

Invisible and everywhere: Heterosexuality in anti-pornography feminism

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Abstract

This article investigates the various (and curiously under-theorised) ways in which heterosexuality is framed in anti-pornography feminist discourses. I argue that within these discourses, a certain model of patriarchal heterosexuality is understood as providing the basic framework for all material classified as ‘pornography’, even that which is produced by and for queers. At the same time, though, the term ‘heterosexuality’ rarely appears within these discourses. To this end, I argue that anti-pornography feminism risks naturalising the heterosexualised gender hierarchy that its proponents have so vehemently opposed. I suggest that critiquing this aspect of anti-pornography feminism is a crucial step in working towards a theory of heterosexuality which does not deny the existence of sexism, but which also emphasises transgression.

Keywords

Anti-pornography feminism, heterosexuality, gender roles, transgression

In her book *States of Injury* (1995), US political theorist Wendy Brown provides a critique of feminist legal scholar Catharine A MacKinnon’s work. This critique is part of a broader study of how notions of injuriousness and freedom operated in North America during the late 20th century. Brown particularly focuses on MacKinnon’s analysis of pornography. Within the terms of this analysis, argues Brown, ‘heterosexuality is the past, present and eternal future of gender’ (Brown, 1995: 89).

The aim of this article is to build on Brown’s insight by examining the complex (and surprisingly under-theorised) ways in which heterosexuality is framed in anti-pornography feminist discourses. Within these discourses, heterosexuality – or,

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more specifically, a model of patriarchal heterosexuality – provides the basic framework for all pornography, even that which is produced by and for queers. At the same time, ‘heterosexuality’ is seldom named, though it is frequently assumed. To this end, I argue that anti-pornography feminism risks naturalising the hierarchical, male/dominant-female/submissive binary that its proponents have so forcefully opposed. I conclude the article by providing notes towards a theory of heterosexuality which does not deny the existence of sexist oppression, but which also does not see heterosexuality as being reducible to this oppression.

The politics of anti-pornography feminism

The following overview of anti-pornography feminism will be familiar to sexuality studies researchers, but is necessary to contextualise the argument that follows. Anti-pornography feminism gained impetus during the late 1970s and early 1980s, particularly in the USA.¹ Notable early proponents included the activist group Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media and theorists such as MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin and Diana Russell (MacKinnon and Dworkin, 1997; Russell, 1993). For these women, pornography eroticised and reinforced male domination and female subordination. This, it seemed, was true even of pornography that was produced by, and marketed towards lesbians and gay men (the more inclusive term ‘queers’ did not yet have the political currency that it now has).

Anti-pornography feminism emerged during a period in which feminists had begun to identify violence against women as a major political issue, and were trying to identify the ways in which this violence was perpetuated, as well as ways to end it. This strand of feminism gained traction during a time in which censorship laws were relaxing across the western world; and (thanks in part to these more permissive censorship laws) ‘sexual liberation’ movements were flourishing. During this period, material classified as ‘pornography’ was becoming increasingly publicly visible. In Sheila Jeffreys’ words: ‘Women were able to look at pornography and for the first time had at their disposal a panoramic view of what constituted male sexuality’ (2011: 247–259).

In the last decade, anti-pornography feminism has exerted influence through the work of commentators such as the US academic Gail Dines (2010) and the Australian activist Melinda Tankard-Reist (Tankard-Reist and Bray, 2012), as well as through the non-profit organisation Stop Porn Culture (2013). These critiques have also targeted what has variously been referred to as the ‘sexualisation’ and ‘pornification’ of contemporary culture (Gill, 2009; Mulholland, 2011; Tankard-Reist and Bray, 2012). These terms have been used to describe the ways in which the kind of sexual explicitness once reserved for ‘pornographic’ material has inflected even ‘mainstream’ popular culture (movies, music videos, advertisements, magazines). The ‘sexualisation’ or ‘pornification’ of culture also refers to the increased availability of pornographic material, for example, through the internet (McKee et al., 2008).

In the introduction to their edited collection *Big Porn Inc.*, Tankard-Reist and Bray write:

The mainstreaming of pornography is transforming the sexual politics of intimate and public life, popularising new forms of anti-women attitudes and contributing to the sexualisation of children. The pornification of culture is leading to a form of hypersexism that entails an increase in physical, sexual, mental, economic and emotional cruelty towards women and children. (2011: xiv)

For Tankard-Reist and Bray, the kinds of eroticised misogyny theorised during the 1980s by Dworkin and MacKinnon have become more prevalent than would previously have been imaginable. Even children cannot be shielded from pornography and the anti-woman messages that it apparently endorses.

Anti-pornography feminism owes a considerable political allegiance to radical feminism. Understanding this allegiance is crucial to understanding anti-pornography feminism's gender politics and, in particular, the way in which heterosexuality tends to be framed within its discourses. Radical feminism is premised on the assumption that the key form of oppression globally and historically is women's oppression, and that this stems from gender inequality (Bell and Klein, 1996). For radical feminists, 'gender' itself refers to an always and only hierarchical system which benefits men and disadvantages women.

Specifically, radical feminists have focused on the ways in which women are oppressed within the realms of sex and sexuality. MacKinnon argues:

Sexuality is the social process through which social relations of gender are created, organized, expressed, and directed, creating the social beings we know as women and men, as their relations create society. (1989: 3)

Heterosexuality, in particular, has come under scrutiny. Adrienne Rich's essay 'Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence' (1984) provides what is still the best-known radical feminist argument that heterosexuality is a political institution which has contributed significantly to women's oppression. According to Sheila Jeffreys, patriarchally defined heterosexuality is, above all:

eroticised power difference. Heterosexual desire originates in the power relationship between men and women ... Heterosexuality as an institution is founded upon the ideology of 'difference'. Though the difference is seen as natural, it is in fact a difference of power. (2011: 295)

Jeffreys does not use the term 'patriarchally defined heterosexuality'; she instead writes 'heterosexuality' and 'heterosexual desire'. Her definition of heterosexual desire is often mobilised in anti-pornography feminist discourses, and the implications of this will be explored in due course.

At the risk of stating the obvious, it is politically necessary to identify the ways in which inequality is endorsed and enforced in heterosexual relationships, as well as in specific acts of heterosex. There is also value in identifying how patriarchal modes of heterosexuality are perpetuated in pornographic cultural production. This is because pornography has profound cultural importance. According to the authors of *The Porn Report*:

Pornography not only stirs our bodies, it stirs our ethical and political selves. Pornography draws out our beliefs about gender and sexuality, race and class, power and selfhood. Pornography is about much more than sex. (McKee et al., 2008: 22)

This is particularly true in the current historical moment. Terms such as 'sexualisation' and 'pornification' are not unproblematic. Nevertheless, it remains indisputable that 'the nature of acts, performances and expressions of sexuality in public life' are more explicit – and thus more closely approaching a pornographic aesthetic – than before (Mulholland, 2011: 120). The messages about sex and gender that pornography conveys (or is seen to convey) are difficult to overlook.

My analysis takes as its starting point Brown's observation about the way in which gender, gender hierarchy and heterosexuality are collapsed in MacKinnon's anti-pornography analysis. Brown argues: 'If gender is sexuality, sexuality is always gendered and women are sex for men, then, for example, lesbian sexuality either doesn't exist, is sex for men, or imitates heterosexuality' (1995: 89). Brown is not alone in advancing such an argument. Lisa Duggan and Nan D Hunter contend that – within the terms of anti-pornography feminist discourse – some forms of lesbian sexuality (for example, lesbian S/M) have been framed as 'male-identified' and 'patriarchal' (2006: 9–10). Duggan and Hunter also take critics such as MacKinnon to task for implying that some heterosexual acts are automatically oppressive:

At its heart, this [MacKinnon's] analysis implies that heterosexual sex is itself sexist; that women do not engage in it of their own volition; and that behaviour pleasurable to men is intrinsically repugnant to women. In some contexts, for example, the representation of fellatio and multiple partners can be sexist, but are we willing to concede that they always are? (2006: 51)

In similar fashion, Lynne Segal has criticised the way in which pornography has sometimes been framed as a 'metaphor' for men's violence against women (1992: 79). This, she implies, has led to pornography 'occupy(ing) such a central place in women's fear of men and some men's embarrassment with themselves' (1992: 67).

I argue that within anti-pornography feminist discourses, heterosexuality is in fact pervasive *and* invisible. This point is, I would suggest, absolutely crucial to understanding how anti-pornography discourses tend to reproduce 'the rigid binary of potentially violent, dominant men and subordinated, silenced women' that its proponents abhor (Duggan and Hunter, 2006: 7). Within the terms of these

discourses, heterosexuality is always hierarchical, always based on the eroticisation of unequal gender roles. This heterosexuality is at the heart of all texts classified as 'pornography', even when bodies and acts that are marked as 'heterosexual' are absent.

And yet, for all the emphasis which anti-pornography feminists have placed on the oppressiveness of heterosexuality, the word 'heterosexuality' is rarely mentioned in their analyses. Puzzlingly, this omission has itself gone almost unmentioned by critics of anti-pornography feminism. As far as I can tell, the closest that anyone has come to bucking this trend is Paul Johnson, who writes: 'Even where relationships between men and women are most forcefully critiqued (e.g. Dworkin, 1987) often there isn't an emphasis on the social construction of heterosexuality per se' (Johnson, 2005: 7). Yet even here, Johnson is not referring specifically to Dworkin's analysis of pornography.

In pursuing my critique of anti-pornography feminism, I ask: How can this strand of feminism – a feminism whose proponents have often endorsed social constructionism, and who have envisioned an unabashedly utopian social change – help or hinder our conceptualisation of heterosexuality as pleasurable and empowering for women and men? Need heterosexuality always be understood as an eroticisation of gender roles? Is 'gender' always hierarchical? I propose to argue for the importance of theorising heterosexuality as a site of transgression as well as danger,² and suggest some ways of working towards this kind of theorising.

Readers will notice that I focus more on critiques of pornography than on 'pornography' itself. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, I follow Michel Foucault's basic thesis that sex is discursively produced (1998: 17–49). Which is to say that, the ways in which certain sexual acts, identities and texts are discussed gives meaning to these acts, identities and texts. There are no inherent meanings attached to, or any inherent relationship between 'pornography' and 'heterosexuality' or, for that matter, between those terms and the term 'oppression'.

Secondly, and relatedly, feminist opponents of pornography have made pornography the subject of feminist debate. Witness the following blog entry from US commentator Susie Bright. This entry marks Andrea Dworkin's death in April 2005. Bright has (by her own admission) often been seen as a political opponent of Dworkin in US feminist debates about pornography. Bright reflects:

Along with Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics*, Andrea Dworkin used her considerable intellectual powers to analyze pornography, which was something that no one had done before. No one. The men who made porn didn't. Porn was like a low culture joke before the feminist revolution kicked its ass. It was beneath discussion. Not so anymore!

Here's the irony ... every single woman who *pioneered* the sexual revolution, every erotic-feminist-bad-girl-and-proud-of-it-stiletto-shitkicker, was once a fan of Andrea Dworkin. Until 1984, we all were. She was the one who got us looking at porn with a critical eye. (Bright, 2005)

Generalisations aside, this passage highlights the important role that feminists such as Dworkin played in framing pornography as a feminist issue. The feminist debates that began in earnest during the 1980s have continued into the early 21st century. These debates have been broad-ranging and complex, even if they have often (and unhelpfully) been framed as conflicts between polarised political factions, for example, ‘sex-positive’ feminists versus ‘sex-negative’/‘anti-sex’ feminists.³

Additionally, the influence of anti-pornography feminism has spread outside the realms of feminism. Much has been written about Dworkin and MacKinnon’s Antipornography Civil Rights Ordinance during the 1980s. The purported aim of this (ultimately unsuccessful) Ordinance was to enable women who were hurt by the production and distribution of pornography to seek legal remedy. In the process of establishing the Ordinance, Dworkin and MacKinnon drew support from a range of conservatives who might otherwise have had little time for feminist insights (Duggan and Hunter, 2006). More recently, in Australia, a handful of grassroots activist groups – amongst them ‘Kids Free 2 B Kids’ (2013) and ‘Collective Shout’ (2013) – have publicly criticised the proliferation of sexually explicit imagery in ‘mainstream’ media and popular culture. These groups have not labelled themselves as ‘feminist’ per se. That being said, their rhetoric shares a key concern with anti-pornography feminism: the subordination of women and girls (as well as children generally) in sexually explicit imagery.

In what follows, I draw primarily (though not exclusively) from more recent anti-pornography feminist works. These include *Pornland* (Dines, 2010) the edited collections *Big Porn Inc.* (Tankard-Reist and Bray, 2011) and *Everyday Pornography* (Paasonen, 2010), and several texts by Sheila Jeffreys (2003, 2011). The anti-pornography feminist work discussed here is not exhaustive. That being said, the particular works cited provide a clear enough sample of the ways in which ‘heterosexuality’ has been framed within anti-pornography feminist discourses.

Heterosexuality in anti-pornography feminism

The most recent anti-pornography feminist writings are similar in tone to the works of theorists such as Dworkin and MacKinnon. According to Gail Dines, for example:

The message that porn disseminates about women can be boiled down to a few essential characteristics: they are always ready for sex and are enthusiastic to do whatever men want, irrespective of how painful, humiliating, or harmful the act is ... Even though these women love to be fucked, they seem to have no sexual imagination of their own: what they want always mirrors what the man wants. (2010: xxiii)

In her contribution to *Big Porn Inc.*, Renate Klein argues a similar line: ‘Pornsex portrays women as hetero ‘ho’s’ with an insatiable appetite for oral, anal and

vaginal penetration, and men as domineering studs' (2011: 86). Likewise, in *Everyday Pornography*, Susanna Paasonen argues that in email porn spam, women 'are marked as the ones whose bodies various things are done to' (2010: 67). For Paasonen, the pornographic sub-genre of email spam 'emphasizes the primacy of male initiative, desire and domination' (2010: 67).

For these commentators, pornographic representations of heterosexual sex are especially problematic. And yet, once again, the actual word 'heterosexuality' is rarely mentioned. When it is, the reference is usually fleeting. The term 'heteroporn' appears in the title of Paasonen's article, but the argument focuses less on the politics of heterosexuality than on 'the characteristics' that make pornography a 'popular genre' (2010: 67). The term 'heterosexuality' is nowhere mentioned in *Big Porn Inc.* or *Pornland*, even when the various authors focus specifically on sexual acts that take place between men and women.

To this end, then, within anti-pornography feminist discourses such as these, 'heterosexuality' as a political category remains largely invisible. As Johnson suggests, this invisibility is significant:

We call what we see in the world 'marriage', 'the family', 'reproduction', 'relationships', but we rarely prefix any of these things with the word 'heterosexual'. Far more visible, in relation to sexuality, is homosexuality. (2005: 6)

Heterosexuality is unnamed and naturalised. There lies an assumption that 'heterosexuality' is 'sexuality' as it is normatively practised and lived. 'Homosexuality' is striking inasmuch as it deviates from this (hetero)sexual path – or does it?

In his contribution to *Big Porn Inc.*, legal scholar Christopher Kendall argues that gay male pornography 'promotes homophobia and sexism' (2011: 53). Such material might be largely 'free of biological femaleness' (2011: 54). However, pornographic texts aimed at gay men 'continue to promote violence along the lines of gender as socially defined, interpreted, and imposed through systems of sex inequality. They often sexualise large, hyper-masculine men – many of whom are described as 'straight' men who find sexual arousal through the infliction of pain on socially feminised sexual subordinates (read: gay men)' (2011: 54). In gay male pornography, Kendall argues, men who occupy subordinate positions are 'subjected to degrading and dehumanising epithets usually used against women, such as 'bitch', 'cunt' and 'whore' (2011: 56). For these reasons, then, this pornography 'reinforces a system in which, as Catharine A MacKinnon puts it, "a victim usually female, always feminized" is actualised' (cited in Kendall, 2011: 56).

The argument advanced by Kendall has been rehearsed and reiterated by other theorists. For Sheila Jeffreys, gay male pornography is 'antithetical... to women's liberation' (2003: 89). On this, she refers to the work of gay male feminist John Stoltenberg, whose opposition to pornography is couched in terms very similar to Kendall's. According to Stoltenberg, 'the faggot is stigmatized because he is

perceived to participate in the degraded status of the female' (cited in Jeffreys, 2003: 89). According to Jeffreys, this 'hatred of the feminine' is a major reason why 'gay men are attracted to the exaggerated masculinity portrayed in gay male pornography' (2003: 89).

What about queer women? In his contribution to *Big Porn Inc.*, Robert Jensen acknowledges that lesbian pornography exists, but suggests that much of this material is aimed at 'a heterosexual male audience' (2011: 29). MacKinnon points out: 'lesbian sex... given a social definition of gender and sexuality, does not by definition transcend the erotization [sic] of dominance and submission...' (cited in Brown, 1995: 89). In other words, lesbian pornography can also reinforce the hierarchical gender dynamics that are (according to this line of argument) so crucial to heterosexuality. Jeffreys makes this point more explicitly when she argues that the 'overwhelming bulk' of pornography aimed at lesbians 'allows women to put themselves in the place of men and find the objectification, fetishisation and humiliation of women exciting or adopt... old-fashioned submissive roles' (1993: 26).

Transgender pornography has been referenced only sparingly in recent anti-pornography feminist writings. Yet even reading these brief references, one gets a sense that, in a pornographic and male-supremacist culture, transgendered and gender-variant people are particularly likely to perpetuate a coercive heterosexuality. According to Jeffreys: 'Transgender pornography suggests forcefully that the excitement of tv/ts is masochism' (2005: 59).⁴ Specifically, this pornography enables men to experience the frisson of sexualised submission by 'having makeup and traditionally feminine clothing placed on them by force' (2005: 59). Within the terms of Jeffreys' analysis, males remain male (and females remain female) even after undergoing sex-reassignment surgery. Male supremacy remains very much intact. Renate Klein briefly references transgenderism in the context of her argument that women are using the language of choice to justify medically altering their bodies to fit a 'pornsex' model. According to Klein, this language of choice is also responsible for 'allowing children as young as 10 to harm their bodies through hormones and surgery as they transit from patriarchal masculinity to patriarchal femininity (or the other way round)' (2011: 95, n. 19).

So, according to anti-pornography feminist discourses, pornography does indeed represent the truth of sexuality – and that sexuality is hetero. Heterosexuality inflects and even constructs queer sexualities, and this fact is revealed – indeed, it is celebrated – by the medium of pornography. Heterosexuality can be witnessed in the power imbalance that is eroticised within gay male and lesbian pornography. Heterosexual desire is also foregrounded by the consumption of lesbian pornographic images by heterosexual men. The 'choice' made by (presumably heterosexual) women to modify their 'bodies' according to 'pornsex' standards exists in a continuum with the 'choice' made by certain men and women to adopt 'patriarchal' (read: 'heterosexual') genders. In short, gender = hierarchy = heterosexuality = homosexuality. There is little incentive to rethink heterosexuality when it has so thoroughly saturated all aspects of social life, and when it always seems to be synonymous with oppression.

Notes towards re-theorising heterosexuality

Thus far, I have highlighted the problematic ways in which heterosexuality has been framed within anti-pornography feminist discourses. The aim of this special issue is to challenge those approaches which see heterosexuality as being simply 'nasty, boring and normative'. In this final section, I take up that challenge. I propose not a theory of heterosexuality *per se*, but a series of notes on how heterosexuality (within and outside the realm of 'pornography') can be theorised as a site of transgression, and not (always) as a bastion of patriarchy. The term 'transgression' is used here in the broadest sense to describe 'rule-breaking thought or behaviour', behaviour that flouts (however mildly) normative ideas and practices (McNair, 2013: 127; and see also Foucault, 1977). Transgression involves going against conventional ways of thinking and living.

A useful place to begin this task is with Judith Butler's early work, in which she complicates the relationship between sex and gender. Butler challenges the assumption that 'gender' is an expression of 'sex', while 'sex' is the 'natural' self that gender expresses. She argues: '[if] gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way' (2006: 9). Specifically, gender is 'a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself' (Butler, 1993: 313). Butler explains that 'the naturalistic effects of heterosexualised genders are produced through imitative strategies; what they imitate is a phantasmatic ideal of heterosexual identity, one that is produced by the imitation as its effect' (1993: 313). For Butler, 'the 'reality' of heterosexual identities is performatively constituted through an imitation that sets itself up as the origin and the ground of all imitations' (1993: 313). These perceived 'imitations' include queer identities.

In short, for Butler, 'gender' is a construct and not an unproblematic expression of one's sex. This point is hardly new, having long been advanced by feminists, including some aligned with anti-pornography politics (Dworkin, 1988; Jeffreys, 2011). However, Butler argues against seeing heterosexuality as the 'origin and the ground' from which all sexualities are constructed. Within the terms of her analysis, there is no 'ground' point for sexuality. Moreover, Butler suggests that conceiving of gender roles as being inherently singular ('masculinity', 'femininity') and inherently hierarchical is problematic: 'If gender hierarchy produces and consolidates gender, and if gender hierarchy presupposes an operative notion of gender, then gender is what causes gender, and the formulation culminates in tautology' (2006: xiii). Thus, Butler cautions against formulating the relationship between gender and sexuality in such a way that gender = hierarchy = heterosexuality = homosexuality.

With this in mind, we are in a better position to understand how heterosexuality can be theorised as a site of transgression. Kath Albury hints at this transgressive potential when she writes that 'a heterosexual woman who actively asserts and exercises sexual agency' might be 'the most perverse of all perverts' (2002: xix).

Chris Beasley (2011) advances another, even more provocative argument specifically focused on the issue of heterosexuality. Beasley cites the following statement made by a woman in an unnamed magazine: '[w]hen I strap on a dildo and fuck my male partner, we are engaging in 'heterosexual' behaviour, but I can tell you that it feels altogether queer' (cited in Beasley, 2011: 120).

Beasley explains that for US feminist theorist Elizabeth Wilson, (who cites the magazine correspondent in the first instance) this heterosexual couple is merely 'kinky', with little potential to bring forth a wider social change (Beasley, 2011: 25). Conversely, for Beasley, sexual practices such as the one she describes can be seen as transgressive inasmuch as they help make 'the normative visible and in the process offer some challenge to the unquestioned authority of the "normal"' (2011: 29). The correlation between masculine/male and feminine/female, as well as between feminine/passive and masculine/dominant, are thrown into question in the context of this sex act. Relatedly, the notion that sexual penetration is always carried out by men, and that it is a key symbol of male power⁵ is also questioned.

In addition, a sense of transgression can also be evoked through acts which do not involve – indeed, which seem to reject any hint of – 'dominance and submission' (Jeffreys, 2011: 309). These are acts that Jeffreys endorses when she argues for the 'eroticising of mutuality and equality' (2011: 311). The challenge, then, involves determining what sex without dominance and submission and/or power imbalances might resemble. What would such sex acts entail? And, on the flipside, is sado-masochistic sexual activity always or necessarily incompatible with 'mutuality and equality'?⁶

As well as emphasising moments of transgression, political importance attaches to challenging commonly held sexual stereotypes and assumptions. For example, in her book *Straight Sex*, Lynne Segal calls for heterosexual feminists to 'come out' and challenge assumptions about 'what it means to be straight' (1994: 261; emphasis deleted). This 'coming out' as heterosexual helps mark the dominant sexuality as *constructed*, and not merely a natural entity that can or should be assumed (along with the assumption that being a heterosexual woman means being oppressed and/or male-identified). Relatedly, Segal challenges us to reconsider any assumptions we may hold about heterosexuality and its compatibility (or lack thereof) with feminism.

It must be acknowledged that 'coming out' as a heterosexual feminist is qualitatively and distinctly different to, say, the 'coming out' of queer subjects. As Kath Albury wryly observes: 'No one's going to arrest me for having sex with my boyfriend' (2002: vii). Claiming a lesbian, gay or queer identity may not be inherently transgressive. Nonetheless, queer identities often challenge the perceived naturalness – and also the assumption – of heterosexuality. Perhaps for this reason, not identifying as heterosexual can still be met with the kind of hostility and derision that is rarely directed at those who do identify as heterosexual.

Transgender and gender-variant feminists have certainly posed a challenge to traditional categories such as 'heterosexual', 'woman' and 'man'. These feminists

are not gender imposters, nor do they necessarily endorse 'patriarchal' gender roles. Pat Califia makes this point with reference to Janice Raymond's book *The Transsexual Empire* (1979), itself a highly influential text in radical feminist theorising of transgenderism and gender variance. Raymond argues:

Transsexually constructed lesbian-feminists are in the same tradition as the man-made, made-up 'lesbians' of the Playboy centrefolds ... Men produce 'lesbian' love the way they want it to be and according to their own canons of what they think it should be. (Raymond, 1979: 118; cited in Califia, 1997: 96)

Califia responds by pointing out that 'few things could horrify the editors of that magazine [*Playboy*] more than someone they would see as a man who had cut his dick off' (1997: 96).⁷ Califia's point is that transgendered subjects do not easily perpetuate patriarchal models of heterosexuality; indeed, the opposite might be true. Recently, an Australian court has overturned a law by which citizens must be identified as either 'male' or 'female' on their legal documentation. This achievement is due in no small part to the efforts of Norrie May-Welby, a 'sexual equality activist' who identifies as 'neuter' (Bibby, 2013). The challenge that activists such as May-Welby pose to traditional sexual categories is profound.

This is by no means to suggest that 'pornography' – or 'sexualised' popular culture more generally – is devoid of sexism. Works such as *Big Porn Inc.* and *Pornland* give the lie to this suggestion. But sexism in pornography has also been critiqued by feminists who may not align with an identifiably anti-pornography stance. For example, in an insightful article, Monique Mulholland (2011) interrogates the undercurrent of heteronormativity at SEXPO (a popular public event focused on sex and sexuality that is held annually across Australia). SEXPO may appear diverse in terms of the sexual identities and practices that it showcases. Nevertheless, as Mulholland demonstrates, the event still foregrounds particular models of heterosex. Similarly, in her study of contemporary visual culture, Rosalind Gill argues that there remain 'profound differences in the ways in which men's and women's bodies are represented sexually' (2009: 143), and that the tables cannot be simply or straightforwardly turned. Rather, she observes, "[s]exualized" representations of the male body are not incommensurable with male dominance' (2009: 147).

Rebecca Beirne lends support to the foregoing suggestion in her study of lesbian pornography.⁸ Beirne cautions against the familiar model she refers to as 'split gazes (masculine-active-objectifying/feminine-passive-narcissistic)' (2008: 151). These 'split gazes' are premised on the assumption of a pervasive and hierarchical heterosexuality (where men are always positioned as voyeuristic spectators, and women are always positioned as the subjects of this gaze). Such an assumption is problematic, in that it frames heterosexuality as 'origin and the ground' (to use Butler's term) of all sexualities. Further to this, the assumption of 'split gazes' seems ill suited to an analysis of material which does not contain – and which is not marketed towards – men. Beirne suggests that lesbian pornographic texts do

not always encourage the (lesbian) viewer's identification with passive and 'objectified' femininity (2008: 147). As Butler reminds us, the notion that the spectator automatically identifies with 'a single position' is erroneous (1990: 109). Butler argues that 'identification is distributed amongst the various elements of the (fantasy) scene' (1990: 109).⁹ The lesbian (or, indeed, the gay male or heterosexual spectator) can identify with various roles and performers in a pornographic text.

Even within specifically heterosexual contexts, pornography is not always conducive to or symptomatic of oppressive practices. Lynne Segal argues:

The last thing men in general (to the limited extent we can give meaning to such notion) 'want' the women in their lives to be – whether wives, daughters, friends, workmates, lovers or whatever – is the ubiquitously sexually desiring, universally sexually available, creature of much pornographic fantasy. (1992: 66)

In other words, heterosexual men can and do distinguish between the 'fantasy' images of femininity that appear in pornography and the women they encounter in their everyday lives. The fantasy woman of pornography is not necessarily the woman they always (or often) desire.

To move forward, then, in our understandings of pornography, heterosexuality and feminism, and in seeking out heterodoxical paths, I have identified several possible routes. First, heterosexuality must be neither excused from analysis nor allowed to hide unmarked in critiques of pornography. However, nor should it be assumed that pornography is always (or for that matter, never) oppressive. Rather, the intersections at which pornography and heterosexuality converge or crash must be mapped and explored. Second, it may be useful to debate pornographies (multiple and varied) rather than the awkwardly singular model of pervasive but invisible heterosexuality populating much of the feminist anti-porn critique. Third, to see potentially transgressive and/or queer pornographies as always-already premised on a heteronormative and patriarchal model loads heterosexuality with possibly misplaced assumptions, endowing it with a power, rigidity and weight that it might not, in fact, wield.

Notes

1. As Kate Gleeson (2013) argues, feminist opposition to pornography did not gain ascendance in Australia during the 1980s and 1990s to the extent that it did in USA. This, she suggests, can be attributed largely to differences (some of which she discusses) between the political cultures of both countries.
2. This is, of course, a reference to Carole S Vance's 1984 edited collection *Pleasure and Danger*. This is an important text in the context of 1980s' feminist debates about pornography.
3. Witness also labels such as 'anti-censorship' and 'pro-censorship'. These labels stem largely from the controversy surrounding the Dworkin/MacKinnon Ordinance in the USA during the 1980s (Duggan and Hunter, 2006; Dworkin, 1988: 253–275).

4. Here, 'tv' is an abbreviation of 'transvestism' and 'ts' an abbreviation for 'transsexual'. Jeffreys does not explore the differences that exist between or within these categories.
5. The symbolism associated with heterosexual penetrative sex is one of the key themes explored in Dworkin (1987).
6. Significantly, 'pornography' and 'SM' are frequently conflated in anti-pornography feminist discourse (see Rubin, 2011).
7. This is not to suggest that transpeople cannot be represented within popular culture in normative, regressive ways (see Serano, 2007).
8. For a study of gay male pornography and its spectators, see Dyer (1985).
9. Butler's analysis of identification and/in fantasy and pornography is indebted to the work of psychoanalytic theorists Jean La Planché and JB Pontalis.

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