



Dines, Gail
[*Pornland: How the Porn Industry Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*](#)
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Media Education
Foundation
35 Minutes

Pornography has likely been around since prehistoric times, as artifacts such as the Venus of Willendorf suggest. However, in *Pornland: How the Porn Industry has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, Gail Dines suggests that the *porn industry* is a relatively new phenomenon (tracing its origins to the establishment of *Playboy* magazine) and that this industry should be considered separately from pornography as a concept. Pornography itself has long received scholarly attention and the topic has even recently been deemed worthy of its own journal, *Porn Studies*. Perhaps this is warranted with the mainstreaming of the porn industry, beginning with the release of *Deep Throat* and continuing to the present day where Ron Jeremy is a commonly recognized porn actor and advocate and Jenna Jameson's autobiography *How to Make Love Like a Porn Star: A Cautionary Tale* spent six weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list (Miller, 2005). Indeed, it is this mainstreaming that is a matter of great concern for Dines.

The narrator, Gail Dines is the author of the book by the same name, professor of sociology and women's studies at Wheelock College, and an anti-porn activist. She is a founding member of "Stop Porn Culture," so it is easy to see where this documentary is heading. Dines is clear about the kind of pornography that we are talking about here; this is not your father's collection of *Playboys*. Dines delves into the seedy underbelly of the porn industry to discuss what has now become mainstream pornography. As she observes in one passage, "You see previously, what happened to boys, hormones raging? You found your father's *Playboy*, if you were lucky. And then, you had to look through and what did you see? Sexist as it was, you had women with no clothes on smiling in a cornfield with a coy smile on their face. As sexist as that was, it was incomparable to this." Throughout the video, we are introduced to such things as pornography that eroticizes racism, faux- incest and child pornography, and "gonzo" pornography, where women are choked, gagged, and beaten.

Dines is at her best when explaining the evolution of the porn industry and how the porn industry interfaces with popular media through such outlets as *Lars and the Real Doll* and the metamorphosis of Miley Cyrus. She also provides startling examples of how the porn industry has mainstreamed violence against women. This thesis is not new, of course; Dworkin (1979) argued three decades ago that "pornography reveals that male sexual pleasure is inextricably tied to victimizing, hurting, exploiting; that sexual fun and sexual passion in the privacy of the male

imagination are inseparable from the brutality of male history” (p. 69). But while Dworkin seemed to paint all instances of pornography with the same brush, Dines provides clear evidence that the porn industry is moving toward more extreme acts of degradation and pain infliction. More importantly, Dines also describes how porn culture has seeped into almost every element of popular culture, shaping how boys and girls view relationships, their bodies, and their sexualities as they move into adulthood.

One issue with this video is the glossing over of nuance inherent in the process of translating a monograph-length book into a 35 minute documentary. At times there is some theoretical slippage between pornography, the porn industry, and porn culture. Also, likely because of time constraints, Dines seems to focus on the most extreme elements of gonzo pornography, such as gagging women during oral sex until they vomit and the sexualization of exploitation. Although this is certainly problematic, other elements of porn culture seem neglected or ignored altogether, such as the runaway popularity of the *50 Shades of Grey* series and the emergence of so-called “mommy porn.” Such issues are no less problematic, as Bonomi, Altenburger, and Walton (2013) has argued that *50 Shades of Grey* glorifies abusive relationships and Bonomi et al. (2014) found a correlation among those who had read at least *50 Shades of Grey* and damaging behaviors such as having an abusive partner, signs of eating disorders, and binge drinking. Dines is certainly cognizant of such issues (see Dines, 2013), but the focus on the hardest of hardcore makes it seem somewhat sensationalist. Finally, the ending sounds like a sales pitch for her group “Stop Porn Culture,” which although admirable, seems to leave the viewer with only two options: degrading pornography churned out by the porn industry or no pornography at all. One is left wondering if there is any form of pornography that would not be considered anti-women or anti-men.

As far as its pedagogical usefulness, Dines raises important issues for communication and media scholars, such as the eroticization of misogyny, constructions of race and gender, and systems and structures of media. I could see this being used in courses such as gender and communication, the rhetoric of sexuality and gender, or even media ethics. However, with the heavy taboos surrounding sex and pornography and the unflinching examination of the topic, any instructor would want to tread carefully in using the video in any class that is not directly focused specifically on sexuality.

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