

AN OPEN LENS MEDIA PRODUCTION

The Price of Pleasure

Pornography, Sexuality & Relationships

Running Time: 55 minutes

For interviews or to arrange speaking engagements, please contact:
Chyng Sun | EMAIL chyng.sun@nyu.edu

For high-resolution images from the film, visit:
www.mediaed.org.

PRAISE FOR *THE PRICE OF PLEASURE*

"When we discuss pornography in my classes, we always begin with what seem to be the wrong conversations -- the actress's choices; no harm, no foul; being pro-porn is just being pro-sex; men don't have to be rapists to like it -- always defensive and dishonest. I've been waiting for a film that was neither sanctimoniously scolding nor callously celebratory. And finally, there is *The Price of Pleasure* -- a film to help us really "see" what we have been looking at, and to enable us, finally, to talk about how pornography informs our actual lives. It's powerful, and I will use it immediately in my classes."

- Michael Kimmel / Professor of Sociology / SUNY Stony Brook

"Deeply disturbing but profoundly important."

- Jean Kilbourne / Creator, *Killing Us Softly 3* / Author, *So Sexy So Soon*

"Most young men and women will find this the kind of provocative documentary that will stimulate constructive conversation and motivation to "do something." Every college campus and community theater should screen this film along with a facilitated discussion. Pornography is endemic, but its destructive role in so many relationships is usually invisible. By making clear why an effective response is more needed than ever, *The Price of Pleasure* is a vital agent for change."

- Judy Norsigian / Executive Director of *Our Bodies Ourselves*

"An intense, powerful documentary that will open up painful but necessary discussions about pornography's role in shaping our identities, our relationships, and our culture."

- Rebecca Whisnant / Associate Professor of Philosophy / Director of Women's and Gender Studies / University of Dayton

"With original research, footage of popular pornographic films, insights from academic experts, interviews with sex workers and even pornographers, *The Price of Pleasure* educates viewers about the prevalence and increasingly violent content of contemporary pornography. Advocates of sexual freedom, as well as activists committed to ending sexual exploitation against women, find common cause in Chyng Sun's compelling argument: contemporary pornographic films illustrate conventional, not deviant, attitudes about women's sexuality. Viewer alert: gazing through the pornographic worldview will turn your stomach. Eat lightly before you watch this!"

- Bernadette Barton / Associate Professor of Sociology and Women's Studies / Morehead State University / Author of *Stripped: Inside the Lives of Exotic Dancers*

"*The Price of Pleasure* goes a long way toward explaining the headline topics and a long way toward revealing the deeper issues involved. As such, it makes a valuable contribution to clarifying the current confusion that exists around pornography in today's society."

- Susan Quilliam / *Sex Education*

"On the pro-pornography side, interviewees include entrepreneurs who profit from porn (including co-eds who publish explicit magazines and make hardcore films), lobbyists instrumental in securing legal protection for pornographers, and consumers who freely admit they enjoy porn. On the other side, interviewees include scholars and pop culture critics who talk about porn's objectification of women, the unsettling fact that violence against women is often employed as a means of arousal, and the observation that some individuals find their ability to develop gratifying relationships in the real world impaired by their addition to porn. Sure to provoke heated discussion..."

- *Video Librarian*

"Abandoning the tired and often cyclical rhetoric on whether pornography is "right or wrong," *The Price of Pleasure* investigates the collision of pornography, sexuality, and relationships. Instead of wagging a finger at the billion dollar industry from an academic pulpit, this film features a diverse group of college students, professionals, media makers, distributors, consumers, and adult performers to expose a panoramic and dizzying look at how pornography affects our lives and relationships. ... *The Price of Pleasure* holds immense possibility for transformative dialogue. The questions raised are almost too difficult to hear, but once they are voiced they are too impossible to ignore."

- *Lisa Factora-Borchers | Feminist Review*

"With the pornography industry pushing its way into the mainstream media at an alarming rate, *The Price of Pleasure* has been released at a critical time. *The Price of Pleasure* shows us what pornography is and how the pornography industry operates - up close and free of industry glorification, distortions and lies... *The Price of Pleasure* is a profound and significant film. It should be viewed by as many people as possible, especially parents, students, teachers, and activists committed to creating a more socially just world. The film will be eye opening to those who are learning about the pornography industry for the first time as well as those who are avid organizers against sexual exploitation. Organize a film screening and hold a discussion afterwards; ask your library to order a copy; share it with family, friends, educators, counselors, social workers, and elected officials."

- *Garine Roubinian | Rain and Thunder*

"*The Price of Pleasure* moves past simple arguments around free speech and instead pushes the viewer to think about the impact that consumption of hateful imagery can have in a society already steeped in rape culture. ...The film does serve as a catalyst for frank discussion about the impact of pornography and lays the foundation on which future activism can be built."

- *Rachel Durchslag | Sexual Assault Report*

"...[P]rovides a compelling argument, from a leftist perspective, that culturally pervasive pornography is detrimental to interpersonal sexual relationships... Showing this documentary in a classroom setting is almost sure to provoke a lively discussion."

- *Donald Palumbo | The Journal of American Culture*

"What makes this documentary innovative is that it incorporates two seemingly disparate ideas about the effects of porn on society. One argument is that violent porn objectifies women, leading men to become more violent and aggressive in the bedroom. The documentary features interviews with lawyers, social workers, and everyday men who explicitly draw these connections. The other, seemingly opposite, argument about porn that the directors Chyng Sun and Miguel Picker also make is that because porn desensitizes men from realistic expectations about what sex with women feels like, men become less interested in the real thing, are experiencing more anxiety around their sexuality, and are less able to orgasm and enjoy sex with real women. ...What makes *The Price of Pleasure* effective but also disturbing is its unabashed examination of the pornographic images themselves, and the direct line they draw between profit, the degradation of women, and our views on sexuality in general."
- Leeat Granek | *Films for the Feminist Classroom*

CREDITS

Director & Producer: Miguel Picker, Chyng Sun
Editor: Miguel Picker
Assistant Editor: Michelle Change
Written by: Chyng Sun, Robert Wosnitzer
Associate Producers: Robert Wosnitzer
Post-Production Supervisor: Miguel Picker
Original Music: Miguel Picker
Sound Design: Miguel Picker
Director of Photography: Miguel Picker
Music: Miguel Picker
Motion Graphics: Miguel Picker

UNITED STATES • 2008 • 55 mins • Shot in Mini-DV • Color • BETA/DVD/DVCAM •
NTSC
Aspect Ratio 4:3 • Stereo • In English/English subtitles

FILM SYNOPSIS

Once relegated to the margins of society, pornography has become one of the most visible and profitable sectors of the cultural industries in the United States. It is estimated that the pornography industry's annual revenue has reached \$13 billion. At the same time, the content of pornography has become more aggressive, more overtly sexist and racist.

The film features the voices of consumers, critics, and pornography producers and performers. It is particularly revealing when male pornographers openly discuss their views about women and how men should relate to them, and when male and female porn users candidly discuss the role pornography has played in shaping their sexual imaginations and relationships. Honest and nonjudgmental, the film paints both a nuanced and complex portrait of how pleasure and pain, commerce and power, and liberty and responsibility are intertwined in the most intimate aspects of human relations. At the same time, the film examines the unprecedented role that commercial pornography now occupies in U.S. popular culture. Going beyond the debate of liberal versus conservative so common in the culture, *The Price of Pleasure* provides a holistic understanding of pornography as it debunks common myths about the genre.

The film features interviews with scholars of mass media (Gail Dines and Robert Jensen), economics (Richard Wolff), and psychology (Dr. Ana Bridges); writers on pornography and popular culture (Ariel Levy and Pamela Paul); producers and performers from the pornography industry (John Stagliano, Joanna Angel and Ernest Greene); and a former stripper/porn performer-turned-author (Sarah Katherine Lewis).

ALTERNATE SYNOPSES

Short Synopsis:

Pornography has become mainstream and ubiquitous, but its content has also become more and more violent and degrading. This film examines this troubling trend and how it affects our sexuality and relationships.

Medium Length Synopsis:

Once relegated to the margins of society, pornography has become one of the most visible and profitable sectors of the cultural industries in the United States. It is estimated that the pornography industry's annual revenue has reached \$13 billion. At the same time, the content of pornography has become more aggressive, more overtly sexist and racist. Going beyond the debate of liberal versus conservative, the film features the voices of consumers, critics, and pornography producers and performers. It paints a nuanced portrait of how pleasure and pain, commerce and power, and liberty and responsibility are intertwined in the most intimate parts of our sexual identities and relationships.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS



CHYNG SUN | Producer, Director & Writer

Dr. Chyng Sun is a filmmaker and a Master Teacher of Media Studies at McGhee Liberal Arts, School of Continuing and Professional Studies at New York University. Her research interests include media literacy; race, gender and sexuality in media; and audience research/media effects. With Miguel Picker, Sun produced the documentaries *Mickey Mouse Monopoly: Disney, Childhood and Corporate Power* and *Beyond Good and Evil: Media, Children and Violent Times* (both distributed by the Media Education Foundation).

She has been researching the topic of pornography since the summer of 2004. Together Robert Wosnitzer and two other scholars, Sun designed a large-scale research project on the content of the most-rented pornographic movies of 2005. Her forthcoming book *Fantasies Matter* (working title) will be published by the Peter Lang Publishing Company in 2010.

Filmography (Producer):

Mickey Mouse Monopoly: Disney, Childhood and Corporate Power | 2001

Beyond Good and Evil: Media, Children and Violent Times | 2003



MIGUEL PICKER | Producer, Director & Editor

Miguel Picker worked at WGBH-TV in Boston for over 15 years as an editor. His editing credits include *La Plaza*, *Greater Boston Arts*, and a 52-part national series titled *Destinos*. He also has produced and directed programs for WGBH, including *Como Hacemos*, *Dúo* and *The Early Music Workshop*. He has produced and directed numerous independent projects as well, such as *Francisco Mendéz - The Portrayal of a Cuban Painter* and *A Day in Martha's Vineyard*. Picker is also a musician and composer, and has worked with a wide range of art institutions and public foundations, including PBS, the

Boston Ballet and the New England Conservatory. Picker moved to New York City in the summer of 2004, and his recent projects include editing and music composition/production for the award-winning documentary *The Borinqueneers* (2007), and co-directing and editing *Ulises' Odyssey* (2009), a documentary on Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile in 1970's and its aftermath.

Filmography (Director):

Beyond Good and Evil | 2003

Recorder Power | 2002

Mickey Mouse Monopoly | 2001

Francisco Mendéz - The Portrayal of a Cuban Painter | 1998

Como Hacemos | 1997

A Day in Martha's Vineyard | 1997



ROBERT WOSNITZER | Co-writer & Associate Producer

Robert Wosnitzer is a doctoral student at New York University's Department of Media, Culture and Communication, and an adjunct instructor at NYU's Stern School of Business. He teaches courses in media, business, politics, and globalization. Prior to his academic career, Robert worked in the field of investment banking capital markets, coordinating the trading and placement of debt-related securities for over a decade. In his current research, Robert draws on critical theory to engage the dynamics of cultural and economic globalization. He is doing research on the cultural implications and patterns in relation to microfinance as a circuit of global capital, and its structuring of identity formations.

Robert's research and writing also includes a large-scale content analysis study investigating aggression, authorship, and ideology within popular pornographic videos, co-authored with Drs. Chyng Sun, Erica Scharrer and Ana Bridges; critical analysis of race in the Academy-Award winning film, *Crash*, co-authored with Dr. Robert Jensen; constructions of race and gender in film texts; and critical media pedagogy.

MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION | Distributor & Sales Rep

The non-profit Media Education Foundation (MEF) is the nation's leading producer and distributor of educational videos designed to inspire students and others to reflect critically on the structure of media industries and the content they produce. Founded in 1991, MEF's mission is to answer the challenge posed by the radical and accelerating corporate threat to democracy.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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BIOGRAPHIES

JOANNA ANGEL

Joanna Angel is a director, an adult entertainer, and the owner of the punk-porn site BurningAngel.com. She has directed and starred in *Joanna's Angels*, *Joanna's Angels 2*, and *Porny Monster*.

People are like 'pornography objectifies women'. How do you make a woman into an object? Like what does that even mean? You could do a porn where a girl is getting choked and hit and spit on, the guy's calling her a dirty slut and stuff and that's okay. That can still be feminist, as long as everybody there is in control of what they're doing.

ANNIE CRUZ

Annie Cruz has worked in the pornography industry for 4 years, appearing in numerous adult entertainment videos and television episodes, including *Naughty Newlyweds*, *Sex Games Cancun*, *Family Business*, and *Hunting for Bambi 2*, among others.

"For blowjobs, regular blowjobs, I get three hundred for those. For a girl on girl scene, that's usually six hundred. Me and one guy, that's nine hundred. Me and one guy anal, that's a thousand."

DR. GAIL DINES

Gail Dines received her Ph.D. from Salford University in England. She is Professor of Sociology and Women's Studies at Wheelock College in Boston. Dr. Dines is co-editor of the best-selling media textbook, *Gender, Race, and Class in Media* (2nd edition, Sage, 2002), used in over 200 colleges across the country. She is co-author of *Pornography: The Production and Consumption of Inequality* (Routledge, 1998). Her numerous articles on pornography, the media and violence have appeared in academic journals and books, as well as in magazines and newspapers such as *Newsweek*, *Time*, *Working Woman*, *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *USA Today*, *Daily Mail* (England). Dr. Dines has also been on shows such as Donohue, Sally Jesse Raphael, Entertainment Tonight, and is a frequent guest on radio shows across the country. She is featured in a number of documentary films, including *Strength to Resist: The Media's Impact on Women and Girls* from Cambridge Documentary Films.

"Pornography takes violence against women, and it sexualizes it. And when you sexualize violence against women, you render the violence invisible."

ANA BRIDGES

Dr. Ana Bridges received her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Rhode Island. Her research focuses on the impact of pornography on romantic relationships, Latino mental health service utilization and outcomes, and assessment methodology and clinical decision making. Recent research by Dr. Bridges has been published in the *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* and articles about her research have been featured in popular magazines such as *Psychology Today*.

“Defenders of pornography often state that critics hold up the worst-case examples, most degrading, most violent pornography and talk about why this is harmful. But in fact, pornography is very diverse. Our research team was interested in what people are actually viewing. So we randomly selected videos from a list of best renting videos and that way we were not responsible for choosing which videos to content analyze. Rather, the viewers are choosing which videos to watch, and we are sampling from their choice.”

ERNEST GREENE

Ernest Greene is a director, actor, writer, producer of numerous adult films, including *Nina Hartley's Guide to Bondage Sex*, *Nina Hartley's Guide to the Ultimate Sex Party*, *Nina Hartley's Guide to Porn Stars Sex Secrets*, *Jenna Loves Pain*, *O the Power of Submission*, and many others. He is also the editor of *Taboo* magazine.

“Men are the majority of consumers of pornography. That has changed to a degree at least in years, but it remains fundamentally true that seventy percent of the audience is straight men watching it alone.”

DR. ROBERT JENSEN

Robert Jensen is an associate professor in the School of Journalism and director of the Senior Fellows Honors Program of the College of Communication at the University of Texas at Austin. Jensen joined the UT faculty in 1992 after completing his Ph.D. in media ethics and law in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Minnesota. Prior to his academic career, he worked as a professional journalist for a decade. At UT, Jensen teaches courses in media law, ethics, and politics. In his research, Jensen draws on a variety of critical approaches to media and power. Much of his work has focused on pornography and the radical feminist critique of sexuality and men's violence, and he also has addressed questions of race through a critique of white privilege and institutionalized racism. In addition to teaching and research, Jensen writes for popular media, both alternative and mainstream. His opinion and analytic pieces on such subjects as foreign policy, politics, and race have appeared in papers around the country.

“In pornography, all women are available to all men for sex. But when you leave that pornographic world, you have to enter the real world in which all women are not available to you sexually. My own experience is, knowing that in my head but still feeling my body, knowing that reaction and having to consciously say, ‘I'm not in the pornographic world. I'm in the real world.’ Now I do that consciously trying to resist it. How many men don't resist it?”

ARIEL LEVY

Ariel Levy is a contributing editor at *New York* magazine and author of the book *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*. Her work has appeared in *The Washington Post*, *Vogue*, *Slate*, *Men's Journal* and *Blender*. The video series *Girls Gone Wild* got some searing criticism from Levy after she followed its camera crew for three days, interviewed both the makers of the series and the young women who appeared on the videos, and commented on the series' concept and the alleged debauchery she was

witnessing. For many of the girls Levy spoke with, "bawdy" and "liberated" were synonymous; for them, *Girls Gone Wild* was only one example of something that was happening all across popular culture. In today's culture, Levy writes, the idea of a woman participating in a wet T-shirt contest or being comfortable watching explicit pornography has become a symbol of feminist strength; she says that she was surprised at how many people, both men and women, working for programs such as *Girls Gone Wild* told her that this new "raunchy" culture marked not the *downfall* of feminism but its *triumph*, because it proved that U.S. women have become strong enough to express their sexuality publicly. Levy argues for understanding of why some women have resurrected stereotypes of women's sexuality that the original feminists fought to break free of. "It is worth asking ourselves," she writes, "if this bawdy world of boobs and gams we have resurrected reflects how far we've come, or how far we have left to go."

"I don't think we're over sexualized. I think we're over-commercialized."

SARAH KATHERINE LEWIS

Sarah Katherine Lewis is the author of *Sex and Bacon: Why I Love Things That are Very, Very Bad For Me* (Seal, 2008) and *Indecent: How I Make It and Fake It as a Girl For Hire* (Seal, 2006) and has contributed to several anthologies, including *Fucking Daphne: Mostly True Stories and Fictions* (Seal, 2008). A ten-year veteran of the adult industry in Seattle, Portland, and New Orleans, she now spends her time maintaining her popular blog, at SarahKatherineLewis.com, writing, and playing with food in Seattle, Washington. An outspoken (and often outrageous) feminist activist, she works to promote global revolution and dreams of a world where all women feast like Vikings.

"When your best choice is taking off your clothes and sticking toys in your cunt for money, I think there's a real problem with the labor system."

PAMELA PAUL

Pamela Paul is an author and journalist who writes about social and cultural issues, demographic trends, consumer culture, psychology and health, and family. Her first book, *The Starter Marriage and the Future of Matrimony*, was named one of the best books of 2002 by *The Washington Post*; her second book, *Pornified*, was named one of the best books of 2005 by *The San Francisco Chronicle*. Her latest book, *Parenting, Inc.*, an investigation of the "parenting" business, will be published in April 2008 by Times Books.

"People tend to think that pornography is something that enhances your sex life. But the men that I talked to, even men who were big fans of pornography and happy consumers of it, found that pornography had become to dictate the way that they thought about sex, that they found themselves unable to achieve orgasm during regular intercourse with their partners, and that often they had to replicate scenes or moves from pornography."

DR. RICHARD WOLFF

Richard Wolff is Professor of Economics at University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He is the author of many books and articles, including (with Stephen Resnick) *Class Theory and History: Capitalism and Communism in the U.S.S.R.* (Routledge, 2002) and (with Stephen Resnick) *New Departures in Marxian Theory* (Routledge, 2006).

“Pornography meets a real need that people have to somehow break out of their sexual loneliness, their sexual isolation, their failure to connect sexually with somebody. And as with other basic human needs that get inappropriately dealt with, it becomes an opportunity for private enterprise to come in. And that’s what private enterprises do. They make money off of human needs and wants and desires. And in the process, of course, they begin to shape those needs and desires.”

ELIZABETH WRIGLEY-FIELD (COLLEGE STUDENT)

“I think when people don’t feel like they could actually challenge sexism and fundamentally change the terms on which we’re evaluated, then the reaction is, if you can’t beat sexism, at least you can join it.... But I think it’s actually a huge mistake because in a fundamental way, it’s just giving up on the idea that we could change the terms of how women are thought to be.”

STEPHANIE (COLLEGE STUDENT)

“I was about ten years old, and I found some of my father’s Playboy magazines. I studied and looked at them for a long time. In comparison with them, my mother just looked really flawed and kind of ordinary and ugly, I guess, so I thought, that must be why my dad has these pictures. It’s because my mother isn’t good enough for him.”

GABRIELLE (COLLEGE STUDENT)

“It was just thrown at me from the time that I was twelve or thirteen that you’re obligated to have sex...that’s kind of how you exist as a social being, as a woman.”

GREG (COLLEGE STUDENT)

“[Pornography] is not sexy. This is not sex. This is not how I want to experience sex.”

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT CHYNG SUN

Having grown up in Taiwan, I did not see my first porn film until I was thirty years old, when I came to the U.S. as a graduate student in Boston in 1990.

Contrary to many women being pushed to watch porn by their boyfriends, I had a shy partner who never had the courage to rent a porn video. The few times that I reached for the top shelf at the Video Smith in Brookline to grab a porn video, I had to endure the torturous journey – ignoring other men peering at me out of the corner of their eyes while I was cruising through this off limits section, holding the extra large video box with vivid pictures for everyone to see while I stood in a long check-out line, and then waiting for the clerk to slowly take the video out of its box and put it in a black box which everyone knew was for porn anyway. Although this journey made me descend from a respectable to a fallen woman, there was something thrilling and daring because I was against the constraints set by both Chinese and American patriarchy that disapproved of women's consumption of porn. I figured, if not being allowed to watch porn was part of the sexual repression, then rebelling against it must be liberating and even feminist.

However, I was conflicted when I was watching those on-screen porn women who were often coy, infantilized, indiscriminating of who had sex with them, and they enjoyed whatever was done to them including being overpowered. I asked myself: if these types of images appear in a beer ad, would I immediately call them sexist? So how could I feel liberated by watching sexism? On the other hand, I wondered if I was overanalyzing a medium that was made for sexual stimulation; perhaps this should be the zone that was free of critical examination because sexuality was not rational. Above all, it was too cool to be a girlfriend who was perceived as taboo-breaking and adventurous. Did I really want to ruin the fun? I felt unsettled and didn't really have the knowledge and conceptual tools to think it all through.

It was 15 years later when I decided to make *The Price of Pleasure: Pornography, Sexuality and Relationships*. The Video Smith where I rented the videos was closed down and the internet had revolutionized the production and consumption of pornography, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Based on my own embarrassing experiences in renting porn videos, I can understand how enticing it is to select among endless pornography privately and anonymously, and how that rush can boost the amount one consumes. Growing up in a conservative family, coming from a culture that is sexually repressive for women, and having no stable relationships in most of the years in my twenties, I also understood the attraction of pornography. My personal experiences and my uncompromised feminist politics created tensions and generate questions about pornography that few people from either anti or pro porn sides have engaged. But I think my ambivalence, concerns, and struggles resonated much more with the majority of people because the issues were not black and white.

Before I entered this project, I had been familiar with the radical feminists' anti-

pornography perspectives through reading the articles and books by Gail Dines and Robert Jensen, and through my numerous and intense conversations with them. My first task of working on this film was actually to go study the opposite side. I thought it was very important to understand the strongest pro-porn arguments in order to come up with the most convincing criticism of pornography. In fact, I agreed with such arguments from the porn defenders as: (1) there is indeed hypocrisy in this culture as witnessed by the Federal Communications Commission making such a big deal when Janet Jackson exposed her nipple; (2) this culture seems to be more tolerant toward violence than toward sex, and (3) some slasher films and advertising may have much more troubling messages than the image of two people having hardcore but consensual sex. Furthermore, there is a stigma in this society toward women who perform in pornography that greatly narrows their future career choices and brings shame to their family as well as ostracism by the larger society. But what if the problem lies with our *society* which is closed to portraying and talking about sexuality and intolerant toward people's differences? And what exactly is the harm in working in the pornography industry? Didn't I see interviews of porn stars saying that they loved to have sex on camera and didn't I see Nina Hartley claiming that she is a feminist and had the choice to make a living as a registered nurse? For young women who do not have family resources, higher education or special skills, working in porn compared to in minimum wage jobs, may well earn them more money and flexibility along with fewer work hours. Isn't this all about individual choice? Above all, pornographic and sexist images are everywhere – don't they all have negative effects? Do I then claim that pornography has the worst effects? Why then do I pick on pornography to criticize? Thus, all these questions that emanated from pro pornography arguments have been very important in pushing me to broaden the scope of my investigation as well to think in a deeper and more nuanced way that is closer to most people's reality. Robert Jensen and particularly Robert Wosnitzer were immensely helpful in the process.

Another question that defenders of pornography often complain about is: given that the definition of pornography is so broad, unclear and subjective, is it almost impossible to study and to criticize it? They further protest that the critics of pornography often purposefully pick the worst kinds of porn to analyze and to use as scapegoats. I took this criticism to heart, and with Robert Wosnitzer, Dr. Ana Bridges and Dr. Erica Scharrer, designed and conducted a large scale study on the content of the most rented pornographic videos in 2005, identified by the porn industry's "Bible," *Adult Video News*. I resolved the issue on the definition of pornography by referring to both the industry's classification as well as to the audience's choices and by examining the popular/mainstream pornography.

Being a producer for a documentary that is normally budgeted as \$200,000 to \$300,000, I miserably failed one of the most important tasks: raising funds. Thanks for NYU's Research Challenge Fund of \$10,000, my parents' unconditional support, and a friend's generosity, I relied for the rest on loans and most importantly, the volunteer labor by Miguel Picker (Co-director and co-producer, director of photography, editor, motion graphic artist, music composer/producer, and all other post-production work), Robert Wosnitzer (Co-writer, Associate Producer, thorough researcher and consultant on all

matters), Sandra Koponen (photographer), Michelle Chang (assistant editor), and Denise Gillman (script consultant), and interns. I also had plenty of other weakness so that the project took a long time and has become so costly. Yet I did one thing right: I was a good listener. My genuine curiosity, nonjudgmental attitude and my respect for the interviewees probably came through and helped me to gain insights that none of the readings I had done could ever have taught me.

A 20 years old male college student said to me, "...because sexuality is so personal. You've got to be real careful how you approach people about that. If you try to be a firebrand about it, you're gonna alienate people." When I made editorial decisions, I always thought of what this young man said, and his words set a tone for the overall film: it is an exploration and analysis that avoids being didactic or dogmatic.

WHAT THE FILM IS REALLY ABOUT

Chyng Sun & Miguel Picker

During the "porn war" in the 1980s and early 1990s, the radical feminists focused on the harm that pornography has perpetuated on women through its producers and consumers. Although some of the interviewees did experience or witness such horrendous sexual violence done to women that was connected to pornography, I think for the majority of men and women the effects of pornography were less overt and dramatic but still no less profound on their sexual imaginations and relationships. That is why the focus of the film is on sexuality and relationships. But when I explored deeper and deeper into the issues, what concerned me the most was beyond how pornography affects, but what it revealed about the world we live in, and the mechanisms that shape and maintain it.

J.M. Productions' *Gag Factor* is indeed hard to watch when the female performers choke and cry because the male performers' penises are inserted in their throat so deeply. The crucial issues are not whether a woman freely "chooses" to work in the film, but why an economic system would pay the women who are willing to be gagged 50 times more money than her McDonald's job and whether this is the best way to organize our labor system. Condemning the producers as being particularly misogynistic does not go far; instead the important questions that we should ask are: why would a system reward private enterprise to make a movie like this and why there are so many consumers who would watch it and gain sexual pleasure? Pornography is where patriarchy and capitalism meet. Theme-wise, this whole film can be summed up by two short statements: "Nothing shows any better than pornography what you get from capitalism," by Rich Wolff, and "Pornography delivers patriarchal messages to men's brain by the penis," by Gail Dines. If problems are rooted in the systems, and if the systems are not going to change overnight, how would the film not leave the audience in a state of paralysis?

Anyone who expects a dramatic ending, a neat solution, or some clear strategies at the end of the film are bound to be disappointed. There is none of these. My target audiences are the typical porn users who regularly use pornography for sexual stimulation, are not critical about what they watch, and mostly receive the messages from the mass media that pornography is harmless fun and that the only problem is that there are some deviant addicts who just can't control themselves. Talking about solutions may be a few steps ahead of them; they are not yet convinced that pornography is a problem. And to be honest, we don't know what a quick or even not so quick solution may be. The defenders of pornography like to say that it is a symptom of sexism or that it is an expression of a male-dominated culture. We don't disagree with that statement but we have trouble with how it is used to justify that pornography is then "innocent." We view pornography as not a mere "reflection" of male supremacy, but rather a construction of masculinity in such a way that male dominance becomes natural and even beneficial. As pornographer Ernest Greene puts it, "There is a natural component of power as an erotic stimulant in all sexuality." Or in the same vein, pornographer Joe Gallent states, "Every woman I have ever met has had a rape fantasy at some point. Men have violence fantasies about domination, and that's just how it is..." Furthermore, we should not be surprised that the

commercialization of our sexuality and humanity is so widespread in a capitalist society in which nearly everything is for sale and profit is legitimized as the major, if not only, incentive that drives production and distribution. Pornography indeed perpetuates, reinforces and normalizes male domination, but burning all porn will not end male dominance and sexual exploitation; the producers of porn simply will find another form, another channel. Furthermore, since pornography has already permeated all forms of popular culture and media, how do we find solutions for all? To us, pornography is a way for us to examine the roots of the problem – patriarchy, capitalism and white supremacy – in their most blatant, naked and rawest forms. When this exploitation can stir and stimulate our most irrational and uncensored sexual core, we know how deep we have internalized and naturalized such inequality.

So we go to the roots. The ambition of the filmmakers may seem very modest but actually no less profound: we want people to really see what they have been watching all along. It is fascinating that almost without exception, the porn users who were interviewed admitted that they felt uncomfortable or guilty when they watched certain scenes. The defenders of pornography often explain that the "guilt" associated with watching porn comes only from sexual repression, and porn could conveniently liberate that. It was only part of the story. What the interviewees revealed is that the guilt also may arise from them knowing full well that the women from whom they gain pleasure may not want to be there, and the treatment of these women is not right. Because the viewers often shut down their critical minds when they are watching pornography or they willfully ignore what is really showing in the porn film, they don't actually think about what they see. Greg, a 20-year-old college student, said at the end of the film, "The second I have an orgasm and that passion kind of sinks out of my body and you're still watching the movie, you start to really see what's going on and it's kind of just foul... and you just kind of wonder like, this is not sexy, this is not sex, this is not how I want to experience sex."