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SP.601J / 17.006J / 17.007J / 24.237J Feminist Theory  
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Prof. Elizabeth Wood  
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**Discussion 7: Pornography, Rape, and the Politics of Consent**

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**General Discussion:**

- What are the intersecting issues of prostitution, pornography, and rape?
- What is the link between men and women in prostitution? What kind of exchange is it?
- What is the link between men and women in rape? What is the power dynamic?
- What is the link in pornography?
- How does the producer/consumer/goods exchange differ in prostitution, rape and pornography?
- How does the threat to women differ in prostitution, pornography and rape?
- In each of these cases who should be punished, if anyone?
- What are speech acts?
- How do we view speech acts?
- Who speaks when? Is there a script?
- How does dominance play a part in speech?
- If prostitution is a business transaction, is a woman subordinated? Is she physically and mentally scarred? How do we weigh such damages in court? Can we?
- How has our society undergone a cultural shift when prosecuting rape cases in court? Is what the victim was wearing taken into account? Her past sexual history?
- Is prostitution at the core or on the fringe of the feminist movement? Why?
- Is there discord amongst feminist political thinkers, and the general public, regarding prostitution and pornography?

**Refer to Catharine MacKinnon's article, "Sex and Violence: A Perspective":**

- Does MacKinnon view all women as victims during heterosexual intercourse?
- Is all heterosexual sex, therefore, a form of male dominance?
- Referring to MacKinnon's thoughts on the male gaze, who is above/below, dressed/undressed, acting/receiving? How do these images affect our understanding of gender?

**Refer to John Stoltenberg's article, "Confronting Pornography as a Civil Rights Issue":**

- Refer to the MacKinnon/Dworkin Ordinance clauses in the article, why would the political right support the ordinance?
- Do MacKinnon/Dworkin outline the need for law courts to protect women because of male dominance? Does this mean that women are always weaker, and subordinated?
- How does Lisa Duggan counteract this argument? (Refer to her article, "False Promises: Feminist Antipornography Legislation")
- Does censorship of pornography inhibit the female sexual expression?
- How does MacKinnon justify the risk of censorship for the protection of women?

- Does MacKinnon see censorship as a risk? Or rather given that porn perpetuates violence, do we need to severely limit porn?
- What is the classic counterargument for MacKinnon's argument of perpetuated violence?
- Can we ever prove the causality of a rape or other acts of violence towards women?
- What could be other contributing factors in society, which lead to male violence against women?
- Does MacKinnon argue that women are seen as objects, under the scrutiny of the male gaze all the time? If so, how does she justify this argument?
- Yet, does this assume a particular type of porn? Would Duggan argue that women are always sex objects in porn?
- How do we define consent? Does MacKinnon/Dworkin define it too broadly in the ordinance?

### **Politics of Consent:**

- Can one ever know if a woman consented to prostitution or to a lead in a porno film? Do women consent to rape by inaction?
- In the courts, how can one be sure that the woman did not consent, make money, and then decide to argue she was coerced in an attempt to make more money?
- When are women sufficiently vulnerable that one can argue a contract was made under duress?
- Furthermore, if one does conclude that the pornography has the power to perpetuate violence by the male internalization of what is real/acceptable, does that mean that the book or video store that sold the porn is responsible? Or are the producers, writers, editors, publishing houses, and movie studios responsible?
- Who is accountable? The prostitute? The porn star?
- Is the 'money for sex' nexus demeaning for men and women, only men, or only women? If you argue that one sex is more shamed than the other, what is your justification?

### **Prostitution/Porn in society:**

- Do prostitutes who work the high-end escort-rings, who tend to be white and middle-class make up the majority of prostitutes? Does one assume that they are paid fairly and are not abused? Is this assumption accurate?
- Why do porn shops appear in poor neighborhoods? How does the negative stereotype of porn shops lead to the hidden nature of pornography amongst the upper-middle class?
- Is prostitution overlooked in neighborhoods? Which would be of more concern for a neighbor with young kids, drugs or prostitutes?
- Would legalizing prostitution give prostitutes more autonomy, or would it lead to an increase in human trafficking?
- How do women mentally suffer from the stress of prostitution/pornography/rape? Post-traumatic stress disorder? Substance abuse?
- Does the military support prostitution in the barracks?
- What is wrong with a man referring to pornography, with the words, "I used them"? Who is being used?

### **Refer to Susan Marcus' article, "Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention":**

- What is a script? How does a woman adhere to or deviate from “the script”?
- Does Marcus assume that women need to be prepared for rape? Is this a good perspective?
- Fundamentally, should women be responsible for being prepared for rape?
- How has socialization affected women’s roles in rape situations today? Is a woman ashamed after she is raped? Does the community devalue her because of the incident?

**Refer to Rae Langton’s article, “Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts”:**

- Are women silenced by pornography?
- Does silencing occur because of our society’s notion that paid sex is fair sex?
- When a woman is paid for sex does she have power? Is there a threat that her monetary gains will lead to independence?
- To what extent do women have a voice in porn?
- How do words have power? How is the act of pornography a reflection of the speech act?
- If the porn star has a voice, is it authoritative? If not, who has the authoritative voice?
- How is fear expressed in the speech act?

**Movie: Home for Little Wanderers**

- Is prostitution portrayed as something glamorous?
- When the women in the film speak of using substances, what were they implying about their motivations? Was it to escape?
- Where did the women receive the most compliments?
- What types of lies did pimps promise these women?
- How are young girls recruited?
- Did the women speak of living in a world of self-hate, and worthlessness?
- What do you think caused them to live in such a negative headspace?
- Do the prostitutes choose the pimp, or vice versa?
- Did the women get beaten often? Why?
- How did these women escape the life of tricks on the street?
- Did the women speak of having future aspirations when they were prostitutes?
- Do the law enforcement officers get corrupted? Why? How?