

Racism in Pornography

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I visited seven largely heterosexual pornography stores in the San Francisco Bay area to investigate the kinds of racist pornography being sold. I also wanted to find out which ethnic groups are most often portrayed in pornography, and in what manner. Once in the store I looked at every accessible piece of pornography on every shelf. I noted all the titles and covers that displayed people of color.

I divided the pornography into the following categories: magazines, books, films, videos, and for one store, games and cards. I recorded the total number of items found in each category as well as the number containing people of color in each category.

Once I had identified the pornography as containing a person of color, I listed the title, a description of the cover picture, as well as the type of pornography it represented. My observations of magazines were limited to

NOTE: The original research for this chapter was conducted by Alice Mayall in 1985 when she was an undergraduate at Mills College in Oakland, California. Diana Russell, a professor of sociology at Mills College at that time, supervised Mayall's research. Russell excerpted a section of Mayall's much longer unpublished report on racism in pornography, and radically revised it for this anthology. The "I" in the rest of the chapter refers to Mayall, the "we" refers to both authors. Reprinted from *Making Violence Sexy*, edited by Diana E. H. Russell (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990), by permission of the authors.

their covers because most of them were encased in plastic. I also selected eight pornography books about people of color and Jews in order to make more detailed analyses of their contents.

The salience of skin color is evident in most of the materials displayed in pornography stores. White women were featured in most pornography (92% of total) presumably because they fulfill the prevailing racist equality of beauty with whiteness and Caucasian features. People of color fall into the special interest category, other examples of which are rape, bondage and sado-masochism, anal sex, sex with children, large breasted women, and sex between women. Some pornographic covers also focus on particular body parts or different methods of penetrating bodies.

A large majority of the magazine covers that portrayed people of color in sexual poses ($N = 109$), but not engaged in sexual contact, used African-American women: 73 covers exhibited African-American women, 18 Asian or Asian-American women, and 4 Hispanic women. Of the covers displaying men of color, 9 were African-American transvestites or transsexuals, while 2 others were portrayed as "normal," 3 were Asian transvestites, and only 1 was Hispanic.

My analysis of book titles revealed the same disproportionate numbers of portrayals of African-Americans compared with other people of color. Anti-Semitic pornography is another special interest evident in the book titles examined, along with a smaller amount of anti-Arab pornography. We can think of no explanation for the relatively small amount of pornography using Hispanics, nor why African-Americans are so overrepresented among people of color.

The breakdown of the ethnicity of the 131 cover pictures in which a person of color was displayed in a state of sexual contact is too complex to describe completely as there are so many possible interethnic and intraethnic permutations. The largest number of these covers portrayed African-American women with white men (28), followed by white women with African-American men (20), Asian women with white men (17), and Asian women with men of unknown ethnicity (12).

Significantly, as judged by these covers, interest in intraethnic heterosexual relations was minimal. For example, there were only six covers portraying sex between African-American women and men, and two portraying intra-Asian sex. Homosexual themes were also uncommon: There were six covers depicting sex between African-American and white men, four depicting African-American and white women, three depicting Asian women together, two African-American women together, and two African-American and Asian women together. Obviously there are some porn stores that cater specifically to the gay male community. The representation of gay men engaged in interethnic sex may well be very different in such stores.

When people of color are used in books, magazines, or videos, the titles usually conveyed this information for consumers. For example, an average of 77% of the magazines on display in six different stores identified the ethnicity of the person in the title. This presumably means that skin color is very salient to most consumers. It comes as no surprise in a racist cul-

ture like the United States, that people of color are a specialty item in pornography.

It was sometimes difficult to determine the ethnicity of the people on magazine covers portraying explicit sexual contact, especially in some of the bondage photographs. For example, I compiled a long list of "Asian Woman and Unknown Man" for which it was impossible to determine the ethnic identity of the penis photographed. With regard to magazines that portrayed explicit sexual-genital contact, there were *very* few in which African-Americans were present without whites. By and large, African-American men who consume pornography have a choice of buying magazines in which only whites are portrayed, or in which white men use African-American women or African-American men use white women. Whether these disproportionate portrayals of the ethnicity of pornographic covers reflect the interest of the consumers or the makers of pornography, we do not know. However, these findings are consistent with Alice Walker's (1981) observation that pornography serves to drive African-American men and women away from each other.

A majority of the men depicted in pornography as transvestites and transsexuals are people of color. Perhaps it is more acceptable to portray people of color as "social deviants." Some of the pornography titles listed in Figure 33.1 provide examples of blatant racist stereotypes, for example, "Animal Sex Among Black Women," "Black Bitch," "Black Girl's Animal Love," "Bitch's Black Stud," "Gang Banged by Blacks," "Geisha's Girls," "Oriental Sadist's Pet," "Raped by Arab Terrorists," "Bound Harem Girl."

Note that the term "bitch" is exclusively used for African-American women in the list of titles recorded in Figure 33.1. The word bitch means female dog. In contrast with other women of color, several titles in Figure 33.1 associate animals with African-American women. As Alice Walker has pointed out, "where white women are depicted in pornography as 'objects,' Black women are depicted as animals. Where white women are at least depicted as human bodies if not beings, Black women are depicted as shit" (Walker, 1981, p. 103). Luisah Teish (1980, p. 117) makes a similar point in her chapter "A Quiet Subversion."

Tracey Gardner makes an interesting observation about male preferences: "I have noticed that while white men like black women 'looking baaad' in leather with whips, Black men like Black women in bondage, helpless and submissive" (1980, p. 113).

Asian women tend to be depicted either as sweet young lotus blossoms or objects of bondage. The notorious December 1984 issue of *Penthouse* contained a nine-picture spread of Asian women, some of whom were

bound tightly with ropes cutting into their ankles, wrists, labias and buttocks. Two of the images showed women bound and hanging from trees, heads lolling forward, apparently dead. . . . Throughout these murderous images are sprinkled "artsy" haiku quotes which exude dominance and subordination. (Farley, 1992)

African-Americans

Animal Sex Among Black Women
 Animals and Black Women
 Bisexual Teacher
 Bitch's Black Stud
 Black Beauty
 Black Bitch
 Black Fashion Model
 Black Ghetto Teens
 Black Girl's Animal Love
 Black Head Nurse
 Black Lady's Lust for Girls
 Black Leather Doll
 Black Passion
 Black Stepfather
 Black Teacher
 Black Woman's Hunger
 Boy for Black Mama
 By Sex Possessed
 Candy's Black Lover
 Dark Detective
 Diner Doll
 Demon Dictator
 Gang Banged by Blacks
 Garment Center Black Sex
 The Heiress' Black Slave Boy
 Her New White Master
 Hot for Black Studs
 Man-Hungry Black Bitch
 Mother's Black Lovers
 Seductive Black Bitch
 Spread Black Thighs
 Teacher's Black Passion
 Young Intern's Surprise

Nazi-Jewish

Gestapo Bondage Brothel
 Gestapo Lust Slave
 Gestapo Sex Crimes
 Gestapo Stud Farm
 Gestapo Training School
 Nazi Dungeon Slave
 Nazi Sex Captives
 Nazi Whip Mistress
 Sadist's Prisoner
 Sluts of the S.S.
 Swastika She Devil

Asian

Bawdy Tales of Wu Wu Wang
 Bloody Encounters
 Geisha's Girls
 Geisha's Torment
 Japanese Sadist's Dungeon
 May Ling's Master
 Oriental Sadist's Pet
 Samurai Slave Girl
 Teen Slaves of Saigon
 Vietcong Rape Compound
 Whips of Chinatown

Asian/Indian

The Talking Pussy

Arab

Bound Harem Girl
 Harem Hell
 Raped by Arab Terrorists
 Sheik's Hand Maiden

This is a complete list of the pornography book titles that portrayed people of color on their covers from six stores.

Figure 33.1 Pornographic Book Titles Using People of Color

These femicidal photographs eroticizing the murder of Asian women prompted Nikki Craft and Melissa Farley to organize a 2-year feminist rampage against *Penthouse* in nine states. More than 100 women participants in the rampage were arrested for their civil disobedience activities (Farley, 1992).

Some of the book titles presented historical periods of abuse as if they were sexually stimulating, for example, the enslavement of African-Americans—"The Heiress' Black Slave Boy," "Her Non-White Master"—and the genocide of Jews—"Gestapo Lust Slave," "Nazi Sex Captives."

The magazine titles are much the same as those used on books. A few examples of particularly racist titles include "Jungle Babies," "Wet, Wild and Black," "Black Mother Fucker," "Geisha Twat," "Hot Asian Asses," "Oriental Pussy," and "Oriental Bondage."

Dorchen Leidholdt points out that "pornography contains a racial hierarchy in which women are rated as prized objects or despised objects according to their color" (1981, p. 20). Nevertheless, Hugh Hefner ignorantly boasted "that portraying women of color as sex objects to a predominantly white male readership is a radical development that shows *Playboy's* social conscience" (Leidholdt, 1981, p. 20). Gardner perceives *Playboy's* inclusion of African-American women as follows:

So, Black women have been elevated from the status of whore to "Playmate." Now white boys can put them in *Playboy* without damaging the magazine's respectability too much (though after the first appearance of Black women in *Playboy*, there were some angry letters to the editor saying "get them niggers out." (1980, p. 113)

The following section presents a content analysis of eight books that exemplify the racism and violence against women prevalent in such "literature." These eight books represent literally thousands of books that are presumably read regularly by thousands of men in the United States, and of course, by men in other countries as well.

Soul Slave (Anonymous, 1981b) is one of a series of "Punishment Books" that presents violent sexual attacks as pleasurable for the women. A 16-year-old African-American woman is portrayed in *Soul Slave* as the willing victim of her white master. The following passages are typical examples of the contents of this book.

Rance Godwin leaned over and drove his fist right into my lower stomach. I jerked and sighed when he gave me that blow, and I listened to the words that he had to say to me. "I told you to get naked, you nigger slut," he said. And I knew then that, no matter how much I loved the pain, I would have to get naked. (p. 22)

Soul Slave is filled with examples of this kind of masochism. The "hero" commands his "soul slave":

"Say that you like it. I know that you do. There is nothing that a nigger girl likes more than being hit by a white man." And I did not know if the feelings that I had would be like the feelings that all nigger girls had, but I did know that I did like it. (p. 71)

The author implies that the woman's pain is special because it is inflicted on an African-American woman by a white man. The derogatory term "nigger" is used approximately 245 times in the 180-page book. This word is frequently put in the mouth of the young woman to describe herself and other African-Americans, and she is always depicted as enjoying it. For example, "Rance looked down at me and said, 'Get naked, Nigger!' And these words were like the greatest poetry in the world to me" (1981, p. 20).

A second book entitled *Black Head Nurse* (Dakin, 1977), is a compilation of sexual encounters between patients, nurses, and doctors in a Harlem hospital. Interracial sex is presumed to constitute evidence that racial or sexual discrimination is not a problem. "In this hospital there is no discrimination. . . . Black nurses, white doctors, black doctors, white patients. It's all the same when the great equalizer Sex comes into play" (p. 34). Absurd as this statement is, it is widely believed that sexual unions nullify sexism and racism.

For example, "It just blew their minds to see this white chick on her knees begging that black dude to give her a little" (p. 142). One of the messages here is that it is extraordinary for a white woman to beg an African-American man for sex. On the other hand, African-American women are frequently portrayed in pornographic literature as begging white men for sex. For example, "Sucking on this fancy white doctor's cock was certainly living the good life. No one could talk her out of that" (p. 178).

The stereotypically tough, powerful, African-American woman is played out in *Black Head Nurse*: "Up in the Harlem hospitals black nurses rule" (p. 34). The most powerful African-American women are portrayed as physically aggressive dykes. For example, the sadistic head nurse is depicted as whipping her nurses and as seducing another young woman.

Black Head Nurse presents other stereotypes about African-American life. For example, this is how the author describes the success story of an African-American doctor:

He had worked his way through one of the toughest medical schools in the East and his mother hadn't even scrubbed floors! Of course, she had to push a lot of drugs and fuck a lot, but even Scott knew that some sacrifice was in order. After all, he had forfeited a lot of good times himself by studying.

The author also normalizes notions of sexually promiscuous African-American children. For example, a 13-year-old African-American female patient, the leader of a gang of girls who thrive on sex, is portrayed as propositioning an African-American doctor for a blow job. He eventually satisfies her wishes. In another case an African-American madam recalls her childhood: "She remembered her first sexual experiences as a small child in a crowded bedroom where all her brothers and sisters slept together. Already at the age of ten she was an expert at blowing her brothers off and eating out her sisters" (p. 175).

Abuse: Black and Battered (Anonymous, 1981a) is described as a collection of "true" case studies based on "Dr. Lamb's" interviews with eight African-

American women. Violent sexual attacks are vividly described in coarse and racist language in all of these stories. They begin with a description of the woman's skin color, so important in this racist country. For example, one woman is depicted as a mulatto, whose "skin is an incredible light cream color." And, "Ellie is a short, attractive black woman, whose skin is a lovely cream shade" (p. 5). "Shari is a very dark-skinned black girl . . ." (p. 22). Some descriptions focus on other ethnicity-related features of physical appearance. For example, "Her nose is flat and her nostrils are large, yet her lips are thin and sleek looking."

The first woman portrayed in these fake case studies observed after her alcoholic African-American husband raped her, "I thought he was letting me go, but you can bet no drunk nigger was gonna do that." In the second case, the woman gives a lengthy, gory description of watching her African-American father raping her mother. He and his friends later rape her when she is 16 years old. Four other cases also depict young girls observing their fathers raping their mothers.

In one particularly racist story, a young girl watches her white father having a positive sexual encounter with her mother. After his death, her mother remarries an African-American man who forces her into violent sexual acts. The mulatto daughter is later gang raped in school by a group of African-American girls and, at another time, by a gang of African-American boys, because she is a "half-nigger." When she gets out of the ghetto by going to college, she has a wonderful sexual relationship with a blonde college man.

The fourth story portrays a girl who is repeatedly raped and gang raped by her father and three brothers. In three other stories, the women have been raped as children or as young teenagers by their African-American fathers, other African American male family members, or male friends of their fathers. In one case a man is described as watching his father rape his mother. His mother then rapes him after his father dies.

The last interview depicts a woman who becomes a prostitute after she was raped by her father and by a gang of African-American men. She blames the ghetto, not the racist social structure, for all this violence: "So blow it up. . . Just get it off the fucking face of the earth and save other ghetto girls from the shit we're put through" (Anonymous, 1981, p. 177). As is typical in pornography, all the perpetrators of sexual violence in these "case studies" escape punishment.

In *Black Ghetto Teens* (Marr, 1977), teenage African-American girls are depicted as thriving on "stealing, lying, and fucking those rich white dudes who come to the city looking for some nice Black meat" (p. 4). An African-American woman in *Soul Food* is raped by three white men. "He got to his feet and grabbed the black girl by her hair. He forced his thick, white cock into her mouth" (Berry, 1978, p. 21). As the pornography industry keeps broadcasting to the world, the victim ends up enjoying the rape: "She had gained some confidence from having sex [sic] with the three men." The woman tells her rapists, "'You really have taught me something,' Pearl laughed. . . . 'It can be fun. My ex asked me to do things like this and I always told Bruce 'no way' " Rape as a liberating experience for women is a popular male fantasy in pornography.

Another common racist and sexist myth about African-American women is articulated in *Soul Food*. One of the white rapists explains:

"I was curious to know what it would be like to screw a black girl," he told her. "I've heard some black women are more lewd and animalistic." "Were they right?" Pearl asked anxiously. Throwing his arms around her, Mike assured her that she was all he had hoped for and more.

After another man's first "screw" with an African-American woman, he compliments her on her "animal lustiness." In several other encounters with white men, African-American women's "animalistic lust," sexual prowess, and desire for pain are stressed.

In *Animal Sex Among Black Women* (Washington, 1983), the case study fabrication is used again, even including a bibliography listing other pornography books about sex with animals. This particular book presents five stories of African-American women having voluntary or coerced sexual encounters with animals. In one fantasy, a go-go dancer is coerced by two African-American men into having sex with a dog. In another, an African-American woman finds comfort in sex with a German shepherd after being dumped by a white man. "All of a sudden I felt a sense of belonging. I had found someone who needed me," she said of her new pet (p. 74). Later, she sees her need for the dog as punishment: "I guess it serves me right for fucking around with a white guy. . . . If I was going to fuck with a guy, it should have been a black guy, not some white stud like Gary" (pp. 80-81).

In a third fantasy, a 31-year-old twice-divorced dental assistant has sex with an African-American ex-fighter, and then has sex with her male cat. Another go-go dancer is paid by an African-American man to have sex with him and his Doberman. And finally, after a 34-year-old divorcee meets a white woman at a bar, she goes home to have sex with her and her Dalmatian.

In the 160-page *Black Fashion Model* (Wilson, 1978), the word "black" is used 155 times to describe people, "white" 50 times, and "Negress" eight times. As usual, the African-American rape victims end up loving the abuse. One victim's thoughts as she is forced to have oral sex with a man are described as follows: "I must be the worst little nigger girl in the entire city. . . . Here I am sucking this man's cock like a tramp . . . and worst of all, I'm enjoying it."

And again, the fact that the woman was African-American is portrayed as rendering the rape all the more gratifying for her white rapist: "It was twice as exciting to him because she was black and he was white." As consumers of pornography often do not know what is true and what is false about female sexuality, particularly the sexuality of women of color, myths like this one probably encourage some white men to rape African-American women in search of the heightened gratification described (for example, see Russell, 1975, pp. 129-140).

One blatantly anti-Semitic book, *Sluts of the S.S.* (Anonymous, 1979), uses the torture of Jewish women as its source of excitement. This book starts

with a description of Rachel's first experience of intercourse with her Jewish boyfriend. The author emphasizes the relationship between sex and ethnicity: "Fuck me," Rachel whispered. "Fuck me, Aaron. I want to feel your hard Jewish cock inside me. Take me. Take me now." (p. 8).

Throughout the book there are rapes, killings, as well as non-violent sex. In the rapes by Nazis, Jewish women are referred to as "Jewish dog," "Jewish whore," "Yiddish swine," "Jewish slut," and so forth, while the Nazis refer to themselves as members of the master race. " 'Whore,' he yelled. 'You will love the cock of your master.' "

There are especially violent scenes of Jewish women being kicked to death, raped anally, forced to eat human excrement, and being killed by dogs. "Filthy Jewish slut," he barked. "Drink my Nazi piss, you little pig" (p. 106). And:

She sucked off the cum and blood and shit from his dick as he pounded it into her throat. She gagged at the taste and at the force with which he was fucking her face. He let go with a stream of hot piss and nearly drowned her as he filled her mouth with his hot yellow piss stream choking her as she tried to swallow it. "Human toilet," he sneered. . . . (p. 107)

A relationship between a Nazi man and a Jewish woman is portrayed in the midst of all this violence. It begins when she is imprisoned as a prostitute for Nazis and he pays to have sex with her. She likes him and becomes the classic willing victim, no longer "enslaved." But their relationship turns violent when he sees her being forced to eat shit by another Nazi. In reaction to her "inherent dirtiness," he sets out to kill and rape Jews: "Hans could not wait to turn his dogs loose on a pack of helpless, cowering, filthy Jews" (p. 123). For her part, she goes out at night to lure Nazi men into dark corners for sex—then slits their throats instead.

Sluts of the S.S. is a series of explicit descriptions of sexual interactions—warped, violent, and sometimes "loving." It is written to excite the reader with the violence, which is portrayed as being highly pleasurable. The Jewish woman ends up needing and wanting the Nazi man despite the fact that he treated her perversely and physically assaulted her. According to this tale, she was as much at "fault" as he was, and in the end they were *both* able to forgive and forget.

CONCLUSION

This study's main purpose was to document the way different ethnic groups are portrayed in pornography. No comparable studies have been undertaken, to our knowledge.

The content analysis of seven pornography books about African-Americans shows that they were depicted in a variety of derogatory and stereotypical ways—as animalistic, incapable of self-control, sexually depraved, impulsive, unclean, and so forth. This kind of pornography is likely to foster

racist-sexist stereotypes as well as racist-sexist behavior, including sexual abuse and sexual violence against African-American girls and women. Similarly, anti-Semitic pornography is likely to foster anti-Semitic sexism as well as sexual violence against Jewish girls and women. Future studies should include books portraying a greater variety of people of color, as well as whites.

An important unanswered question is why the liberal and radical community, as well as people of color who are not part of this community, appear to be totally unconcerned about the racism in pornographic materials in contrast to their concern about other manifestations of racism, such as those in ads, literature, media, verbal statements, and so on. If it is due to ignorance, then bringing the virulent racism in pornography to people's attention, as we have done in this chapter, will hopefully shock them into action.

Unfortunately, we think there is a more consequential explanation for this apathy about racist pornography. The combination of sex and racism appears to blunt people's response to pornographic racism just as the combination of sex and violence appears to dull concern about the consequences of violent pornography.

Teish explains the lack of reaction by African-American women as follows: "Pornography is a branch of the media that Black-activist feminists have considered a 'white market' " (1980, p. 117). Many others have shared the perception that pornography has little relevance for people of color ever since the President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography reported that the buyers of pornography were "predominantly white, middle-class, middle-aged males" (1970). While not necessarily contradicting this view, Gardner nevertheless maintains that:

The Black man, like the white man, is buying pornography. He is beating, raping, and murdering all kinds of women. Black women are going to have to deal with him on this. But when we do, we must deal with the Black man as a Black man, not as a white man. In this country it is the *white* man who is producing pornography, and it is the *white* man who is profiting from it. (1980, p. 113).

Dorchen Leidholdt offers two other reasons why the liberal left has been, and continues to be, indifferent to racism in pornography.

First, in liberal ideology there is an invisible boundary separating the public and political from the personal and sexual. Whereas liberals readily deplore inequality and injustice in the public sector, the private sphere—and sexual relationships in particular—are sacrosanct. Radical feminists' insistence that the personal is political and that public life grows out of private, sexual interactions has been ignored or denied. Second, some "progressive" men have not simply ignored pornography's racism, they have incorporated it into their personal sexual repertoires. (1981, p. 20)

Whatever the best explanations turn out to be, it is vital that people start to question their old assumptions about pornography, including racist pornography. Addressing African-American activists in particular, Teish recommended in 1980 that the "clearly ignored" area of pornography deserves further investigation (p. 117). The liberal, radical, and feminist communities must recognize the glaring contradiction in being concerned about the destructive effects of racism and outraged by all manifestations of it—except when it appears in pornography.

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