the challenges to the civil rights law have been abstract arguments about speech, as if women’s lives are abstract, as if the harms are abstract, conceded but not real. The women trapped in the pictures continue to be perceived as the free speech of the pimps who exploit them. No judge seems willing to look such a woman, three-dimensional and breathing, in the face and tell her that the pimp’s use of her is his constitutionally protected right of speech; that he has a right to express himself by violating her. The women on whom the pornography is used in assault remain invisible and speechless in these court cases. No judge has had to try to sleep at night having heard a real woman’s voice describing what happened to her, the incest, the rape, the gang rape, the battery, the forced prostitution. Keeping these women silent in courts of law is the main strategy of the free speech lawyers who defend the pornography industry. Hey, they love literature; they deplore sexism. If some women get hurt, that’s the price we pay for freedom. Who are the
“we”? What is the “freedom”? These speech-loving lawyers keep the women from speaking in court so that no judge will actually be able to listen to them.

Women continue speaking out in public forums, even though we are formally and purposefully silenced in actual courts of law. Hearings were held by a subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee on the effects of pornography on women and children; the Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography listened to the testimony of women hurt by pornography; women are demanding to speak at conferences, debates, on television, radio. This civil rights law is taught in law schools all over the country; it is written about in law journals, often favorably; increasingly, it has academic support; and its passage has been cited as precedent in at least one judicial decision finding that pornography in the workplace can be legally recognized as sexual harassment. The time of silence—at least the time of absolute silence—is over. And the civil rights law developed in Minneapolis has had an impact around the world. It is on the agenda of legislators in England, Ireland, West Germany, New Zealand, Tasmania, and Canada; it is on the agenda of political activists all over the world.

The law itself is civil, not criminal. It allows people who have been hurt by pornography to sue for sex discrimination. Under this law, it is sex discrimination to coerce, intimidate, or fraudulently induce anyone into pornography; it is sex discrimination to force pornography on a person in any place of employment, education, home, or any public place; it is sex discrimination to assault, physically attack, or injure any person in a way that is directly caused by a specific piece of pornography—the pornographers share responsibility for the assault; in the Bellingham version, it is also sex discrimination to defame any person through the unauthorized use in pornography of their name, image, and/or recognizable personal likeness; and it is sex discrimination to produce, sell, exhibit, or distribute pornography—to traffic in the exploitation of women, to traffic in material that provably causes aggression against and lower civil status for women in society.

The law’s definition of pornography is concrete, not abstract. Pornography is defined as the graphic, sexually explicit subordination of women in pictures and/or words that also includes women presented dehumanized as sexual objects, things, or commodities; or women presented as sexual objects who enjoy pain or humiliation; or women presented as sexual objects who experience sexual pleasure in being raped; or women presented as sexual objects tied up or cut up or mutilated or bruised or physically hurt; or women presented in postures or positions of sexual submission, servility, or display; or women’s body parts—including but not limited to vaginas, breasts, buttocks—exhibited such that women are reduced to those parts; or women presented as whores by nature; or women presented being penetrated by objects or animals; or women presented in scenarios of degradation, injury, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual. If men, children, or transsexuals are used in any of the same ways, the material also meets the definition of pornography.

For women hurt by pornography, this law simply describes reality; it is a map of a real world. Because the law allows them to sue those who have imposed this reality on them—especially the makers, sellers, exhibitors, and distributors of pornography—they have a way of redrawing the map. The courts now protect the pornography; they recognize the harm to women in judicial decisions—or they use words that say they recognize the harm—and then tell women that the Constitution protects the harm; profit is real to them and they make sure the pimps stay rich, even as women and their children are this country’s poor.

The civil rights law is designed to confront both the courts and the pornographers with a demand for substantive, not theoretical, equality. This law says: we have the right of those of us who are real to be treated as real; if my existence is proved real, I am comi...
is mine," Therese Stanton wrote for every woman who wants to use this law. How terrifying that thought must be to those who have been using women with impunity.

Initially an amendment to a city ordinance, this law has had a global impact because: (1) it tells the truth about what pornography is and does; (2) it tells the truth about how women are exploited and hurt by the use of pornography; (3) it seeks to expand the speech of women by taking the pornographers' gags out of our mouths; (4) it seeks to expand the speech and enhance the civil status of women by giving us the courts as a forum in which we will have standing and authority; (5) it is a mechanism for redistributing power, taking it from pimps, giving it to those they have been exploiting for profit, injuring for pleasure; (6) it says that women matter, including the women in the pornography. This law and the political vision and experience that inform it are not going to go away. We are going to stop the pornographers. We are going to claim our human dignity under law. One ex-prostitute, who is an organizer for the passage of this civil rights law, wrote: "Confronting how I’ve been hurt is the hardest thing that I’ve ever had to do in my life. A hard life, if I may say so." She is right. Confronting the pornographers is easier—their threats, their violence, their power. Confronting the courts is easier—their indifference, their contempt for women, their plain stupidity. Confronting the status quo is easier. Patience is easier and so is every form of political activism, however dangerous. Beaver is real, all right. A serious woman—formidable even—she is coming to take what is hers.

As far as I can determine, Goebbels' film of the generals slowly, horribly dying—their innards caving in from the force of gravity on their hung bodies, the slow strangulation pushing out their tongues and eyes and causing erection (which strangulation invariably does in the male)—was the first snuff film. The master of hate propaganda didn't get it right though—a rare lapse. Audiences became physically sick. These were Nazi audiences watching Nazi generals, men of power, the society's patriarchs, so white they were Aryan; rulers, not slaves. It only works when the torture is done on those who have been dehumanized, made inferior—not just in the eyes of the beholder but in his real world. Goebbels started out with cartoons of Jews before the Nazis came to power; he could have moved on to the films made in Dachau in 1942, for instance, of the reactions of the men placed in the Luftwaffe's low-pressure chambers; desensitizing his Nazi audiences to the humiliation, the torture, of Jews, he could have made a film that would have worked—of Jews hanging from meat hooks, slowly strangled. But never of power, never of those
who were the same, never of those who had been fully human to the audience the day before, never of those who had been respected. Never.

Des Pres says it is easier to kill if “the victim exhibits self-disgust; if he cannot lift his eyes for humiliation, or if lifted they show only emptiness...” There is some pornography in which women are that abject, that easy to kill, that close to being dead already. There is quite a lot of it; and it is highly prized, expensive. There is still more pornography in which the woman wets her lips and pushes out her ass and says hurt me. She is painted so that the man cannot miss the mark: her lips are bright red so that he can find the way into her throat; her vaginal lips are pink or purple so that he can’t miss; her anus is darkened while her buttocks are flooded with light. Her eyes glisten. She smiles. Sticking knives up her own vagina, she smiles. She comes. The Jews didn’t do it to themselves and they didn’t orgasm. In contemporary American pornography, of course, the Jews do it to themselves—they, usually female, seek out the Nazis, go voluntarily to concentration camps, beg a domineering Nazi to hurt them, cut them, burn them—and they do climaxes, stupendously, to both sadism and death. But in life, the Jews didn’t orgasm. Of course, neither do women; not in life. But no one, not even Goebbels, said the Jews liked it. The society agreed that the Jews deserved it, but not that they wanted it and not that it gave them sexual pleasure. There were no photographs from Ravensbruck concentration camp of the prisoners who were incarcerated there along with other women gasping for breath in pleasure; the gypsies didn’t orgasm either. There were no photographs—real or simulated—of the Jews smiling and waving the Nazis closer, getting on the trains with their hands happily fingering their exposed genitals or using Nazi guns, swastikas, or Iron Crosses for sexual penetration. Such behaviors would not have been credible even in a society that believed the Jews were both subhuman and intensely sexual in the racist sense—the men rapists, the women whores. The questions now really are: why is pornography credible in our society? how can anyone believe it? And then: how subhuman would women have to be for the pornography to be true? To the men who use pornography, how subhuman are women? If men believe the pornography because it makes them come—them, not the women—what is sex to men and how will women survive it?

This book—written from 1977 through 1980, published in 1981 after two separate publishers reneged on contractual agreements to publish it (and a dozen more refused outright), out of print in the United States for the last several years—takes power, sadism, and dehumanization seriously. I am one of those serious women. This book asks how power, sadism, and dehumanization work in pornography—against women, for men—to establish the sexual and social subordination of women to men. This book is distinguished from most other books on pornography by its bedrock conviction that the power is real, the cruelty is real, the sadism is real, the subordination is real: the political crime against women is real. This book says that power used to destroy women is atrocity. *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* is not, and was never intended to be, an effete intellectual exercise. I want real change, an end to the social power of men over women; more starkly, his boot off my neck. In this book, I wanted to dissect male dominance; do an autopsy on it, but it wasn’t dead. Instead, there were artifacts—films, photographs, books—an archive of evidence and documentation of crimes against women. This was a living archive; commercially alive, carnivorous in its use of women, saturating the environment of daily life, explosive and expanding, vital because it was synonymous with sex for the men who made it and the men who used it—men so arrogant in their power over us that they published the pictures of what they did to us, how they used us, expecting submission from us, compliance; we were supposed to follow the orders implicit in

the pictures. Instead, some of us understood that we could look at those pictures and see them—see the men. Know thyself, if you are lucky enough to have a self that hasn’t been destroyed by rape in its many forms; and then, know the bastard on top of you. This book is about him, the collective him: who he is; what he wants; what he needs (the key to both his rage and his political vulnerability); how he’s diddling you and why it feels so bad and hurts so much; what’s keeping him in place on you; why he won’t move off of you; what it’s going to take to blow him loose. A different kind of blow job. Is he scared? You bet.

Pornography: Men Possessing Women also puts pornography, finally, into its appropriate context. A system of dominance and submission, pornography has the weight and significance of any other historically real torture or punishment of a group of people because of a condition of birth; it has the weight and significance of any other historically real exile of human beings from human dignity, the purging of them from a shared community of care and rights and respect. Pornography happens. It is not outside the world of material reality because it happens to women, and it is not outside the world of material reality because it makes men come. The man’s ejaculation is real. The woman on whom his semen is spread, a typical use in pornography, is real. Men characterize pornography as something mental because their minds, their thoughts, their dreams, their fantasies, are more real to them than women’s bodies or lives; in fact, men have used their social power to characterize a $10-billion-a-year trade in women as fantasy. This is a spectacular example of how those in power cannibalize not only people but language. “We do not know,” wrote George Steiner, “whether the study of the humanities, of the noblest that has been said and thought, can do very much to humanize. We do not know; and surely there is something rather terrible in our doubt whether the study and delight a man finds in Shakespeare make him any less capable of organizing a concentration camp.” As long as language is a weapon of power—used to destroy the expressive abilities of the powerless by destroying their sense of reality—we do know. Beaver knows.

Some have said that pornography is a superficial target; but, truly, this is wrong. Pornography incarnates male supremacy. It is the DNA of male dominance. Every rule of sexual abuse, every nuance of sexual sadism, every highway and byway of sexual exploitation, is encoded in it. It’s what men want us to be, think we are, make us into; how men use us; not because biologically they are men but because this is how their social power is organized. From the perspective of the political activist, pornography is the blueprint of male supremacy; it shows how male supremacy is built. The political activist needs to know the blueprint. In cultural terms, pornography is the fundamentalism of male dominance. Its absolutism on women and sexuality, its dogma, is merciless. Women are consigned to rape and prostitution; heretics are disappeared and destroyed. Pornography is the essential sexuality of male power: of hate, of ownership, of hierarchy; of sadism, of dominance. The premises of pornography are controlling in every rape and every rape case, whenever a woman is battered or prostituted, in incest, including in incest that occurs before a child can even speak, and in murder—murders of women by husbands, lovers, and serial killers. If this is superficial, what’s deep?

When I first wrote this book, I was going to use these lines from Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s letters as an epigraph: “If a woman ignores these wrongs, then may women as a sex continue to suffer them; there is no help for any of

us—let us be dumb and die." I changed my mind, because I decided that no woman deserved what pornography does to women: no woman, however stupid or evil, treacherous or cowardly, venal or corrupt; no woman. I also decided that even if some women did, I didn't. I also remembered the brave women, the women who had survived, escaped; in the late 1970s, they were still silent, but I had heard them. I don't want them, ever, to be dumb and die; and certainly not because some other woman somewhere is a coward or a fool or a cynic or a Kapo. There are women who will defend pornography, who don't give a damn. There are women who will use pornography, including on other women. There are women who will work for pornographers—not as so-called models but as managers, lawyers, publicists, and paid writers of "opinion" and "journalism." There are women of every kind, all the time; there are always women who will ignore egregious wrongs. My aspirations for dignity and equality do not hinge on perfection in myself or in any other woman; only on the humanity we share, fragile as that appears to be. I understand Elizabeth Barrett Browning's desperation and the rage behind it, but I'm removing her curse. No woman's betrayal will make us dumb and dead—no more and never again. Beaver's endured too much to turn back now.

—Andrea Dworkin
New York City
March 1989

In a study specifically of force used against adult females by males, the objective scientists introduce the female put off by gentleness, the female who wants to be "treated a little roughly," the female who cannot be satisfied without the use of force. Since "[a] standard gambit in feminine flirtation is to irritate the male and provoke him into physical contact . . . ," it is hard to blame the male even for using gross force against the female—hurting her, hitting her, physically overpowering her: nonobjective persons not scientists sometimes call it "rape." So the scientists do not blame him or even hold him responsible for his own behavior. The masochistic female with her low sex drive or inhibitions or morals who pretends to resist or is actually but unjustifiably unwilling is in fact the one responsible for the harm done to her, which is not really harm, since she is used in an appropriate way because she is female.

The destiny of the woman who does not want it—moralistic or inhibited or with a low sex drive—is the familiar female destiny because underneath is the masochist who does want it, with force. The destiny of the woman who does not want it—a superficial characterization of her, since underneath she does want it or would if she were not moralistic or inhibited—is precisely the same as the destiny of the harlot who provokes in order to be forced. The female is never entitled not to want sex. Force used against her when she refuses is always warranted because she is never either justified or serious in not wanting sex. No authentic idea of bodily integrity is ever hers to claim or to have. Force does not violate her or victimize her because force is nature's way of giving her what she really wants. Force is nature's victory over the constraints of civilization. Force is intrinsic to male sexuality and force used against her does not victimize her; it actualizes her. The objective scientists and the pornographers agree: she wants it hard, she wants it rough, she provokes it because she likes it; and even the sexual apathy posited by Kinsey simply establishes another reason to disregard her will because an assertion of will on her part—by definition, refusal—is a misrepresentation of her own sexual nature, which is fulfilled when she is sexually used by the male to satisfy him, especially in coitus.

Consider also our spirits that break a little each time we see ourselves in chains or full labial display for the conquering male viewer, bruised or on our knees, screaming a real or pretended pain to delight the sadist, pretending to enjoy what we don't enjoy, to be blind to the images of our sisters that really haunt us—humiliated often enough ourselves by the truly obscene idea that sex and the domination of women must be combined.

Gloria Steinem, "Erotica and Pornography"

Somehow every indignity the female suffers ultimately comes to be symbolized in a sexuality that is held to be her responsibility, her shame. Even the self-denigration required of the prostitute is an emotion urged upon all women, but rarely with as much success: not as frankly, not as openly, not as efficiently. It can be summarized in one four-letter word. And the word is not fuck, it's cunt. Our self-contempt originates in this: in knowing we are cunt.

Kate Millett, The Prostitution Papers

I can never have my fill of killing whores.

Euripides' Orestes, in Orestes

The word pornography, derived from the ancient Greek pornografia and graphos, means "writing about whores." Pornography means "whore," specifically and exclusively the lowest class of whore, which in ancient Greece was the brothel slut available to all male citizens.
The pornography was the cheapest (in the literal sense), least regarded, least protected of all women, including slaves. She was, simply and clearly and absolutely, a sexual slave. Graphos means “writing, etching, or drawing.”

The word pornography does not mean “writing about sex” or “depictions of the erotic” or “depictions of sexual acts” or “depictions of nude bodies” or “sexual representations” or any other such euphemism. It means the graphic depiction of women as vile whores. In ancient Greece, not all prostitutes were considered vile: only the porneia.

Contemporary pornography strictly and literally conforms to the word's root meaning: the graphic depiction of vile whores, or, in our language, sluts, cows (as in: sexual cattle, sexual chattel), cunts. The word has not changed its meaning and the genre is not misnamed. The only change in the meaning of the word is with respect to its second part, graphos: now there are cameras—there is still photography, film, video. The methods of graphic depiction have increased in number and in kind: the content is the same; the meaning is the same; the purpose is the same; the status of the women depicted is the same; the sexuality of the women depicted is the same; the value of the women depicted is the same. With the technologically advanced methods of graphic depiction, real women are required for the depiction as such to exist.

The word pornography does not have any other meaning than the one cited here, the graphic depiction of the lowest whores. Whores exist to serve men sexually. Whores exist only within a framework of male sexual domination. Indeed, outside that framework the notion of whores would be absurd and the usage of women as whores would be impossible. The word whore is incomprehensible unless one is immersed in the lexicon of male domination. Men have created the group, the type, the concept, the epithet, the insult, the industry, the trade, the commodity, the reality of woman as whore. Woman as whore exists within the objective and real system of male sexual domination. The pornography itself is objective and real and central to the male sexual system. The valuation of women's sexuality in pornography is objective and real because women are so regarded and so valued. The force depicted in pornography is objective and real because force is so used against women. The debasing of women depicted in pornography and intrinsic to it is objective and real in that women are so debased. The uses of women depicted in pornography are objective and real because women are so used. The women used in pornography are used in pornography. The definition of women articulated systematically and consistently in pornography is objective and real in that real women exist within and must live with constant reference to the boundaries of this definition. The fact that pornography is widely believed to be “sexual representations” or “depictions of sex” emphasizes only that the debasing of women as low whores is widespread and that the sexuality of women is perceived as low and whorish in and of itself. The fact that pornography is widely believed to be “depictions of the erotic” means only that the debasing of women is held to be the real pleasure of sex. As Kate Millett wrote, women's sexuality is reduced to the one essential: "cunt...our essence, our offense." The idea that pornography is "dirty" originates in the conviction that the sexuality of women is dirty and is actually portrayed in pornography; that women's bodies (especially women's genitals) are dirty and lewd in themselves. Pornography does not, as some claim, refute the idea that female sexuality is dirty: instead, pornography embodies and exploits this idea; pornography sells and promotes it.

In the United States, the pornography industry is larger than the record and film industries combined. In a time of widespread economic impoverishment, it is growing: more and more male consumers are eager to spend more and more money on pornography—on depictions of women as vile whores. Pornography is now carried by cable television; it is now being marketed for home use in video machines. The technology itself demands the creation of more and more porneia to meet the market opened up by the technology. Real women are tied up, stretched, hanged, fucked, gang-banged, whipped, beaten, and begging for more. In the photographs and films, real women are used as porneia and real women are depicted as porneia. To profit, the pimps must supply...
the *porneia* as the technology widens the market for the visual consumption of women being brutalized and loving it. One picture is worth a thousand words. The number of pictures required to meet the demands of the marketplace determines the number of *porneia* required to meet the demands of graphic depiction. The numbers grow as the technology and its accessibility grow. The technology by its very nature encourages more and more passive acquiescence to the graphic depictions. Passivity makes the already credulous consumer more credulous. He comes to the pornography a believer; he goes away from it a missionary. The technology itself legitimizes the uses of women conveyed by it.

In the male system, women are sex; sex is the whore. The whore is *pornē*, the lowest whore, the whore who belongs to all male citizens: the slut, the cunt. Buying her is buying pornography. Having her is having pornography. Seeing her is having pornography. Seeing her sex, especially her genitals, is seeing pornography. Seeing her in sex is seeing the whore in sex. Using her is using pornography. Wanting her means wanting pornography. Being her means being pornography.

Male sexual domination is a material system with an ideology and a metaphysics. The sexual colonization of women’s bodies is a material reality: men control the sexual and reproductive uses of women’s bodies. The institutions of control include law, marriage, prostitution, pornography, health care, the economy, organized religion, and systematized physical aggression against women (for instance, in rape and battery). Male domination of the female body is the basic material reality of women’s lives; and all struggle for dignity and self-determination is rooted in the struggle for actual control of one’s own body, especially control over physical access to one’s own body. The ideology of male sexual domination posits that men are superior to women by virtue of their penises; that physical possession of the female is a natural right of the male; that sex is, in fact, conquest and possession of the female, especially but not exclusively phallic conquest and phallic possession; that the use of the female body for sexual or reproductive purposes is a natural right of men; that the sexual will of men properly and naturally defines the parameters of a woman’s sexual being, which is her whole identity. The metaphysics of male sexual domination is that women are whores. This basic truth transcends all lesser truths in the male system. One does not violate something by using it for what it is: neither rape nor prostitution is an abuse of the female because in both the female is fulfilling her natural function; that is...