

## **Men, Pornography and Prostitution: The Trap Of Pornography As Sexual Education**

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*Abstract:* Pornography (of the Greek words porné + graph, “the prostitute's description”) is not a topic, but a certain relationship between the women (or sometimes men) that are presented as objects and an invisible “buyer”. It is that relationship, and not the subject or the degree of explicitness that distinguishes pornography from erotic art. Men that have developed their sexual identity with the help of pornography, and for that reason have not learned to differentiate between fantasy and reality, have to return later also to pornography in order to obtain a confirmation of that identity. For that reason many men live a double life: in the world of the pornographic fantasies and in a personal relationship with a woman. However, these two worlds never connect, since the personal relationship requires of the man to show himself naked internally (on the first place for himself), while the pornographic iconography suggests him that everything exists only outside of him and that to be man is not a vital experience which is born from one’s inside, but an achievement projected to the external world.

During more than two decades of professional activity first in Sweden, then in Spain and Hungary I have had the luck and the privilege of being able to collaborate with men who also care about masculinity from a pro-feminist and anti-sexist perspective. Despite that, I have seen that the topic of pornography and that of prostitution, intrinsically bound to each other, have been treated mostly by women, while men, even if they otherwise assumed the challenge of equality between the two sexes, either was not very aware of these questions or did not take a stand. Nevertheless

I think that pornography and prostitution are essentially male issues (which have an effect on women), and that they touch upon the most important aspects of the masculine condition.

My own road to a clear standpoint on these topics has not been easier or more difficult than that of other men, but it took place under peculiar historical circumstances.

As I grew up in Hungary and in the times of the iron curtain, behind which pornography was simply absent, pornography has not had any influence on my own personal and sexual development. I was 17 years old in 1968, a year marked by several momentous events. The first one of them is rather personal, unnoticed by the rest of the world, since that was the year in which I lost my virginity. The other events are remembered by many, as they changed the direction of contemporary history of both blocks in which the world was divided at that time. One was the May of the student revolts in some of the metropolis of the Western world, the other the Spring of Prague in the Soviet block. The violent smashing of the latter event in the summer of the same year also supposed the loss of my political virginity. Me and other young people who followed with sympathy that experience, cried with bitter tears of rage when the tanks of the Soviet block invaded Czechoslovakia. But I have to admit that we cried not only because they forced back to clandestinity any intent of bestowing the "existent socialism" "a human face", but because they also condemned to the same destiny the postcards of topless women that were sold openly on the streets of Prague, something unusual at those latitudes and in those times.

Six years later, with 23 years of age, I arrived to Sweden as a politic refugee to discover how far those clumsy semi-nudes were from the content of any pornography stores even in a small Scandinavian village. But the second half of the nineteen-seventies was not only the time of the

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full peak of pornography in Scandinavia, but also that of a feminist movement that elevated its voice against the humiliation of the women in that type of publications and of a movement of pro-feminist men who empathically made echo of their claims. From then on I have worked more than two decades as a psychotherapist with individuals of both sexes and with couples; I have directed courses of corporal self-knowledge for men; I have facilitated consciousness-raising groups about the masculine role; I have imparted courses of natural birth control and thus gained intimate knowledge about the way of thinking of many men regarding reproductive responsibility and sexuality. All these experiences have confirmed me that what is humiliating for one part in a relationship, can not be beneficial for the other part either. Pornography does not make less damage to men than to women.

This damage can be summarized in the following points:

1. Pornography separates men's sexuality from their own feelings and from everyday relationships. This way it enhances dissociation as the dominant feature of the masculine way of being.
2. Pornography counteracts equality and closeness between men and women.
3. Pornography foments the reproductive irresponsibility of men.
4. Pornography foments the acceptance and even the use of the violence in relationships.

When many years later I began to pay attention to the problem of prostitution, I had to add one more point to the list of the damages caused by pornography:

5. Pornography is the marketing of prostitution.

Along my participation in the public debate on prostitution I realized that I could make good use of my knowledge of the recent history of Sweden. We know that the Swedish legal model is the most elaborate alternative those in favor of the abolition of prostitution can name against the arguments for legalizing or regulating it. This model is different to all other in that it focuses the legislation on the figure of the client that takes advantage of the prostituted person.

The topic that already previously has been a reason for studying the example of Sweden was in fact that of pornography, so intimately connected to that of prostitution. Sweden has been the pioneer country in making of pornography a socially accepted phenomenon. The promoters of the introduction of pornography both in post-Franco Spain in the second half of the nineteen-seventies, as in the countries of the former Soviet block after the fall of the wall in the nineteen-nineties have used with predilection the false myths that accompanied the process of liberalization of pornography in Sweden during the nineteen-sixties. These myths prayed that Scandinavia is the live example of pornography having a beneficent effect or at least being innocuous and that there is no sexual liberation without giving free way to pornography. But these promoters ignored or kept secret two facts. First, that in the meantime Sweden once again got ahead of all the other developed countries of the West, this time in adopting a severe legislation regarding pornography. Second, that most of the Swedish public personalities and intellectuals that impelled the liberalization of pornography in the nineteen-sixties, in the nineteen-eighties have taken a radically opposed position, assuming that pornography didn't lead to the expected self-fulfillment of solitary men,

but to the manifestation of the most repugnant forms of hate and of violence towards women.<sup>1</sup>

The Swedish model of treating prostitution keeps an intimate relationship with the road the Swedish society has traveled in its perception of pornography.<sup>2</sup> However in today's Spain, Hungary and elsewhere still prevail the false myths that have been questioned already decades ago in their place of origin. This confusion is convenient for the economic interests that move one of the most profitable industries in our civilization. But it is also fed by the ignorant and naïve acceptance of the press and of people who consider themselves progressive and partisans of sexual freedom as well as of equality among the sexes. Somebody who wants to distance oneself from pornography, easily can see him or herself be remitted to the field of the Catholic obscurantism or of the enemies of the liberty of the press, or neo-conservatism...

For that very reason I would like to begin with analyzing the features and the main effects of pornography. In the first place I will define the dividing line between pornography and erotic art, something that has become very diffuse.



Erotic art arises when an artist relates to his/her topic in an erotic way, he/she reveals something of him/herself and thus transmits us his/her own vital experience. Let us look at this "Erotic scene" for example, that in fact is the title of this drawing of the young Picasso.<sup>3</sup> The same theme in a pornographic image would surely be represented with the woman facing the public, since pornography doesn't seek the representation of the bond between the parts that are embarked in a sexual experience, but the establishment of a relationship between the person that is looking (the buyer) and the sexual object which is presented to him. To dilute the dividing line between eroticism and pornography is a basic element of the myth of pornography. However what pornography makes disappear is in fact the mysterious element without which eroticism becomes pornography--and the circle is closed.

Although pornographic images are strongly sexualized, or rather, genitalized, they have little to do with sexuality, since pornography is not a topic (in this case sexuality) but a relationship, the same one that publicity tries to establish between a buyer and the object to sell. For that reason I will use here two images of publicity from Spain to illustrate the essential codes of pornography. I use these two publicities not only in order to avoid having to expose us once again to explicitly pornographic images. I do it also because the subject of these publicities has to do with an issue which from my point of view is basic to the topic of pornography and prostitution. This issue is equality between men and women, something that can't be achieved only by women coming out in the public space, but requires as well that men enter in the domain of the domestic and that of caring.

The first image is a commercial publicity of a baby bottle of the mark Nuk, supposedly representing a progressive vision of "the new man".<sup>4</sup> The other one is a non-commercial publicity to promote a bigger

participation of fathers in the upbringing of children.<sup>5</sup> In both images appears the same theme: a child and a man together, but in the first one with the codes of pornography and in the second with the codes of erotic art. What is the difference?



Let us observe first the primordial code, that of the relationship of the figures with each others and with the spectator. In the second image the two characters are sunk in an intimate relationship between them, of which we are only witness, the same as in the drawing of Picasso. In the first ad the child looks toward me, future buyer of Nuk, without more contact than the merely physical one with the man that holds him in his arms. For the purposes of the publicity indeed is not necessary that there is more connection between them, since in fact the adult character it is not in the image because of the child, but to sell us a product.

For that same purpose the "Nuk" man is provided also of some additional codes, also characteristics of pornography. For example, he is naked, which serves two functions. On the one hand it links the product to sell with certain aesthetic norms required by the dominant culture, in this case a muscular body, shaped in many hours of gym. On the other hand the nakedness of both figures together with the absence of any

environment around them deprives the image of references that could interfere with the idealization which is aimed to make publicity more suggestive. All the elements of the image are real, however nothing in it is truth and the accompanying text ("They can also breastfeed" and "Because Nuk imitates the perfection of the mother's breast") makes even more patent that it is a lie.

In the other image both the man and the child are ordinary people, nothing of models, both dresses in a way that suggests commonness. In the same way, the text of the publicity ("They are growing in equality") is simply applying the motto of the campaign it divulgates ("We grow in equality") to the relationship of two persons who are represented in the image.

I started off with the postulate that in pornography, contrary to erotic art, the sexual load doesn't occur between parts that are embarked in a mutual experience, but between the person that is looking and the sexual object that is offered to him, i.e. the same relationship that publicity intends to establish between a buyer and the object to sell. After having illustrated the elements that mark this difference with images which are not explicitly pornographic, let us now turn to the true object of our analysis.

Pornography is a term of Greek origin that means "the description (*graphia*) of the prostitute (*pornê*)". That means that pornography and prostitution have the same function: to serve, with the help of women (or, much less frequently, of men), transformed into sexual objects, the sexuality of an invisible spectator/buyer who is masturbating on or inside that object. For that reason the demarcation line between erotic art and pornography does not lie between the nudes of Playboy on one hand and the explicit representations of the sexual act on the other one. Both things are pornography. The expressions and the postures of the



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women who pucker their lips on the covers of Playboy transmit also the message that they are willing to gladly satisfy any imagined desire of the buyer. Pornography is not good or bad according to whether it is softer or harder. It is, like prostitution, a service, the elaboration of an instrument, the offering of an object for sale.

This way pornography is the first element of a continuum along which, together with other forms of transforming women into sexual objects, like prostitution and sexual violence, male dominance over women is taken into the terrain of sexuality. Each one of these forms is wrapped in different myths in order to legitimate them and hide their violent character.

Pornography is alleged to have an educational and therapeutical function. The Scandinavian experience brought data which show, that, in fact, the couples that have shared “sexually explicit informative material” in the bed and have compared their results with those of the laboratory of Master and Johnson, didn't need less sexual therapies or counseling for couples that the generations preceding the sexual revolution. From the first half of the nineteen-eighties there has been more and more writing on how the lack of sexual lust was becoming a widespread phenomenon. The women, who in the pornographic literature always want “that”, in the reality continued wanting more proximity and personal relationship than sex. And the men could not either maintain the rhythm dictated by their colleagues, described in the pornographic literature as sexual athletes. For what nobody has found a recipe in the literature of “the new love disorder” was how to converse of it in the couple. Pornography offers a totally false image to both sexes on the other one and about what there is behind the corporal reality which photography can capture. This false image has not made disappear the insecurity, on the contrary: it has elevated it to a

higher level and increased the distance between men and women with other years of light.

Pascal Bruckner and Alain Finkielkraut say in their book "The new love disorder": "Pornography is illusion and report at the same time, adventure for adults and documentation of the sexuality. And it is precisely in this function, as arrogant illustration of the libido, where the most horrendous and less criticized feature of pornography appears. The daring scenes don't only transmit the sexual fantasies of men, but by means of their realistic style, make them appear as objective reality. This way the fiction invented by men occupies sexuality, the same way a conquering army occupies a hostile country, expelling from the world everything that is feminine."<sup>6</sup>

The idea of pornography as sexually explicit informative material and sexual education is false for several reasons. One is that if it was, then once the information is acquired, it should disappear. Also, the sexual information is necessary only to avoid risks and not for sexuality in itself. Pornography in fact becomes incompatible with sexual education in that point. In the world of the male fantasies contained in pornography, the time which elapses between the emergence of the desire and its satisfaction has an inverse proportion to the sensation of success. For that reason to follow instructions like "unfold the condom carefully on the erected penis before any contact with your partner" would worsen the timing, but it is even superfluous, since in pornography things as AIDS exist - if at all - as a morbid element and women become always delighted, but never pregnant.

As I have mentioned before, pornography didn't help solitary men to find themselves sexually, but opened the way for more and more brutal representations of hatred and violence toward women. The distance, even in the concrete sense, from the "classic" pornographic movies to the

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"stunt" movies, is less than it seems. An example: the movie "Deep Throat" from 1972 was the first porno-movie that became an authentic box office success even in the serious movie theaters of the whole world. It transformed an unknown, 23 years old prostitute named Linda Boreman into Linda Lovelace, her artistic name as a porno star. Almost ten years later Linda Boreman succeeded to escape from her husband and pimp Chuck Traynor and she wrote her shattering autobiography entitled "Ordeal".<sup>7</sup> In this book she tells how Chuck Traynor has been forcing her with a gun pointed at her head to prostitution and to play in pornographic movies. The bizarre story of "a woman with the clitoris in her throat who hears church bells to ring with each orgasm" was faked by a woman that lived in an indescribable terror without any joy (and without gaining a penny) from the moment she got to know Chuck Traynor until she succeeded to leave him. From then on and until her death in April of 2002, she was a burning activist against the pornographic industry, but this never brought her to the front page of the magazine "Time", as it had happened with "Deep Throat". The most tragic in this story is that serious newspapers continue referring to the movie as a "landmark of pornographic cinema" and to her as "the actress porno that marked the libido of an entire generation". This way the total humiliation of a woman by the most successful pimp in history is eternized: the result of his terror turns out to reflect the interior desires of many other men and his fantasies are transformed into reality by being accepted by other men.

In fact, pornography supplies a product in order to serve what is supposed to be masculine sexuality, but not only that. It is also the source and the constant reproduction of this notion of sexuality, the same one that is the base for prostitution and sexual violence. A vulgar but eloquent way to formulate this notion would be that when a man gets an erection, he must find a hole where to put it... Thus pornography is not sexual

education, neither reflects the sexual desires of men, rather is a material through which men learn the masculine role. The world of pornography is populated by men who are always active and who, although they might be totally naked, never reveal anything of their interior (and even less some of their weak aspects) and by women who despite the fact that they are carrying out a hectic physical activity are always passive, because they are not carrying out their own sexuality, but one dictated by the masculine fantasies. For that reason in this world, just like in the advertisement of Nuk, everything is real and nothing is true.

People who have formed their sexual identity with the help of pornography and for that reason did not learn the difference between fantasy and reality, unavoidably have to return to pornography in order to be reaffirmed in that identity. That is the reason why many men live a double life: in the world of the pornographic fantasies and in a personal relationship with a woman, possessor of her own sexuality. However, these two worlds never connect (something I witnessed in many painful cases in my work as a psychotherapist dealing with individuals and couples), since the personal relationship requires of a man to reveal his interior, while the pornographic iconography suggests him that everything exists only outside of him and that to be a man is not a vital experience which is born from one's inside, but an achievement projected to the external world.

Nevertheless, there is a world where the fantasies dictated by the learned role always become real, without a man having to face his own insecurity or the everyday difficulties of beginning and maintaining a relationship. This is the world of prostitution. For that reason men go to prostitutes or take advantage of their hegemony to create a culture in which male pornographic fantasies become the definition and the measure of female sexuality. The presentation of these fantasies as something

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universal is possible among other things because of the almost completely anonymous and invisible character of the main actors of pornography and prostitution: the male clients.

The connection between pornography and prostitution is very concrete. Even if pornography not always is enacted by real persons (e.g. in comics); even if the enactors of pornography not always are prostituted persons (like in the case of Linda Boreman/Lovelace); even if we might be confused about the limits between pornography and erotic art and tend to think about pornography as something abstract, an idea - the reality of prostitution can remind us about what pornography is about.

Because prostitution is not an idea. Prostitution is the mouth, the vagina and the rectum, penetrated usually by a penis, sometimes hands, sometimes objects, by one man and then another and then another and then another and then another. Let's not forget that the deep contempt which reduces a human body, a human life to a few sexual orifices with which a man can do anything he wants, is the basic teaching of pornography. Theoretically talking this is called the representation of women as sexual objects. But as John Stoltenberg states it: "... every act of sexual objectifying occurs on a continuum of dehumanization that promises male sexual violence at its far end."<sup>8</sup> Prostitution institutionalizes this violence, since the client gets of the prostituted person (who did not chose to make love with him) something that he otherwise could not get but with violence. The client (and with him society) hides for himself that fact by interposing an infrastructure (managed by the pimps) and money - and pornography, "*porne-graphia*", the depiction of the prostitute.

In our days men meet on certain pages of Internet to exchange and to sell information about their contacts and transactions with pornography and prostituted people in their countries or abroad. (Most of

the pornography sites on Internet transfer also, covertly or openly, information about prostituted persons.) In the past the fraternal lodges moved friendships, business, politics and leisure, while they supported and reproduced the powerful myth that masculinity is forged in the exclusive company of men. In the modern virtual versions of the homo-social alliances we can see a nostalgic resurrection of the gender privilege that justifies the free access to pornography and prostitution. That is how the body of a woman exploited in pornography or prostitution becomes the transmitting agent through which men share among themselves, in words and in facts, their sexuality. What, among other things, makes possible for a man to find pornographic material or a prostitute is that before him other men gone there and that other men will be there after him. In fact, in the same way as in gang rapes or massive violations in situations of war, in pornography and prostitution men use women's bodies to communicate among themselves and to express what unites them - which, after all, is no more than they are not women.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Hans Nestius, *I last och lust* (Stockholm: Prisma, 1982)

<sup>2</sup> “In Sweden, prostitution is regarded as an aspect of male violence against women and children. It is officially acknowledged as a form of exploitation of women and children that constitutes a significant social problem, which is harmful not only to the individual prostituted woman or child, but also at society at large.” *Prostitution and trafficking in human beings* (Fact sheet of the Swedish Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications, April 2005)

<<http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/04/28/97/4ba5b1b7.pdf>>

<sup>3</sup> Pablo Picasso, *The Erotic Scene* (1903)

<sup>4</sup> Publicity of “Nuk”, 1997

<sup>5</sup> *Campaign for the reconciliation of work and household life* (Madrid, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2000)

<sup>6</sup> Alain Finkelkraut with Pascal Bruckner, *Le nouveau désordre amoureux* (*The New Love Disorder*) (Paris : Seuil, 1977)

<sup>7</sup> Linda Boreman with Mike McGrady, *Ordeal* (New York: Berkley Books, 1981)

<sup>8</sup> John Stoltenberg, *Refusing to be a Man* (London: Fontana, 1990)

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