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Beyond Speech Pornography and Analytic Feminist Philosophy

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CHAPTER 12 | Feminist Pornography

A. W. EATON

12.1. Introduction

When Catharine MacKinnon asserts in *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* that “male and female are created through the eroticization of dominance and submission” (MacKinnon 1991, 113), she invites us to critically examine what I call below our ‘erotic taste’ (although she does not use this term). What do we find to be sexy or otherwise attractive about other human beings, as well as about ourselves? *Why* do we find these things to be sexy? What work does our erotic taste—our sense of what is sexy—do in sustaining the existing social order?

It is difficult to ask such questions about erotic taste in the abstract without thinking about what makes *women* and *men* sexy or otherwise attractive. This is because erotic taste is typically bound to gender, and in particular to gender norms. According to what I below call our ‘collective erotic taste,’ some form of dominance is what makes men attractive, while some form of submissiveness makes women attractive. This is precisely why it is important to subject our collective erotic taste to critical scrutiny.

But many of us are reluctant to do this. For one thing, erotic taste can seem merely “given” and so beyond one’s rational control: we did not choose to be attracted to the things that we find attractive, nor can we simply decide to be attracted to other things instead. Following the idea that ought implies can, there is no point in subjecting our erotic taste to a feminist analysis. Another reason why many tend to resist subjecting erotic taste to critical examination is that this can be deeply unsettling. Because one’s erotic taste often lies at the core of one’s self-understanding—unlike, say, one’s taste in socks (although we can imagine particular cases where

socks might matter that much)—critically dissecting it can cause considerable discomfort.

Following MacKinnon's prompt, this chapter urges that, despite these difficulties, we subject our collective erotic taste to critical analysis. This is because, I argue in Section 12.2, our collective erotic taste plays a significant role in sustaining the dominant patriarchal order. This exercise is not futile, I shall also argue, because erotic taste is shaped—if not entirely, then at least in significant part—by social forces and through representations. This is where pornography enters my discussion. Section 12.3 discusses the ways in which vivid and compelling sexual representations can, through repeated use, shape their users' erotic taste in the direction of gender inequality (what I call 'inegalitarian porn'). However, this conviction in the power of representations to shape our sentimental lives should, I argue in Section 12.4, commit feminists to embracing forms of pornography that serve to shape our collective erotic taste in the direction of gender equality. Some of these new transformative forms of pornography are already being produced under the banner of what is often called "feminist porn." As we shall see, this is a vibrant and growing genre embracing works that cater to a wide variety of proclivity and interests, all united by a commitment to undermine gender injustice.

12.2. Erotic Taste and Patriarchy

By *taste* I mean an individual's or collective's standing disposition for evaluative sentiments regarding some *x*—whether a particular thing or a kind of thing—where these sentiments are partially or fully constituted by or based on pleasurable or displeasurable responses to some of *x*'s properties. I construe *sentiment* broadly here to include various occurrent, affect-laden, object-directed mental states such as emotions and also some feelings and pleasures. By *evaluative* I do not mean that these sentiments need involve explicit appraisals of the worth of the object toward which they are directed; rather, the phenomenology of these sentiments is to present their object as valuable and so worthy of experiencing, having, or preserving (or as disvaluable and so to be avoided or discarded). To "have the taste for *x*," then, is to have the standing disposition to take pleasure in *x* based on some of *x*'s properties, whereas to have a distaste for *x* is to have the standing disposition to be displeased by (or to have an aversion toward) *x* based on some of its properties. This is the sense of "taste" in play when we speak, for instance, of a person's having a taste (or distaste)

for something (e.g., "She has a taste for peaty whisky") or a taste *in* something (e.g., "I admire his taste in shoes").

Taste is not here restricted to the sense that has been the focus of much philosophical aesthetics, namely the rarefied faculty for discerning aesthetic excellence. *Taste* as I construe it is not necessarily contemplative or disinterested, nor need it be directed at high art or nature. Rather, I mean the concept in the expanded sense that concerns what has come to be called *everyday aesthetics*.¹ Taste can be—and most often is—directed at everyday things like food, fashion, home furnishing, popular culture, automobiles, people, and finally, to the point of this chapter, various dimensions of people (including their bodies) and most other aspects of our erotic lives.

In emphasizing taste's everydayness, however, I do not mean to suggest that taste is trivial or practically insignificant. On the contrary, as I argue in this chapter, I think that feminism has typically not taken taste seriously enough, as if it were only people's beliefs that really mattered in sustaining sexism. This is a major oversight, I think, because taste, as I construe it here, plays an important role in precisely those aspects of a person's life in which she is deeply invested. Taste really matters: it is highly motivating, typically activating all sorts of behavioral tendencies, and it has, as I hope to demonstrate, many serious social ramifications.

This is especially true for what I call 'erotic taste,' where the concept *erotic* should be construed broadly to include a person's sexual taste—for instance, her positive and negative preferences for particular types of sex acts, or orientation toward certain kinds of sex partners—but also to extend to one's general sense of what makes a person sexy or even simply attractive. *Erotic taste* includes positive and negative preferences for particular kinds of mannerism and comportment (for instance, a person's way of walking, talking, or holding themselves), for activities such as a kind of dance or sport, for particular facial and body types, for fashion and personal grooming (hair, make-up, fragrance), and for personality traits (such as confidence or coyness), to name only a few. Erotic taste can even extend to one's preferences for inanimate objects that are erotically inflected, such as shoes or automobiles. Finally, erotic taste is not merely other-directed; it also importantly includes one's own sense of what would make oneself

¹*Everyday aesthetics* has become its own subfield within philosophical aesthetics to which many articles and books have been devoted. My understanding of *taste* in the everyday sense has been strongly influenced by Yuriko Saito's excellent study (2007), which also contains a useful bibliography on the topic. See also Irvin (2008a, 2008b). For a criticism of Irvin's argument, and of in general overextending our concept of the aesthetic, see Soucek (2009).

pretty or handsome, sexy, and otherwise attractive. (For more on “our” standards of sexiness, see Maes, in this volume.)

To be clear, when I speak of our erotic taste, I mean the collective taste that is manifest in the erotic aesthetic that dominates mainstream popular culture, advertising, sex education, and the like in North America and much of Europe. (I am not qualified to say whether this extends beyond these contexts.) As noted above, our collective erotic taste is governed by norms that assume sexual dimorphism (that is, that there are only two biological sexes and that these are mutually exclusive) and that are sexist, cis- and hetero-normative, racist, “fattist,” and ableist. This notion of collective erotic taste is meant to acknowledge the important fact that some ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities, as well as some individuals, do not adhere to the dominant erotic aesthetic, and that this is sometimes on purpose as the result of having cultivated strategies of resistance. Indeed, it is the point of Section 12.4 that feminist porn can play an important role in resisting our collective erotic taste.

This chapter focuses on the many ways that the dominant gender norms—norms regarding the behavior and characteristics considered appropriate to females and males (where, to be clear, the dominant gender norms are cis- and hetero-normative and assume sexual dimorphism)—inflect erotic taste in both its self- and other-directed modalities. The central idea is that the eroticization of masculinity and femininity is a significant component of the dominant mode of erotic taste.

As just noted, contemporary feminist thought, at least in the analytic tradition, tends to eschew considerations of the role of taste in sustaining the current order. I think that part of this eschewal is due to a misunderstanding about taste, a misunderstanding that Sally Haslanger expresses when she worries that construing the claim “crop tops are cute” as a judgment of taste would not “make room for meaningful critique” (Haslanger 2007, 73). But it is a commonplace in the philosophy of art and aesthetics that this is a mistake: contrary to the adage “*De gustibus non disputandum est*,” there *is* disputing about taste. For instance, we can ask whether our judgments of taste are properly directed at appropriate aesthetic properties. And—what is often an entirely different kind of question—we can also inquire into the morality of our judgments of taste; for instance, we can ask whether they support or undermine social justice. The second and related reason for this eschewal of taste is feminist analytic philosophy’s generally intellectualist tendency, by which I mean a tendency to conceive of sexism primarily in terms of peoples’ (misguided) *beliefs* about the two sexes (and, of course, the actions based on these beliefs). Antiporn feminism tends

to suffer from this tendency of being overwhelmingly concerned with the falsehoods that pornography propagates—for instance, falsehoods about female inferiority, rape myths, etc. that it purportedly leads its audiences to accept, whether consciously or unconsciously.

While I do not disagree with the idea that false beliefs play a significant role in sustaining sexism, and while I accept that the dominant form of pornography can lead its audiences to internalize various falsehoods, I agree with Rae Langton (2012) that we need to move “beyond belief” to give more attention to the role of the affective life in sustaining sexism, and in particular more attention to taste. One important reason for this is that on any plausible account of action, beliefs do not by themselves leaf out into action: motivation is also required, and this, on most accounts, must come from our affective life, in particular from our desires. More important, when our affective life is norm-discordant—that is, when our likes and aversions and fears and desires are out of sync with our deeply held moral convictions and/or with what we know to be true—we are often akratic; that is, it is the affective life that usually carries the day. It is for these reasons that an account of the role of erotic taste—of what we find desirable, attractive, and sexy—needs more attention from feminists and theorists of other kinds of oppression. In particular we need to think about the ways that erotic taste generates motivations and behaviors (on the part of both men *and* women) that instantiate sex inequality. This means attending to the eroticization of male dominance and female submission, as MacKinnon exhorts us in the bit quoted at the start of this paper.

To some, “eroticization of dominance and submission” may sound hyperbolic. I submit, however, that this is actually the right way to put things and that it captures something significant about our collective erotic taste. Here are just a few examples of the banal ways that the eroticization of dominance and submission infects the dominant norms and practices that infect everyday heterosexual life:

- Women’s high heels are hobbling, even crippling, yet sexy, whereas men’s shoes are grounding, enabling, and foot-friendly.
- Whereas men initiate romantic encounters—whether it be asking a woman out on a date or asking for her hand in marriage—women wait to be asked. This is not simply customary; it is part of behaving in a way that is considered attractive. Women commonly *want* men to ask them.
- Opening doors, carrying heavy packages, and paying for meals is still very much a standard part of being a “gentleman” and still has a grip

on the dominant heterosexual romantic sensibility as expressed in popular culture, norms of etiquette, and so on.

- When women exhibit diminutive postures and ways of speaking, it sounds as if they are always asking questions and displaying a lack of confidence in their assertions. Men, by contrast, “command” more space, speak more loudly, and are more assertive, all of which is part of being attractive under the dominant paradigm.
- Heterosexual women display a marked preference for taller men, and men a preference for shorter women. It is not simply that a man should be tall to be attractive; he should be taller than the female with whom he is coupled.

These are just a handful of ways that women’s subordination to men and men’s domination of women are eroticized (in the expanded sense described above) in daily life. I deliberately chose examples that are not extreme—compare these examples to, say, rape, which also is commonly eroticized—to make the point that the eroticization of male dominance and female subordination is all around us and is unwittingly promoted by “well-meaning people,” to use a phrase from Iris Marion Young (2011).

The eroticization of female subordination and male dominance is so pervasive that it is built into our everyday understanding of heterosexual coitus. We standardly use the word “penetration” to denote intercourse, figuring the male part as active (the thing that penetrates) and the female part as passive (the thing penetrated). If, by contrast, one were to conceive of the female member of this union as active and the male member as the object—the passive recipient of the action—we would use terms like “envelopment” or “invagination.” My point is that the eroticization of female passivity and submission to active and dominant males extends even to the way that we conceptualize coitus in the first place: men act, women are acted upon.

One significant locus of this eroticization of sex inequality is what I elsewhere call (and there following Larry May) ‘inegalitarian pornography’ (Eaton 2007).

12.3. Inegalitarian Pornography

As mentioned above, when explaining the role of culture in maintaining patriarchy, feminism tends toward a kind of intellectualism; that is, the

focus tends to be on the ways that various cultural forms of representation (from advertising to music videos to pornography) inculcate false beliefs rather than on the ways that representations shape audiences’ *emotional* landscapes (of which taste is an important part). For instance, when explaining pornography’s role in sustaining sexism, MacKinnon gives a lot of attention to the ways that pornography authoritatively asserts falsehoods about women (e.g., the propositions that “women enjoy subordinating treatment”) that are then internalized, in the sense of “believed,” by their audiences.² (This leads pro-pornography feminists like Laurie Shrage to insist that the solution is not to limit or criticize pornography but, rather, to focus on “education” and other mechanisms to, as she puts it, “make people unsubscribe to the idea that coercive sex is enjoyable” [Shrage n.d., 3].)

This is not to say that antiporn feminism completely ignores the deformation of our emotional lives under patriarchy. There are moments where MacKinnon, for instance, attends to pornography’s capacity to produce violent *desires*. As we saw at the start of this chapter, she highlights pornography’s eroticization of male dominance and female submission (where, as I argued in Section 12.2, *eroticization* is primarily a matter of sentiments and taste rather than belief). MacKinnon’s model here is classical conditioning: pornography, she writes, “works as primitive conditioning, with pictures and words as sexual stimuli” (MacKinnon 1996, 16). This picture is troublesome for several reasons. For one thing, the model is deterministically causal; this, I have argued, is implausible (Eaton 2007). For another thing, classical conditioning rests on a kind of monkey-see-monkey-do picture that underestimates pornography’s audiences, and in particular their ability to distinguish between fiction and reality. As Langton and West put it, pornography’s audience members, on the conditioning model, “have more in common with the salivating dogs of Pavlovian fame than with the political agents of liberal utopia” (Langton and West 2009, 175). But attention to pornography’s effects on the sentimental lives of its audiences (on our tastes, desires, pleasures, and so forth) need not take a Pavlovian form. There is a decidedly different model of how pornography shapes its audience’s erotic taste, namely an Aristotelian model of habituation.³

²MacKinnon writes: “Together with all its material supports, authoritatively saying something is inferior is largely how structures of status and differential treatment are demarcated and actualized” (MacKinnon 1996, 31). This idea appears in its most precise and convincing form in Langton and West’s essay (2009).

³What follows is based on Aristotle’s discussion of virtue and habituation toward virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, especially Book II. Aristotle discusses the use of representations in habituation toward virtue in Book VIII of the *Politics*, the *Poetics*, and also the *Rhetoric*. I argue for the relevance of this model in “A Sex-Positive Antiporn Feminism,” forthcoming.

Aristotelian habituation is importantly different from operant conditioning. On Aristotle's account, the disposition to feel properly about some object in the world is inculcated in a subject by repeatedly getting the subject to have that feeling with the right intensity toward the object. Representations, on Aristotle's view, can play a critical guiding role in habituation by encouraging their audiences to imaginatively engage with represented objects (characters, inanimate objects, events, situations, and the like). Aristotle's basic idea is that representations solicit from their audience particular sorts of sentimental responses and train them on represented objects in our imaginations, and in repeatedly doing so over time, inculcate in this audience a predisposition to respond similarly to similar objects in the real world. This directed imaginative engagement inculcates in the audience a predisposition to see similar kinds of real-world objects as meriting similar sentimental responses.⁴

There are two things worth noting about this. First, in order for representations to do this kind of work in habituating, they must be *vivid*: that is, they must be such as to convey the freshness of immediate experience. Whatever else one might say about the aesthetic worth of pornography, it is hard to deny that most pornographic representations possess vivacity in the requisite sense. Second, while Aristotle is concerned primarily with using representations to habituate audiences in the direction of virtue, nothing in the nuts and bolts of his model precludes its applicability to representations that habituate audiences in a morally unsalutary direction.

A sensible antiporn feminism as I conceive it is decidedly Aristotelian in its understanding of the power of pornographic representations to shape their audiences' erotic taste. The model proposed here does not attribute determinative power to pornography, nor does it reduce pornography's audiences to salivating dogs. But nor should a sensible antiporn feminism adopt the other extreme, which holds that representations have no effect whatsoever on their audiences and merely cater to fully preestablished

⁴In Book VIII, Section 5, of the *Politics*, Aristotle writes: "When men hear imitations, even apart from the rhythms and tunes themselves, their feelings move in sympathy. Since then music is a pleasure, and excellence consists in rejoicing and loving and hating rightly, there is clearly nothing which we are so much concerned to acquire and to cultivate as the power of forming right judgments, and of taking delight in good dispositions and noble actions. Rhythm and melody supply imitations of anger and gentleness, and also of courage and temperance, and of all the qualities contrary to these . . . in listening to such strains our souls undergo a change. The habit of feeling pleasure or pain at mere representations is not far removed from the same feelings about realities" (1340a11-25). Aristotle says similar things in *Poetics* 1.1447a13-28 and *Rhetoric* 1.11.1371b4-10. By "imitations" (mimesis) Aristotle means what we now mean by "representation," although he includes things under this concept that we typically do not today, like music and dance.

tastes. Instead, a sensible antiporn feminism follows Aristotle and MacKinnon (or at least one strain of her thought) in respecting the power of representations to actually shape what people desire and find attractive. This is something that advertisers have long known: sufficiently vivid and compelling representations can actually change what people want and find attractive in the first place.

Like MacKinnon's conditioning model, the Aristotelian model proposed here is a *causal* model in that it aims to describe representations' *effects* on their audiences. But unlike MacKinnon's conditioning model, the Aristotelian model respects the complexity of people's engagements with representations and reflects the way that pornographic representations actually work in the world. As I have argued elsewhere (2007), a causal model of pornography's harms need not be crudely deterministic, nor need it portray pornography's audiences as unthinkingly and automatically associating stimulus with response, nor should it focus on the extreme but rarer kinds of effect at the expense of the mundane and quotidian. The causal model that I think antiporn feminism ought to adopt (a) is probabilistic, (b) holds *ceteris paribus*, (c) and is cumulative; that is, it insists on the importance of repeated engagement—Aristotle's "habituation," after all, takes time. And finally, this model (d) sees pornographic representations as one salient component of a larger complex causal mechanism that deforms erotic taste and thereby sustains gender inequality (Eaton 2007).

As mentioned above, advertising has picked up on something that Aristotle described in some detail, namely that sufficiently vivid and compelling representations can mold people's tastes; that is, alter their sense of what is desirable, attractive, and praiseworthy. While many kinds of representation work to deform audience's erotic taste (in the sense of bending our taste toward gender *inequality*), mainstream heterosexual pornography stands out as having special potency in this regard due to both what it represents (i.e., its representational content) and also *how* it represents. Mainstream heterosexual pornography's representational content strongly tends toward sexually explicit scenes in which women take a subordinate role to men. This content is highly eroticized in the sense that it is presented with particular vivacity and detail aimed at erotically stimulating its target audience.⁵ While many kinds of representation eroticize male dominance and female subordination to some degree—for instance, this is common in mainstream music videos, television, and advertising—feminists pay

⁵It is worth noting that these can come apart. For instance, a documentary about the harms of pornography might depict sex and gender subordination without eroticizing it.

particular attention to pornography because, more than many genres of representation, pornography aims to elicit the strongest of erotic responses and focuses them on stark examples of male sexual dominance and female subordination. Here I refer not just or even primarily to those pornographic representations that eroticize rape; rather, I am talking about garden-variety heterosexual pornography.

Mainstream heterosexual pornography has the following features: (1) it eroticizes women performing and enjoying passivity, (2) it eroticizes women forgoing their own pleasure in order to service men, and (3) it does these things in ways that enhance women's subordinate position to men who are active and in control and whose pleasure determines the course of events. (As noted above, when I say that pornography *eroticizes* these things, I mean that it not only represents them, but that it represents them in such a manner as to make them sexually stimulating for the audience.) The problem that this chapter aims to highlight is that what I am calling "garden-variety pornography"—that is, everyday nonviolent heterosexual pornography—presents gender imbalance to us in such a way as to merit an erotic response. The Aristotelian hypothesis I propose here is that regular engagement with this kind of representation shapes its audience's taste in the direction of finding various manifestations of gender imbalance to be erotically attractive.

12.4. Feminist Porn

One of the main points of this chapter is that achieving gender equality is not simply a matter of getting everyone to *believe* in equality; we must also organize our sentimental lives, and in particular our erotic tastes, around gender equality. To this end I proposed (in Section 12.3) an Aristotelian model of imaginative engagement with representations to explain how people's tastes became distorted in the first place. But this conviction in the power of representations to shape our sentimental lives cuts both ways: pornographic representations that promote sexist taste can do—and, we believe, have done—damage, but by the same token, pornographic representations promoting gender equality can do good. As porn artist Annie Sprinkle puts it, "The answer to bad porn is not no porn, but to try to make better porn."⁶ The question we finish with in this section,

⁶The quote is widely reproduced without citation. As near as I can tell, its source is a newspaper article from 1999 (Rich 1999).

then, is this: what, exactly, does this "better porn"—which I elsewhere call "egalitarian pornography," but which one might also refer to as "feminist pornography"—look like?

The last 10 years have witnessed a burgeoning industry of self-identified feminist porn. Witness, for instance, the Good For Her Feminist Porn Awards in Toronto and the PorYes Feminist Porn Award in Berlin.⁷ Indeed, since feminist pornography is a vibrant and growing practice that (a) caters to a wide variety of interests and proclivities and (b) fosters continued scrutiny of and dialog about its own practices, it is not possible to give anything like necessary and sufficient conditions for *feminist porn*. What I offer below instead is a characterization that I think captures what most feminist porn makers and users are after; there will, of course, be exceptions.

At the most general level, feminist porn is pornography that is committed to, in the words of Tristan Taormino (a sex educator, feminist pornographer, and theorist), "fight[ing] gender oppression and attempt[ing] to dismantle rigid gender roles" (2013, 260). This commitment manifests itself in two ways. First, in the production of pornographic works. As Taormino makes clear, "the production must be a fair and ethical process and a positive working environment for everyone" (2013, 260). Second, the commitment to gender equality and social justice is manifest in the finished product itself in terms of both content (i.e., what is represented) and form (i.e. how it is represented), as discussed below. It is important to note that feminist pornography is truly *pornographic*: that is, it is typically sexually explicit material that functions to sexually arouse its audience, often aiming at achieving sexual fulfillment, either alone or with others. Feminist porn is not merely what some people call "couples' porn," which is typically considered to be "soft" porn that focuses on kissing and foreplay and excludes things like anal sex and rough sex. But "couples' porn" can be quite conservative with respect to gender roles, while some feminist porn includes so-called kinky sex, anal sex, BDSM, and rough sex. What exactly makes the latter *feminist*, though?

We can begin with negative criteria. Feminist pornographic representations are marked by an absence of the following: representations of non-consensual violence, expressions of contempt for women, and sexist stereotypes, and scenes of men ejaculating on women's faces are typically

⁷<http://www.poryes.de/en/>

avoided. Further, narrative and visuals are not organized around men's orgasms but, rather, centrally feature female pleasure and orgasms. (The so-called cum or "money" shot is often the most important element in a pornographic work, around which everything else is organized.)

But once we have said what feminist porn is *not*, there is still much to say about what it *is*. Feminist porn should, as feminist pornographer Petra Joy puts it, "spread the message of pleasure and respect for women and sexual liberation in the world."⁸ Although she does not specify criteria for how to achieve this, here are some noticeable features of her own films (and of the films of other feminist pornographers). First, women are portrayed in active roles, both as initiators of and guides of sexual interaction, and also as *subjects* of desire and pleasure (rather than merely objects of desire). Second, there is an emphasis on genuine women's sexual pleasure: women receive oral sex and prolonged stimulation of the clitoris and other erogenous zones. Joy sums up the point thus: "The men appearing in my films are not cast by the size of their penis but by their ability to enjoy giving women pleasure."⁹ Third, men are portrayed as sex objects in two senses—diegetic objectification, where men are sexually objectified by female characters in the world of the film (the diegesis), and extradiegetic objectification—that is, objectification by the representation as opposed to in the world of the representation—in the sense that men are made into sex objects for the viewer. Again Joy sums this up nicely:

Women are voyeurs, too. We like to watch sexy men. And there is this fantasy of watching a stranger but he doesn't know you're there. And we get pleasure out of watching him pleasuring himself. I think it's very important that heterosexual women get some eye candy. It's long overdue.¹⁰

Fourth, feminist porn includes erotic representations of male bisexuality. Fifth, it often includes scenes where men take submissive roles and women are shown in dominant roles (but not exclusively according to the dominatrix stereotype). Sixth and related, women are represented as powerful and physically strong. Seventh, realistic female bodies of all ages that do not promote unhealthily thin stereotypes are not only represented but are also eroticized.

⁸From the documentary that accompanies her film, *A Taste of Joy* (2012).

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

But, one might wonder, can feminist pornography handle a taste for rough sex and BDSM? The answer, I think, is yes, but these things must be handled with considerable care. One example is Tristan Taormino's *Rough Sex* series, where each vignette begins with a lengthy interview with the performers. In these interviews, the performers discuss their actual fantasies and explain how they establish trust with their partners and how they both establish and test their own boundaries. This establishes a rich context for the fantasies that follow, making it clear that the dominance, submission, and violence are not only consensual but actually emanate from the performers themselves.

One point that Taormino and other feminist pornographers continually make is that feminist pornography is far from being humorless, preachy, or man-hating. Rather, it is an inventive, edgy, highly erotic genre that ranges from mild to wild (as the Good For Her Feminist Porn Awards puts it) and focuses on representing and generating authentic pleasure for everyone. For this reason, many think that feminist porn might actually make for *better* pornography; that is, it might not be just morally and politically better but also pornographically better precisely because its creators assume critical distance from mainstream porn. (And it is worth noting that art, quite broadly construed, has always benefited from precisely this kind of distance.) The result is pornography that does not rely on the over-used formulas of mainstream porn such as predictable and mechanical sex and redundant close-ups of so-called "money shots."

12.5. Concluding Thoughts

I would like to return to one of the basic questions that feminism must confront: what explains the ubiquity and intransigence of gender inequality? MacKinnon offers part of an answer when she draws our attention to the socially dominant mode of erotic taste that permeates our mundane everyday existence (although she does not use these words). This mode of erotic taste, which is heterosexual in orientation and internalized by men and women alike, strongly favors dominance as an alluring feature in men and submissiveness as an alluring feature in women. Since the pursuit of some degree of erotic allure infuses almost everyone's ordinary everyday lives, this gives gender inequality considerable influence despite our considered views and commitments (and the laws and regulations based upon them). If this is right, then the following question becomes urgent: how can we rid gender inequality of its erotic appeal?

The problem is that we cannot simply argue our way toward finding the right things attractive and sexy. Even strong cognitivists about emotions do not think that propositional knowledge or rational argument suffices to change our feelings and desires. So how can we bend the predominant mode of erotic taste toward gender equality?

I have proposed feminist porn as part of an Aristotelian program to reshape the dominant mode of erotic taste in this direction. To some, the very concept of *feminist pornography* is incoherent. Many antiporn feminists, as is well known, define pornography as inherently subordinating. Popular stereotypes, on the other hand, typically portray feminists as sex-negative prudes incapable of endorsing, much less producing, pornography and other erotic material. Against both of these views, I have argued that we have good reason *on feminist grounds*—grounds that also support feminist arguments against mainstream inegalitarian pornography—to champion this new form of pornography.

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