continue to view anti-porn feminists as fellow travelers, instead of seeing them as dangerous companions.

One reason for this is that liberal feminists share many of the ideological assumptions underlying the radical feminist attack. For example, both liberal and radical feminists condemn the free market for making a profit by using women as “body parts.” Both believe that the commercialization of sex degrades women. In an essay meant to defend the rights of pornographers, Lisa Steel comments: “Sexist representation of women . . . is all part of the same system that, in the service of profits, reduces society to ‘consumer groups.’ And marketing is every bit as conservative as the military . . . we pay dearly for the ‘rights’ of a few to make profits from the rest of us.”

Is this a defense or an attack?

Liberal feminists also tend to use the radical feminist definition of pornography—a definition tremendously slanted in favor of censorship. Once women accept the anti-pornography definition, it is difficult to arrive at any position other than censorship. The Canadian sociologist Jill Ridington argues for free speech. Nevertheless, she defines pornography as: “... a presentation ... of sexual behavior in which one or more participants are coerced, overtly or implicitly, into participation; or are injured or abused physically or psychologically; or in which an imbalance of power is obvious, or implied ... and in which such behavior can be taken to be advocated or endorsed.” (Emphasis added.)

By this definition, what isn't pornography? What can't be interpreted as an imbalance of power? Since almost every sexual presentation is capable of causing psychological harm to someone, almost every presentation can be considered pornographic. Pornography needs stauncher advocates.

Fortunately, it has them.

Individualist feminism provides the best defense of pornography because its ideology is the mirror image of radical feminism, from which the most effective attack on porn is coming. Individual feminism insists on the principle of self-ownership: a woman's body, a woman's right. It insists that women be free to choose, regardless of the content of their choices.

The key concept here is choice, which is present whenever a woman acts without physical coercion. Certainly, it is present whenever the woman herself says the actions are voluntary, because she is the only person truly capable of judging that claim. The peaceful choices of every woman must be respected; the voice of every woman should be heard.

This is a profoundly individualistic approach, which leaves little room for class analysis as presented by anti-porn feminists. Such feminists view individual rights and personal preferences as irritating bumps on the road to the greater good of class interest. To them, “the personal is political.”

To individualist feminists, the personal is personal. There is a political door that closes to separate and protect individuals from
society. People call this protection by different names: the Bill of Rights, self-ownership, individual rights, or natural law. In the shadow of this protection, individual women make decisions about matters that concern them and them alone. For example, they decide about sex.

This is not to say that one woman’s sexual choices cannot have implications for another woman, or an impact upon her. Every action you take and every word you utter can impact upon another human being. Exhaling can have an impact, especially if you have a cold or some other contagious disease. The question is: At what point does another woman have a right to restrict your actions on the grounds of self-protection?

Individualist feminism answers: When, and only when, those actions involve physical force, threat of force, or fraud. In the absence of force, women should be free to make any and every sexual choice they wish.

I may not personally approve of their choices. I may find their choices distasteful. Nevertheless, every choice a woman makes enriches me, because it expands my range of alternatives—even if it is an alternative I can’t imagine ever pursuing myself.

The nineteenth-century individualist feminist Lillian Harman made a similar point:

I consider uniformity in mode of sexual relations as undesirable and impractical as enforced uniformity in anything else. For myself, I want to profit by my mistakes... and why should I be unwilling for others to enjoy the same liberty? If I should be able to bring the entire world to live exactly as I live at present, what would that avail me in ten years, when as I hope, I shall have a broader knowledge of life, and my life therefore probably changed.1

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To repeat: the key is choice. With regard to pornography, this means: Let individual women decide for themselves. Let them weigh the evidence and come to their own conclusions.

But what of the women who are upset by the mere fact that pornography exists? Aren’t they “forced” to live in a pornographic world? In a word, yes. Women who like pornography force others to live in a pornographic world in the same manner that women who lack taste in clothes force others to live with their fashion sense. Every peaceful act can affect someone else. Again, the question is: Do the effects deny to anyone what they have the right to demand?

The answer is no. My decision to consume pornography in no way infringes on another woman’s ability to walk right past it. She can express her disapproval—through speaking out, picketing, and boycott. What she must not do is introduce the force of law.

The mere fact that some women are upset by the presence of pornography tells us very little. It tells us nothing about whether porn is right or wrong, valuable or useless. After all, feminism distresses a great many people. Yet feminists would argue that the movement should not only be tolerated, it should be nurtured. They consider women’s rights to have a positive, rather than a negative effect on society—even if it causes distress. Perhaps the same is true of the graphic depiction of sex.

This is the position I maintain. I argue that the benefits pornography provides to women far outweigh any of its disadvantages. But, at its root, the argument for pornography is not utilitarian.

Pornography should be defended out of respect for women’s choices and for human sexual diversity.

AN INDIVIDUALIST FEMINIST DEFENSE OF PORNOGRAPHY

Pornography and feminism have many things in common. They both focus on women as sexual beings. Pornography dwells on
the physical act of sex itself; feminism examines the impact of sex upon women—historically, economically, politically, and culturally.

Pornography is one of the windows through which women glimpse the sexual possibilities that are open to them. It is nothing more or less than freedom of speech applied to the sexual realm. Feminism is freedom of speech applied to women's sexual rights.

Both pornography and feminism rock the conventional view of sex. They snap the traditional ties between sex and marriage, sex and motherhood. They both threaten family values and flout the status quo. Because of this, when conservatives look at both feminists and women in porn, they see homewreckers, harlots, and sexual deviants.

In other words, pornography and feminism are fellow travelers. And natural allies.

It is time for the feminist movement as a whole to become "improper" and so outrageous as to suggest that sex can be fun and fulfilling. It is time to take sex out of politics and to put it back into the bedroom, where it belongs. Sex is a private choice, and not a political matter open to a majority vote. It is a rebellious process of self-discovery. And feminists should be adamantly defending those women whose sexual choices are under attack. They should be defending women in pornography.

Modern feminism needs a little less dogma and a lot more heresy.

The starting point of this heretical rebellion is to provide a true defense of pornography. Pornography is now the front battleline where the war between sexual correctness and sexual liberation is being waged. The outcome may well define what sexual choices you and I—and our daughters—will be able to make.

I contend: Pornography benefits women, both personally and politically.

It benefits them personally in several ways:

1. It provides sexual information on at least three levels: it gives a panoramic view of the world's sexual possibilities; it allows women to "safely" experience sexual alternatives; and, it provides a different form of information than can be found in textbooks or discussions.
2. Pornography strips away the emotional confusion that so often surrounds real-world sex.
3. Pornography breaks cultural and political stereotypes, so that each woman can interpret sex for herself.
4. Pornography is the great leveler of shame.
5. Pornography can serve as sexual therapy.

Pornography benefits women politically in many ways, including the following:

1. Historically, pornography and feminism have been fellow travelers and natural allies.
2. Pornography is free speech applied to the sexual realm.
3. Viewing pornography may well have a cathartic effect on men who have violent urges toward women.
4. Legitimizing pornography would protect women sex workers, who are stigmatized by our society.

Let's examine the remaining arguments one-by-one:

**Personal Benefits**

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5. Pornography can serve as sexual therapy.
sex with a stranger, in a group, with the same sex, as an act of revenge. It has been called “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Sexual Galaxy.” In times of repression and shame, it is sometimes the only source of sex education for the curious, and of sexual validation for the isolated.

It is how-to literature for those who lack real-world experience, as everyone does in the beginning. Consider just one of the dilemmas of inexperienced women. We all hear about oral sex, but what is it? More specifically, how do you give a man a blow job? What about your teeth? Where do you put your hands? Are the testicles involved? How deep is deepthroating? Are you supposed to swallow? How long should it last? Is it foreplay, or a separate sex act?

Men don’t have a monopoly on performance anxiety.

Although how-to sex manuals may give descriptions of oral sex, the most accessible and graphic source of information is pornography. By watching videos, you can vicariously experience the techniques of dozens—even hundreds—of women. You can decide which aspects of oral sex appeal to you and which, if any, you find unsavory.

The same is true of most other forms of sexuality, including masturbation. This form of sexual play seems to come less naturally to women than to men, perhaps because men’s sexual organs are more exposed. It is not uncommon for women to reach adulthood without knowing how to give themselves pleasure.

Pornography Allows Women to “Safely” Experience Sexual Alternatives.

One of the most benevolent aspects of pornography is that it provides women with a safe environment in which they can satisfy a healthy sexual curiosity. The world is a dangerous place. It is a cold place. Reaching out for real-world experience often involves putting yourself at risk.

The world is especially dangerous for young inexperienced women who are curious and who want to explore—or push—the boundaries of sex. Real-world sex carries the risk of real-world violence at the hands of a stranger. Or at the fists of a man you thought you knew—until the two of you were behind a closed door, or until he was drunk, or . . .

Rape, domestic violence, sexual battery—the list of dangers is long.

By contrast, pornography can be a source of solitary enlightenment. Pornography presents women with their wildest fantasies—from voyeurism to wearing Bo Peep costumes to mock rape. This cornucopia is served up in the privacy of a woman’s own bedroom, on a television set that can be turned off whenever she has had enough. She does not have to defend herself against persistent advances, or “give in” rather than be hurt by a man who will not take no. She is in absolute control of the timing, the content, the duration, the climax.

Pro-pornography women are sometimes accused of not caring about the sexual dangers that face women. I care deeply. I suspect there are few women who have experienced more sexual violence than I have. It is precisely because I know how dangerous the world can be that I have a benevolent view of pornography.

It is because I know how brutal sex can be that I insist on reminding women that they also live in a world of sexual possibilities and pleasures. Sex is too important to surrender. I remember the “sexual revolution” and “women’s liberation.” Women like me who believed in its promises have been left dazed and wondering where the joy in feminism has gone. The sixties were a period when women were encouraged to enjoy—indeed, to demand!—the bounty of pleasure hidden away within their own bodies.

Many things have happened since then. AIDS and a constellation of other perils have changed sexual mores for us all. But the devastation of AIDS cannot explain the current feminist backlash against the “safe sex” practice of enjoying pornography.
Pornography is safe sex. No diseases. No violence. No pregnancy. No infidelity. No one to apologize to the next morning.

Pornography is one of the most benevolent ways a woman can experience who she is sexually.

Pornography Provides a Different Form of Information than Textbooks or Discussion.

Pornography is more than just an encyclopedia of sexual alternatives. It provides women with a different type of information than they can get from a textbook. It offers the emotional information that comes only from experiencing something either directly or vicariously. It provides us with a sense of how it would "feel" to do something.

If pornography offered only intellectual knowledge, it would be far less useful. After all, women already can discuss any sexual theme they wish and still remain "respectable." So long as the sexual expression remains a scholarly discussion, the law takes no notice of what women say. For example, a woman can declare, "I am a lesbian, because it is the purest expression of woman's dignity and true nature." Such a statement is not only acceptable, it is often applauded. But let lesbianism be portrayed in words or images which are meant to be vicariously enjoyed, and the legal system perks up its ears. Knowing about a sexual preference is one thing. Experiencing it is quite another. Even if that experience is vicarious.

Some people believe that open discussion should be enough to provide women with information about sex. But a crucial element is missing. Women still don't have a sense of how it feels—and feeling is what sex is all about. Sex is not about intellect; it is about emotions. Women who watch pornography acquire emotional knowledge about themselves. By indirectly experiencing a wide range of sexual scenarios, they discover their reaction to them.

If a woman listens to a lecture on bondage, she will learn which activities constitute that subgenre of sexuality. She may come to a conclusion about what she thinks about bondage.

But if she sees a movie in which a woman straps a man down, the images will spark emotional responses. She will move closer to discovering how she feels about bondage. Perhaps the sight of a man tied down to a bed appeals to a woman who has never felt sexual power. Perhaps she is frightened or repelled by the sight. Even these reactions—usually considered negative—are valuable. They indicate where that woman draws the line dividing pleasure from pain, excitement from disgust.

In an essay entitled "Talk Dirty to Me," Sallie Tisdale gave a sense of the emotional information she derives from watching pornography:

"Not all I felt was arousal. There are other reasons for a hurried blush... I felt a heady mix of disgust and excitement, and confusion at that mix. Layers peeled off one after the other, because sometimes I disliked my own response... when my body is provoked by what my mind reproves."

2. Pornography strips away the emotional confusion that so often surrounds real-world sex.

It is important to emphasize: Pornography is not real. Pornography is words and images. It allows women to enjoy scenes and situations that would be anathema to them in real life. Women who could never handle the guilt and emotional pressures of an affair can indirectly experience the thrill of one. And feel no shame in doing so.

Why? Because pornography is fantasy. And fantasy is not just some form of attenuated reality. Like dreams or metaphors, sexual fantasies cannot be taken at face value; they should not be taken literally. A woman who daydreams about seducing her neighbor might be genuinely horrified if a glimmer of interest appeared in his eyes. A prudish woman might fantasize about a wild threesome in which she throws her inhibitions into a corner
along with her clothes; if such a situation cropped up, she might run, with all sincerity, in the other direction.

A fantasy is a wholly artificial situation. It is artificial in a number of ways. For one thing, there are no real-world consequences. By this, I mean: No diseases are communicated; no romantic spur-of-the-moment promises are made; no marriage vows are broken; no children result; no disturbing intimacy is possible. All the dilemmas of real sex are avoided.

The woman exercises a level of control that is never possible in the real world. If the sexual action in a video distresses her, she can hit the off button. If it bores her, she can fast-forward. The characters that draw her are just that: characters. They are not real people to whom she must apologize or send thank-you notes the next morning. They are not people about whom she needs to tell her husband. Pornography is innocent exploration.

Pornography allows a woman's imagination to run wild. And nothing on earth is more human than wondering "what if." It allows women to wonder, What if . . . I were lesbian . . . into leather . . . a virgin again . . . ? What if all the worries and criticism of the world fell away, how would I react to sex then?

Pornography can help us become more self-aware sexually. When we are ready to reach out to another human being, it will not be out of ignorance. It will spring from informed desire.

3. Pornography breaks cultural and political stereotypes, so that each woman can interpret sex for herself.

Women who enjoy pornography are often contemptuously dismissed as "psychologically damaged" by the new feminist puritans. This is especially true if the depiction they enjoy shows something which is considered especially "degrading." The epitome of such a scene is one in which a man ejaculates onto a woman's face.

But judgments like "degrading" do not come from anything objective within the pornography itself; they come from the subjective evaluation of the observer. Degradation, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.

For example, when I view pornography in which a woman seems to get real pleasure out of fellatio, it never occurs to me that the woman is psychologically damaged. It never occurs to me that she has fallen in love with her own oppression. I wonder how it feels.

Anti-porn feminists undoubtedly believe that my identification with her pleasure is nothing more than evidence of my psychological damage. I contend that the woman who enjoys fellatio represents a totally different interpretation of a blow job than that offered by anti-porn feminism. She represents a different opinion in action.

Pornography can be likened to dreams or other nonliteral forms of expression. Interpretation is extremely personal. Even those sexual acts which are considered to be prima facia degrading to women—like ejaculating on a woman's face—are wide open to interpretation. Radical feminism considers such an act to be the quintessential humiliation of women—case closed. It is the subordination of a woman to a man's pleasure, which puts him in a position of power.

But is it?

Consider the perspective offered by James R. Petersen on come-shots: "What makes ejaculating on the outside degrading . . . while ejaculating inside . . . sacred? Do guys learn to come on a woman from porn or from premature ejaculation? . . . For that matter, masturbating guys ejaculate on their own bodies all the time, and not one says, 'Oh God, I just degraded myself.'"

Many interpretations can be attached to coming on a woman's face. In the introduction to Perspectives on Pornography: Sexuality in Film and Literature, Gary Day offers a Freudian (and unsatisfying) analysis: "For what the man does in ejaculating over the woman is in a sense to replicate the role of the mother giving milk to the infant . . . [P]ornography does not show, as some
feminists have claimed, a hatred of women but rather a desire to become like them."

Other people—more attuned to the commercial aspects of pornography—claim that come-shots are there purely and simply to prove that the male did ejaculate, that he was excited by the sex act. The woman's response of smearing the sperm or tasting it is nothing more than proof that she enjoyed and approved of the act.

Still others observe that women are particularly interested in seeing come-shots because men's ejaculations are generally hidden from them. In "normal" sex, women never see men come. To some of them, it may be as seductively elusive as the glimpse of a breast or lace pantie is to a pubescent boy. In this context, the come-shot can be interpreted as almost romantic: The woman wishes to share in her lover's orgasm.

My point is not that any one interpretation is "correct," but that the delightful diversity of human nature allows for many interpretations, none of which are inherently right or wrong. They are all subjective. They are all benign.

But, if any one interpretation should be given extra weight, I think it should be the view of those attuned to the particular sub-genre of pornography being viewed. People outside a subgenre cannot realistically judge its nuances any more than people who dislike cheese can judge Brie. After all, when fantasies are not arousing, they all tend to seem ridiculous.

For example, I now understand gay pornography only because gay friends went to the trouble of explaining what particular interactions and pieces of dialogue meant. They knew the slang, the body language, the literary/movie references, the rituals of being gay. Until they clued me in, I felt like a tourist who only barely spoke the language. I suspect the same is true of other subgenres, like S/M; they can be best understood and explained by those who appreciate them.

The appeal of S/M cannot be explained by people like me, who cannot get past a bad reaction to scenes like a man licking a woman's boot. I see nothing of the tease and the flow of mock power that's supposed to be there. I only see what the act would mean to me; and this reaction rather misses the point. The point is: Not everyone responds the way I do.

When I try to open up to it, I can almost understand the attraction of S/M. I know the appeal of scratching the back of a man on top of you, of biting a shoulder, of wrestling on the floor or making up after a fight. A vast number of people find such mild and harmless "violence" stimulating. Why shouldn't a small minority of them enjoy carrying it one step farther?

But when a fantasy expresses violence, people hesitate to acknowledge that it can be benign and beneficial. Take, for example, one of the most common fantasies reported by women—the fantasy of "being taken," of being raped.

The first thing to understand is that a rape fantasy does not represent a desire for the real thing. It is a fantasy. The very definition of the word distinguishes it from reality. In a fantasy, the woman is in control of the smallest detail of every act: the timing, the setting, the words, and how she reacts to them. She picks a man to whom she is attracted. If the scene begins to frighten her, she stops it.

In other words, the fantasy has no connection with genuine violence, which strips away control. Rape fantasies offer absolute control to women: They are the opposite of the real thing. To assume that a fantasy of rape reveals a desire to be attacked is like taking a literal interpretation of dreams. Dreaming of a house on fire doesn't make anyone an arsonist.

Why would a healthy woman daydream about being raped? There are dozens of reasons. Perhaps by losing control, she also sheds all sense of responsibility for and guilt over sex. Perhaps it is the exact opposite of the polite, gentle sex she has now. Perhaps it is flattering to imagine a particular man being so overwhelmed by her that he must have her. Perhaps she is curious. Perhaps she
has some masochistic feelings that are vented through the fantasy. Is it better for her to bottle them up?

The real question to ask is: Why not simply let women enjoy their fantasies? Why shouldn't a woman entertain the wildest sex her imagination can generate? What damage is done? Who has the right to question it?

There is an important corollary. If women's fantasies cannot be taken at face value, neither can men's. Just as a woman's fantasy of rape may represent a desire to surrender without guilt, so too a man's fantasy may show his desire to conquer without consequence. In her book *Magic Mommas, Trembling Sisters, Puritans and Perverts*, Joanna Russ speculates:

"I think male pornography in which a woman is 'raped' ... may be struggling with a similar problem of permission. ... Women, after all, fantasize 'rape' as the solution to issue of permission and forced passivity; why shouldn't men ... use the other side of the same fantasy?"  

In fantasy, anything goes—because everything happening in your own mind is inescapably, and by definition, "between consenting adults."

4. Pornography is the great leveler of shame.  

Historically, women have been made to feel ashamed of their sexual thoughts and desires. Those who were not put on a pedestal were often thrown into the gutter. Women who had the courage to pursue their own sexual pleasure were branded as sluts, whores, and tramps.  

As recently as the fifties, respectable women were given the sexual choice of marriage or celibacy. Anything else meant ostracism. Women who demanded pleasure in sex were condemned as "nymphomaniacs," much as they are pitied today as "victims of male culture" by anti-porn feminists.  

As a teenager, I struggled with who I was sexually. (This, despite the fact that my sexual preferences fall well within statistical norms.) I turned to feminism for encouragement and enlightenment. I was lucky. Back then, feminism still offered a vision of sexual liberation, not of sexual oppression and bitterness. Feminism still had a sense of rollick and raunch, which was invigorating. I met women who were as confused as I was by sex, men, and their responses to both. We had late-night sessions over wine during which we hashed it out.  

I worry about the younger generation of women who have to go through the same sexual angst that confronts us all. If they turn to feminism, will they find a sense of joy and adventure? Or will they find only anger and a theory of victimization? Will anti-porn feminists call their deepest desires "degrading"? Will their fantasies of rape or being dominated be labeled in political terms as "the eroticization of oppression"? How much of themselves will they have to disown in order to be sexually correct?

It is left to pornography to strip away the sexual guilt and confusion that radical feminism heaps upon women who have the "wrong" sexual responses. Anti-porn feminists tell women to be ashamed of their appetites and urges. Pornography tells them to accept and enjoy them. Pornography provides reassurance and eliminates shame. It says to women, "You are not alone in your fantasies and deepest darkest desires. Right there, on the screen are others who feel the same urges and are so confident that they flaunt them."

If you love to give blow jobs, pornography applauds you. If you wonder about sex with a woman, pornography makes it seem harmless. If you wish to be overpowered by a man, porn allows you to see what it might look like. Videos make no comment on which sexual preferences are acceptable; they eroticize every aspect of the human body, from feet to breasts; no sexual question is wrong to ask; no sexual preference is wrong to pursue. Pornography is the true arena of tolerance.

It is also the great leveler of shame. It says, "Sex is good for its own sake." This is particularly important today, when sex educa-
tion seems to dwell exclusively on sexual negatives: AIDS, disease, teen pregnancy, molestation, date rape, etc. Pornography balances the picture by reminding us that sex can be fun.

Can women afford to do without this essential element of human happiness? I say no.

5. Pornography can serve as sexual therapy.

Pornography enhances the enjoyment of masturbation and provides a sexual outlet for those who—for whatever reason—have no sexual partner. Perhaps they are away from home, recently widowed, or isolated because of infirmity. Perhaps they simply choose to be alone. Sometimes, masturbation and vicarious sex are the only acceptable alternatives to celibacy.

Couples also use pornography to enhance their relationships. Sometimes they do so on their own, watching videos and exploring their reactions together. Sometimes, the couples go to a sex therapist who advises them to use pornography as a way of opening up communication on sex. By sharing pornography, the couples are able to experience variety in their sex lives without having to commit to adultery.

The social commentator Fred Berger wrote of the need for variety. He wrote of sex being routine, dull, and unfulfilling. He ascribed this “neurosis” to the constraints on sex imposed by conservatives. “Those constraints dictate with whom one has sex, when one has sex, how often one has sex, where one has sex, and so on. Moreover, the web of shame and guilt destroy[s] its enjoyment, and our capacity for joy and pleasure through sex.”

Even those of us who never find sex “dull” need variety. In fact, an adventurous spirit may be absolutely necessary to retain the zing in marital sex. Many women are like me. I am not interested in pursuing variety through a series of affairs, which would involve hurting and lying to someone I love. I want to go through decades of sharing new experiences with the same man. I want to tackle head-on the hard problem of keeping sex fresh and playful through a relationship that extends into old age.

Toward this end, pornography is a valuable tool which I do not hesitate to use.

Political Benefits

1. Historically, pornography and feminism have been fellow travelers.

Through much of their history, women’s rights and pornography have had common cause. The fates of feminism and pornography have been linked. Both have risen and flourished during the same periods of sexual freedom; both have been attacked by the same political forces, usually conservatives. Laws directed against pornography or obscenity, such as the Comstock laws in the late 1880s, have always been used to hinder women’s rights, such as birth control. Although it is not possible to draw a cause-and-effect relationship between the rise of pornography and that of feminism, such a connection seems reasonable to assume. After all, both movements demand the same social condition—namely, sexual freedom.

Chapter Three provided perspective on this.

2. Pornography is free speech applied to the sexual realm.

Freedom of speech is the ally of those who seek change; it is the enemy of those who seek to maintain control. Pornography is nothing more or less than freedom of speech applied to the sexual realm. It is the freedom to challenge the sexual status quo. Pornography, along with all other forms of sexual heresy, such as homosexuality, should have the same legal protection as political heresy.

This protection is especially important to women, whose sexuality has been controlled by censorship through the centuries.
In recent decades, this control has slipped. Abortion is available on demand. Lesbianism no longer means ostracism. Nonmarital sex is commonplace.

But now the barriers to sexual expression are being erected again. The attack is directed not only at pornography, but at other sexual choices as well.

Our society is teetering on the brink of a revolution in sexuality, which is being ushered in by new reproductive technologies (NRTs). Through such techniques as embryo transplants and in vitro fertilization, women in their sixties are now able to bear children. Soon there will be new family categories: sperm donor fathers, postmenopausal mothers, test-tube babies. The NRTs will redefine terms like motherhood and the family.

Women are on the verge of being freed from the barriers imposed upon them by nature. Thanks to technology, human sexuality is about to enter the twenty-first century, where a woman's reproductive choices may expand in almost unimaginable ways.

This revolution in sexuality is being opposed by the same feminists who attack pornography. And for the same reason. Both the NRTs and pornography are condemned as "men controlling and exploiting the bodies of women."

As Janice Raymond approvingly states in her book Women as Wombs: "Radical feminists stress how male supremacy channels women into pornography and surrogacy as well as into other reproductive procedures. . . ."

On every front, a woman's right to define and to pursue her own sexual destiny is being questioned. Anti-pornography feminists, such as Janice Raymond and Gena Corea, are also in the forefront of an anti-NRT crusade. The attacks on both issues have the same ideological root: the dogmatic belief that there is only one proper way to view sex. Their way.

Pornography threatens this orthodoxy. For doing this, it should be prized all the more.

3. Viewing pornography may well have a cathartic effect on men who have violent urges toward women.

Pornography may be a catharsis for men with violent urges toward women. If this is true, restricting pornography removes a protective barrier between women and abuse.

Studies on rape differ, but many indicate that pornography may prevent violence against women.

Unbiased research on violence against women is desperately needed. Unfortunately, one of the casualties of the new dogma of sexual correctness has been good solid work in this area.

The Kinsey study listed seven different types of rape. However, it is no longer sexually correct to conduct studies on the many causes of rape, because—as any "right thinking" person knows—there is only one cause: patriarchy as expressed through pornography. As the slogan goes, "Pornography is the theory, rape is the practice."

Studies such as the Kinsey report are no longer possible in the sexually correct environment of modern universities. By demonizing pornography, radical feminists are doing women a great disservice. They are blocking valuable research into other possible causes of rape, which could lead to new forms of prevention.

And they are diverting attention away from the real issues underlying violence against women.

In Magic Mommas, Trembling Sisters, Puritans and Perverts, Joanna Russ explains: "[P]arallels can be drawn between today's anti-pornography movement and the 19th century Temperance movement. . . . By pinpointing Demon Rum as the central issue, reformers could avoid the real (and dangerous) ones like women's position in marriage and women's lack of economic autonomy. . . ."

The real cause of rape is not pornography, patriarchy, or men as a class. It is the individual men who rape individual women. Pornography is a scapegoat.
4. Legitimizing pornography would protect women sex workers, who are stigmatized by our society.

Anti-pornography feminists are actually undermining the safety of sex workers when they treat them as "indoctrinated women." Leonore Tiefer, a professor of psychology has observed: "These women have appealed to feminists for support, not rejection. . . . Sex industry workers, like all women, are striving for economic survival and a decent life, and if feminism means anything it means sisterhood and solidarity with these women."9

The law cannot eliminate pornography, any more than it has been able to stamp out prostitution. But making pornography illegal would further alienate and endanger women sex workers. Anti-porn feminists realize that laws will simply drive porn underground. Even totalitarian regimes, with absolute control of the press and the media, cannot suppress pornography.10 Indeed, making it forbidden fruit may increase its attraction.

Anti-porn feminists also know that most of the danger confronting sex workers comes from social stigma, which isolates them. Without recourse to unions or to the police, performers have little control over their working conditions. Making pornography illegal—driving the industry underground—will take away whatever safeguards for women presently exist. Women in porn would become even more reluctant to go to the police for protection or to the courts for redress.

Women who were involved in pornography in the fifties, when it was illegal, tell horror stories of police raids in which they were made to lie naked and face-down, while police pressed guns against their heads. The purpose: to make them answer questions about friends and associates. By trying to drive pornography underground, anti-porn feminists are encouraging a return to such violence against women sex workers.

In March 1985, a representative of the U.S. Prostitutes Collective stood before the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and pleaded with them not to pass an ordinance against pornography. She explained that the closure of such sex operations would force the women, who needed to eat and pay their bills, out into the streets as prostitutes. There, they would fall prey to pimps and police crackdowns. She explained: "Feminists who support the porn ordinance said they are not attacking prostitutes—yet the ordinance explicitly calls for enforcement of the prostitution laws. They can't have it both ways."

Pornography needs to be legitimized so that women sex workers can be protected by the legal system, not victimized. Keeping the industry visible is the best way to monitor how women within it are treated. It is the only way to bring public opinion to bear on abuses.

**CONCLUSION**

After any defense of pornography, a question invariably arises: Is no form of pornography objectionable?

On a political and legal level, the answer is: No form of pornography between consenting adults is objectionable. Pornography is words and images, over which the law should have no jurisdiction.

On a personal level, every woman has to discover what she considers to be unacceptable. Each woman has to act as her own censor, her own judge of what is appropriate.

"A woman's body, a woman's right" carries certain responsibilities.
sexuality are inherent in human biology; instead, they are products of culture. If women's sexuality is a blank sheet of paper, then defining it becomes tremendously important. Whoever controls the definition will determine the content. The struggle to define pornography is part of radical feminism's attempt to control sexuality itself.

The stakes are high. High enough for freedom of speech to be jettisoned. Indeed, in her recent book *Only Words*, Catharine MacKinnon argues that pornography has no connection with free speech whatsoever; it is an act of sexual subordination, of sexual terrorism.

"Empirically, of all two dimensional forms of sex, it is only pornography, not its ideas as such, that gives men erections that support aggression against women in particular."

Over the last decade or so, the feminist position on pornography has shifted toward this definition. Pornography is no longer viewed as merely offensive; it is redefined as an act of violence, in and of itself. It is the sexual subordination of women, by which their victimization is eroticized and perpetuated. It is the main way patriarchy subordinates women.

Other feminists have pointed out that rape existed long before *Playboy* appeared in the racks of corner stores. Such voices of reason are lost in the wind of hysteria. Anti-pornography feminists acknowledge them only to launch an *ad hominem* attack.

For better or worse, it is necessary to treat anti-pornography feminists with more respect than they are willing to give back. It is important to consider the substance of their definitions.

The anti-pornography definitions abound with emotionally charged and highly subjective terms like "humiliation" or "subordination." And they are commonly offered as the crowning statement of horrifying stories of sexual abuse.

Consider the opening of *Only Words*: "You grow up with your father holding you down and covering your mouth so another man can make a horrible searing pain between your legs."

When you are older, your husband ties you to the bed and drips hot wax on your nipples... and makes you smile through it." Ms. MacKinnon springboards from this scenario into a discussion and definition of porn.

In January/February 1994, *Ms.* magazine featured the issue of pornography. In an open discussion between a group of feminists, the following definitions were offered:

**Pornography is the use of sex to intimidate and/or control women and children. ... It has to do with depicting something that is violent and possibly life-threatening for entertainment.**—Ntozake Shange

I look at pornography as a system and practice of prostitution, as evidence of women's second class status. It is a central feature of patriarchal society.

—Norma Ramos

Pornography is the graphic, sexually explicit subordination of women that includes one of a series of scenarios, from women being dehumanized—turned into objects and commodities—through women showing pleasure in being raped, through the dismemberment in a way that makes the dismemberment sexual.

—Andrea Dworkin

Radical feminism's current definition of pornography is the logical outgrowth of its view of heterosexual sex, which was well expressed over a decade ago by Andrea Dworkin. Throughout her still-classic book *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, Dworkin's diatribe on men and heterosexuality borders on hate-mongering. "Men develop a strong loyalty to violence. Men must come to terms with violence because it is the prime component of male identity." (p. 51) "The immutable self of the male boils down to an utterly unselfconscious parasitism." (p. 13) "Men are distinguished from women by their commitment to do violence..."
DEFINING A DEFINITION

At the risk of sounding like an instructor of Logic 101, let me run the word *pornography* through a definitional process.

A good definition consists of two basic components:

The *definiendum*. This is the word or concept being defined. In the tentative definition “pornography is sexually explicit literature,” the term *pornography* is the *definiendum*;

The *definiens*. This is the defining part of the definition. In “pornography is sexually explicit literature,” the phrase “sexually explicit literature” is the *definiens*.

The process of defining a word involves analyzing it in several ways:

What is the *genus*? That is, what is the general class or category to which the word belongs? In “pornography is sexually explicit literature,” the term *literature* is the genus. It is the wider category to which *pornography* belongs. Once the broad context for *pornography* has been established, the process of definition becomes a matter of narrowing things down. The next question becomes:

What is the *differentia*? That is, what distinguishes *pornography* from all other forms of literature? What essential characteristics make *pornography* different from murder mysteries or historical novels?

Establishing the *differentia* means following certain rules, the most basic of which are:

1. The essential characteristics—or the common denominator found in all instances of the *definiendum*—cannot be too broad. Consider the definition “human beings are animals that walk on two legs.” Since gorillas also walk on two legs, this *differentia* is too broad.

2. The essential characteristics should not be too narrow. Thus, “human beings are animals that negoti-

**CHAPTER FIVE. LIBERAL FEMINISM:**

**THE GLIMMER OF HOPE**

2. Indianapolis-Mercer County; Indiana, General Ordinances Nos. 24 and 25 (1984), amendments to code of Indianapolis and Marion County.
5. Jill Ridington, as quoted in *Women Against Censorship*, p. 34.

**CHAPTER SIX. INDIVIDUALIST FEMINISM:**

**A TRUE DEFENSE OF PORNOGRAPHY**


**CHAPTER NINE. A COYOTE MEETING**

As long as I have been talking about sex, there has been a persistent question in every gathering I have attended: "What is the difference between pornography and erotica?" It's an eternal hot coal that will not be extinguished no matter how much sand I shovel on it—and that's my first impulse with this "non-question." It is, in truth, an anxiety-driven plea for benediction rather than a genuine inquiry.

The erotic versus pornographic debate will limp along as long as sexual speech is suspect, and only an elite disclaimer (like the ones used by many museums nowadays) can open any of it to public discussion. If we thought of sex as a matter of taste and individuality, as we do with the foods that we eat, we wouldn't ask stupid questions like, "Is it erotic food or is it pornographic
food?" "Is it the sort of food for men or the sort of food for women?" "Should it be eaten in public or hidden in the cupboard at home?" No, we would say. "Eat! This is what keeps you alive."

I'm exhausted with the argument, and so is everyone else. I don't want to discuss porn versus erotica anymore. I want to say, "Oh, dear, I'm sorry, we covered that last year. It was announced on a loudspeaker during a national air-raid drill last August, and if you were absent, you'll have to look it up yourself at the library." I intentionally want to stymie any further investigation into this hoax of a dispute because anyone who does dare to answer it with authority is thwarting any genuine progress in sexual expression. The very debate itself is reactionary, and it needs to have its pious little robes ripped off.

Here's what people want to hear when they ask what the difference is between erotica and porn: "Yes, upon careful examination, experts have decided that my fantasies and my sexual identity are beautiful, healthy, and a real turn-on besides . . . but that person over there, sitting in the corner, now their sexual expression is total rot."

Then, depending on whether you like the buzz of the word porn or the insinuations of erotica, you pin the beneficial label on yourself and the icky label on the other person. Voilà, another perfect discriminating pose is accomplished!

What's really rotten is creating such a misleading discrimination to begin with. The truth of the matter is that your sexual speech is no better, more attractive, or healthier than anyone else's. The smartest thing to say to yourself when you encounter a style of sexuality unknown to you—which may be frightening, offensive, or unimaginable—is to whisper a variation on this theme: "Let them who are without desire cast the first stone."
theoretical opposition, not if they wish to maintain their liberal credentials. Yet when it comes to the treatment of women, the liberal consciousness remains fiercely obdurate, refusing to be budged, for the sin of appearing square or prissy in the age of the so-called sexual revolution has become the worst offense of all.

Erotica and Pornography:
A Clear and Present Difference
Gloria Steinem

Perhaps one of the greatest debates about pornography is the question of how to distinguish pornography from erotica. Here, in an article first printed in Ms. magazine, Gloria Steinem provides a practical test for making a distinction between the two.

Human beings are the only animals that experience the same sex drive at times when we can and cannot conceive. Just as we developed uniquely human capacities for language, planning, memory, and invention along our evolutionary path, we also developed sexuality as a form of expression; a way of communicating that is separable from our need for sex as a way of perpetuating ourselves. For humans alone, sexuality can be and often is primarily a way of bonding, of giving and receiving pleasure, bridging differentness, discovering sameness, and communicating emotion.

We developed this and other human gifts through our ability to change our environment, adapt physically, and, in the long run, affect our own evolution. But as an emotional result of this spiraling path away from other animals, we seem to alternate between periods of exploring our unique abilities to forge new boundaries, and feelings of loneliness in the unknown that we ourselves have created; a fear that sometimes sends us back to the comfort of the animal world by encouraging us to exaggerate our sameness with it.

The separation of "play" from "work," for instance, is a problem only in the human world. So is the difference between art and nature, or an intellectual accomplishment and a physical one. As a result,
we celebrate play, art, and invention as leaps into the unknown; but any imbalance can send us back to nostalgia for our primate past and the conviction that the basics of work, nature, and physical labor are somehow more worthwhile or even more moral.

In the same way, we have explored our sexuality as separable from conception: a pleasurable, empathetic bridge to strangers of the same species. We have even invented contraception—a skill that has probably existed in some form since our ancestors figured out the process of birth—in order to extend this uniquely human difference. Yet we also have times of atavistic suspicion that sex is not complete—or even legal or intended-by-god—if it cannot end in conception.

No wonder the concepts of “erotica” and “pornography” can be so crucially different, and yet so confused. Both assume that sexuality can be separated from conception, and therefore can be used to carry a personal message. That’s a major reason why, even in our current culture, both may be called equally “shocking” or legally “obscene,” a word whose Latin derivative means “dirty, containing filth.” This gross condemnation of all sexuality that isn’t harnessed to childbirth and marriage has been increased by the current backlash against women’s progress. Out of fear that the whole patriarchal structure might be upset if women really had the autonomous power to decide our reproductive futures (that is, if we controlled the most basic means of production—the production of human beings), right-wing groups are not only denouncing pro-choice abortion literature as “pornographic,” but are trying to stop the sending of all contraceptive information through the mails by invoking obscenity laws. In fact, Phyllis Schlafly recently denounced the entire Women’s Movement as “obscene.”

Not surprisingly, this religious, visceral backlash has a secular, intellectual counterpart that relies heavily on applying the “natural” behavior of the animal world to humans. That application is questionable in itself, but these Lionel Tiger-ish studies make their political purpose even more clear in the particular animals they select and the habits they choose to emphasize. For example, some male primates (marmosets, titi monkeys, night monkeys) carry and/or generally “mother” their infants. Tiger types prefer to discuss chimps and baboons, whose behavior is very “male chauvinist.” The message is that females should accept their “destiny” of being sexually dependent and devote themselves to bearing and rearing their young.

Defending against such reaction in turn leads to another temptation: merely to reverse the terms, and declare that all nonprocreative sex is good. In fact, however, this human activity can be as constructive or destructive, moral or immoral, as any other. Sex as communication can send messages as different as life and death; even the origins of “erotica” and “pornography” reflect that fact. After all, “erotica” is rooted in “eros” or passionate love, and thus in the idea of positive choice, free will, the yearning for a particular person. (Interestingly, the definition of erotica leaves open the question of gender.) “Pornography” begins with a root “porno,” meaning “prostitution” or “female captives,” thus letting us know that the subject is not mutual love, or love at all, but domination and violence against women. (Though, of course, homosexual pornography may imitate this violence by putting a man in the “feminine” role of victim.) It ends with a root “graphos,” meaning “writing about” or “description of,” which puts still more distance between subject and object, and replaces a spontaneous yearning for closeness with objectification and voyeurism. The difference is clear in the words. It becomes even more so by example.

Look at any photo or film of people making love; really making love. The images may be diverse, but there is usually a sensuality and touch and warmth, an acceptance of bodies and nerve endings. There is always a spontaneous sense of people who are there because they want to be, out of shared pleasure.

Now look at any depiction of sex in which there is clear force, or an unequal power that spells coercion. It may be very blatant, with weapons of torture or bondage, wounds and bruises, some clear humiliation, or an adult’s sexual power being used over a child. It may be much more subtle: a physical attitude of conqueror and victim, or an adult’s sexual power being used over a child. It may be much more subtle: a physical attitude of conqueror and victim, the use of race or class difference to imply the same thing, perhaps a very unequal nudity, with one person exposed and vulnerable while the other is clothed. In either case, there is no sense of equal choice or equal power.

The first is erotic: a mutually pleasurable, sexual expression between people who have enough power to be there by positive choice. It may or may not strike a sense-memory in the viewer, or be creative enough to make the unknown seem real; but it doesn’t require us to identify with a conqueror or a victim. It is truly sensuous, and may give us a contagion of pleasure.

The second is pornographic: its message is violence, dominance, and conquest. It is sex being used to reinforce some inequality, or to create one, or to tell us that pain and humiliation (ours or someone else’s) are really the same as pleasure. If we are to feel anything, we must identify with conqueror or victim. That means we can only experience pleasure through the adoption of some degree of sadism.
or masochism. It also means that we may feel diminished by the role of conqueror, or enraged, humiliated, and vengeful by sharing identity with the victim.

Perhaps one could simply say that erotica is about sexuality, but pornography is about power and sex-as-weapon—in the same way we have come to understand that rape is about violence, and not really about sexuality at all.

Yes, it's true that there are women who have been forced by violent families and dominating men to confuse love with pain; so much so that they have become masochists. (A fact that in no way excuses those who administer such pain.) But the truth is that, for most women—and for men with enough humanity to imagine themselves in the predicament of women—pornography could serve as aversion-conditioning toward sex.

Of course, there will always be personal differences about what is and is not erotic, and there may be cultural differences for a long time to come. Many women feel that sex makes them vulnerable and therefore may continue to need more sense of personal connection and safety than men do before allowing any erotic feelings. Men, on the other hand, may continue to feel less vulnerable, and therefore more open to such potential danger as sex with strangers. Women now frequently find competence and expertise erotic in men, but that may pass as we develop those qualities in ourselves. As some men replace the need for submission from childlike women with the pleasure of cooperation from equals, they may find a partner's competence to be erotic, too.

Such group changes plus individual differences will continue to be reflected in sexual love between people of the same gender, as well as between women and men. The point is not to dictate sameness, but to discover ourselves and each other through a sexuality that is an exploring, pleasurable, empathetic part of our lives; a human sexuality that is unchained both from unwanted pregnancies and from violence.

But that is a hope, not a reality. At the moment, fear of change is increasing both the indiscriminate repression of all nonprocreative sex in the religious and "conservative" male-dominated world, and the pornographic vengeance against women's sexuality in the secular world of "liberal" or "radical" men. It's almost futuristic to debate what is and is not truly erotic, when many women are again being forced into compulsory motherhood, and the number of pornographic murders, tortures, and rapes...