**Pigtails and Prurience**

Author: Monica Day from Memorial High School

It is unfortunate that sexual depiction of minors and infantilization of women is often too touchy a topic to be discussed in contemporary debates between anti-porn feminists and sex positive feminists/pro-porn activists. Even when these complex subjects are mentioned, little attention is given to incipient configurations of child pornography in the internet age. These new forms include realistic artistic renderings of underage women in compromising situations and the proliferation of illicit communities that purchase explicit, self-shot content from minors. Identifying a victim in these circumstances is now complicated by the possibilities that the child may have ostensibly consented or no minor may have been involved in production at all.

I call for an expansion of the definition of child pornography and a greater import provided to the psychological damage done to women who participate in these schemes. To clarify, this essay is not about the redemption of feminist pornography or its censorship - when I use the term “pornography,” it is in reference to a specific, inegalitarian form of content that degrades/harms a woman or child for the purposes of sexual pleasure.

I classify opponents of stricter regulation of pornography in 3 categories. The first group of sex-positive feminists believe women’s sexual liberation can be achieved through porn. The second maintain Foucault’s claim that transgression of sexual taboo is a form of resistance to authority.⁠1 The third category is composed of liberal fundamentalists in defense of abstract individual rights such as of freedom of expression.⁠2 While the first two pursue the common goal of personal liberty, the last category does not explicitly support deregulation for the purposes of subverting oppressive power structures. Though all of these positions champion liberal autonomy,⁠3 it is imperative for feminists to ask for *whom* these stances serve to benefit.

A woman cannot emancipate herself from the bonds of sexual repression by partaking in the re-enactment of incest. And Foucault’s assertion that a minor may be “trusted to say whether or not [they were] subjected to violence”⁠4 does not hold when children have not had the formative experiences to determine the consequences of their consent. These and other untenable defenses of pornography inadvertently sustain collective policing of young women’s sexualities while attempting to dismantle legislative ascendancy of proper sexual ethics.

Young girls, by nature of being children, are impressionable and may internalize misogynistic demands of compulsory sexuality. While the exchange of self-created child pornography remains illegal, more often than not these cases are presented as extortion on the part of the offender instead of a set of coercive actions that function to normalize objectification in the mind of the victim.

While I agree with Hahn’s disavowal of Lombroso’s “born criminal,”⁠5 (rapist, pedophile, or otherwise) I run counter to his conclusion that the legal system concerns itself primarily in the medical constitution of the pervert.⁠6 This is a dangerous supposition: it dismisses the prurient social influences that go into the development of a violent sexuality, typified by the overwhelming number of male pedophiles. The mutually reinforcing construction of a sexual attraction to infantilized bodies and the extensive body of teen porn on the internet cannot be discounted in our analysis.

One need not venture far on mainstream porn sites and forums to encounter sadistic representations of school-aged girls’ “defloration.” these include depictions of inter-kin rape and bloodshed in tearing the hymen. It goes without saying that the women featured are almost exclusively white or east Asian, hairless, and thin. If federal statute prohibits simulated child pornography, then these gruesome performances of violence against infantilized women should not be distributed with impunity as they are. The current application of the law is insufficient in its interpretation of what comprises child porn and violence against women. Conceptual defenses of free speech fail to serve their purpose when they functionally disallow compassion to the denigrated.

With this in mind, McGlynn and Ward’s insistence that “it is here, at the point of systematic objectification and degradation, the the law must intervene, not as in the past in order to assuage a masculine fear of female sexuality, but because the failure to do so reinforces the species of ‘cultural sadism’”⁠7 most readily strike a chord in the heart of the feminist optimist.

1 Abigail Bray, “Merciless Doctrines: Child Pornography, Censorship, and Late Capitalism,” *Signs* 37 no. 1 (2011): 134

2 Clare McGlynn and Ian Ward, “Pornography, Pragmatism, and Proscription,” *Journal of Law and Society* 36 no. 3 (2009): 336

3 Robert J. Danay, “The Danger of Fighting Monsters: Addressing the Hidden Harms of Child Pornography Law,” *Review of Constitutional Studies/Revue*

*d’etudes constitutionnelles* 11 no. 1 (2005): 171-173

4 Michel Foucault, interviewed with Guy Hocquenghem, Jean Danet, and Pierre Hahn by Roger Pillaudin, France Culture Broadcast, April 4, 1978.

5 Pierre Hahn, interviewed with Guy Hocquenghem, Jean Danet, and Michel Foucault by Roger Pillaudin, France Culture Broadcast, April 4, 1978.

6 Ibid.

7 McGlynn and Ward, *Pornography*, 341.