

**‘Pornography Is What the End of the World Looks Like’**

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By Chris Hedges



A scene from “Fifty Shades of Grey.” ([YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfZWFDs0LxA))

BOSTON—“Fifty Shades of Grey,” the book and the movie, is a celebration of the sadism that dominates nearly every aspect of American culture and lies at the core of pornography and global capitalism. It glorifies our dehumanization of women. It champions a world devoid of compassion, empathy and love. It eroticizes hypermasculine power that carries out the abuse, degradation, humiliation and torture of women whose personalities have been removed, whose only desire is to debase themselves in the service of male lust. The film, like [“American Sniper,”](http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/killing_ragheads_for_jesus_20150125) unquestioningly accepts a predatory world where the weak and the vulnerable are objects to exploit while the powerful are narcissistic and violent demigods. It blesses this capitalist hell as natural and good.

“Pornography,” [Robert Jensen](http://robertwjensen.org/) writes, “is what the end of the world looks like.”

We are blinded by self-destructive fantasy. An array of amusements and spectacles, including TV “reality” shows, huge sporting events, social media, porn (which earns at least twice what Hollywood movies generate), alluring luxury products, drugs, alcohol and magic Jesus, offers enticing exit doors from reality. We yearn to be rich, powerful and celebrities. And those we must trample to build our pathetic little empires are seen as deserving their fate. That nearly all of us will never attain these ambitions is emblematic of our collective self-delusion and the effectiveness of a culture awash in manipulation and lies.

Porn seeks to eroticize this sadism. In porn women are paid to repeat the mantra *“I am a cunt. I am a bitch. I am a whore. I am a slut. Fuck me hard with your big cock.”* They plead to be physically abused. Porn caters to degrading racist stereotypes. Black men are sexually potent beasts stalking white women. Black women have a raw, primitive lust. Latin women are sultry and hotblooded. Asian women are meek, sexually submissive geishas. In porn, human imperfections do not exist. The oversized silicone breasts, the pouting, gel-inflated lips, the bodies sculpted by plastic surgeons, the drug-induced erections that never subside and the shaved pubic regions—which cater to porn’s pedophilia—turn performers into pieces of plastic. Smell, sweat, breath, heartbeats and touch are erased along with tenderness. Women in porn are packaged commodities. They are pleasure dolls and sexual puppets. They are stripped of true emotions. Porn is not about sex, if one defines sex as a mutual act between two partners, but about masturbation, a solitary auto-arousal devoid of intimacy and love. The cult of the self—that is the essence of porn—lies at the core of corporate culture. Porn, like global capitalism, is where human beings are sent to die.

There are few people on the left who grasp the immense danger of allowing pornography to replace intimacy, sex and love. Much of the left believes that pornography is about free speech, as if it is unacceptable to financially exploit and physically abuse a woman in a sweatshop in China but acceptable to do so on the set of a porn film, as if torture is wrong in Abu Ghraib, where prisoners were sexually humiliated and abused as if they were on a porn set, but permissible on commercial porn sites.

A new wave of feminists, who have betrayed the iconic work of radicals such as [Andrea Dworkin](http://www.biography.com/people/andrea-dworkin-38425), defends porn as a form of sexual liberation and self-empowerment. These “feminists,” grounded in [Michel Foucault](http://www.iep.utm.edu/foucault/) and [Judith Butler](http://www.egs.edu/faculty/judith-butler/biography/), are stunted products of neoliberalism and postmodernism. Feminism, for them, is no longer about the liberation of women who are oppressed; it is defined by a handful of women who are successful, powerful and wealthy—or, as in the case of “Fifty Shades of Grey,” able to snag a rich and powerful man. A woman wrote the “Fifty Shades” book, as well as the screenplay. A woman directed the film. A woman studio head bought the movie. This collusion by women is part of the internalization of oppression and sexual violence that have their roots in porn. Dworkin understood. She wrote that “the new pornography is a vast graveyard where the Left has gone to die. The Left cannot have its whores and its politics too.”

I met [Gail Dines](http://gaildines.com/), one of the most important radicals in the country, in a small cafe in Boston on Tuesday. She is the author of [“Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality”](http://www.powells.com/biblio/1-9780807001547-0) and a professor of sociology and women’s studies at Wheelock College. Dines, along with a handful of others including Jensen, fearlessly decry a culture that is as depraved as Caligula’s Rome.

“The porn industry has hijacked the sexuality of an entire culture and is laying waste to a whole generation of boys,” she warned. “And when you lay waste to a generation of boys, you lay waste to a generation of girls.”

“When you fight porn you fight global capitalism,” she said. “The venture capitalists, the banks, the credit card companies are all in this feeding chain. This is why you never see anti-porn stories. The media is implicated. It is financially in bed with these companies. Porn is part of this. Porn tells us we have nothing left as human beings—boundaries, integrity, desire, creativity and authenticity. Women are reduced to three orifices and two hands. Porn is woven into the corporate destruction of intimacy and connectedness, and this includes connectedness to the earth. If we were a society where we were whole, connected human beings in real communities, then we would not be able to look at porn. We would not be able to watch another human being tortured.”

“If you are going to give a tiny percent of the world the vast majority of the goodies, you better make sure you have a good ideological system in place that legitimizes why everyone else is suffering economically,” she said. “This is what porn does. Porn tells you that material inequality between women and men is not the result of an economic system. It is biologically based. And women, being whores and bitches and only good for sex, don’t deserve full equality. Porn is the ideological mouthpiece that legitimizes our material system of inequality. Porn is to patriarchy what the media is to capitalism.”

To keep the legions of easily bored male viewers aroused, porn makers produce videos that are increasingly violent and debasing. Extreme Associates, which specializes in graphic rape scenes, along with JM Productions, promotes the very real pain endured by women on its sets. JM Productions pioneered “aggressive throat fucking” or “face fucking” videos such as the “Gag Factor” series, in which women gag and often vomit. It ushered in “swirlies,” in which the male performer dunks the woman’s head into a toilet after sex and then flushes. The company promises, “Every whore gets the swirlies treatment. Fuck her, then flush her.” Repeated and violent anal penetration triggers anal prolapse, a condition in which the inner walls of a woman’s rectum collapse and protrude from her anus. This is called “rosebudding.” Some women, penetrated repeatedly by numerous men on porn shoots, often after taking handfuls of painkillers, require anal and vaginal reconstructive surgery. Female performers may suffer from sexually transmitted diseases and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). And with porn mainstreamed—some porn video participants are treated like film celebrities by talk show hosts such as Oprah and Howard Stern—the behavior promoted by porn, including stripping, promiscuity, S&M and exhibitionism, has become chic. Porn also sets the standard for female beauty and female comportment. And this has had terrifying consequences for girls.

“Women are told in our society they have two choices,” Dines said. “They are either fuckable or invisible. To be fuckable means to conform to the porn culture, to look hot, be submissive and do what the man wants. That’s the only way you get visibility. You cannot ask adolescent girls, who are dying for visibility, to choose invisibility.”

None of this, Dines pointed out, was by accident. Porn grew out of the commodity culture, the need by corporate capitalists to sell products.

“In post-Second-World-War America you have the emergence of a middle class with a disposable income,” she said. “The only trouble is that this group was born to parents who had been through a depression and a war. They did not know how to spend. They only knew how to save. What [the capitalists] needed to jump-start the economy was to get people to spend money on stuff they did not need. For women they brought in the television soaps. One of the reasons the ranch house was developed was because [families] only had one television. The television was in the living room and women spent a lot of time in the kitchen. You had to devise a house where she could watch television from the kitchen. She was being taught.”

“But who was teaching the men how to spend money?” she went on. “It was Playboy [Magazine]. This was the brilliance of Hugh Hefner. He understood that you don’t just commodify sexuality, you sexualize commodities. The promise that Playboy held out was not the girls or the women, it was that if you buy at this level, if you consume at the level Playboy tells you to, then you will get the prize, which is the women. The step that was crucial to getting the prize was the consumption of commodities. He wrapped porn, which sexualized and commoditized women’s bodies, in an upper-middle-class blanket. He gave it a veneer of respectability.”

The VCR, the DVD and, later, the Internet allowed porn to be pumped into individual homes. The glossy, still images of Playboy, Penthouse and Hustler became tame, even quaint. America, and much of the rest of the world, became pornified. The income of the global porn industry is estimated at $96 billion, with the United States market worth about $13 billion. There are, Dines writes, “420 million Internet porn pages, 4.2 million porn Web sites, and 68 million search engine requests for porn daily.” [To see excerpts from Dines’ book, [click here](https://books.google.com/books?id=x9CMJ_zY4WUC&printsec=frontcover&dq=pornland&hl=en&sa=X&ei=q__gVNCiGIW7ogSgk4LgDg&ved=0CB8Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=pornland&f=false).]

Along with the rise of pornography there has been an explosion in sex-related violence, including domestic abuse, rape and gang rape. A rape is reported every 6.2 minutes in the United States, but the estimated total, taking into account unreported assaults, is perhaps five times higher, as Rebecca Solnit points out in her book [“Men Explain Things to Me.”](http://www.powells.com/biblio/62-9781608464661-0)

“So many men murder their partners and former partners that we have well over a thousand homicides of that kind a year—meaning that every three years the death toll tops 9/11’s casualties, though no one declares a war on this particular kind of terror,” Solnit writes.

Porn, meanwhile, is ever more accessible.

“With a mobile phone you can deliver porn to men who live in highly concentrated neighborhoods in Brazil and India,” Dines said. “If you have one laptop in the family, the man can’t sit in the middle of the room and jerk off to it. With a phone, porn becomes portable. The average kid gets his porn through the mobile phone.”

The old porn industry, which found its profits in movies, is dead. The points of production no longer generate profits. The distributors of porn make the money. And one distributor, MindGeek, a global IT company, dominates porn distribution. Free porn is used on the Internet as bait by MindGeek to lure viewers to pay-per-view porn sites. Most users are adolescent boys. It is, Dines said, “like handing out cigarettes outside of a middle school. You get them addicted.”

“Around the ages of 12 to 15 you are developing your sexual template,” she said. “You get [the boys] when they are beginning to construct their sexual identity. You get them for life. If you begin by jerking off to cruel, hardcore, violent porn then you are not going to want intimacy and connection. Studies are showing that boys are losing interest in sex with real women. They can’t sustain erections with real women. In porn there is no making love. It is about making hate. He despises her. He is revolted and disgusted by her. If you bleed out the love you have to fill it with something to make it interesting. They fill it with violence, degradation, cruelty and hate. And that also gets boring. So you have to keep ratcheting it up. Men get off in porn from women being submissive. Who is more submissive than children? The inevitable route of all porn is child porn. And this is why organizations that fight child porn and do not fight adult porn are making a huge mistake.”

The abuse inherent in pornography goes unquestioned in large part by both men and women. Look at the movie ticket sales for “Fifty Shades of Grey,” which opened the day before Valentine’s Day and is expected to [take in up to $90 million](http://deadline.com/2015/02/fifty-shades-of-grey-kingsman-weekend-box-office-1201372952/) over the four-day weekend (which includes Presidents Day on Monday).

“Pornography has socialized a generation of men into watching sexual torture,” Dines said. “You are not born with that capacity. You have to be trained into it. Just like you train soldiers to kill. If you are going to carry out violence against a group you have to dehumanize them. It is an old method. Jews become kikes. Blacks become niggers. Women become cunts. And no one turns women into cunts better than porn.”