

MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION STUDY GUIDE

THE PRICE OF PLEASURE:

Pornography, Sexuality & Relationships

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NOTE TO TEACHERS

This study guide is designed to help you and your students engage and manage the information presented in this video. Given that it can be difficult to teach visual content—and difficult for students to recall detailed information from videos after viewing them—the intention here is to give you a tool to help your students slow down and deepen their thinking about the specific issues this video addresses. With this in mind, we’ve structured the guide so that you have the option of focusing in depth on one section of the video at a time. We’ve also set it up to help you stay close to the video’s main line of argument as it unfolds. The structure of the guide therefore mirrors the structure of the video, moving through each of the video’s sections with a series of key summary points, questions, and assignments specific to that section.

Pre-viewing Discussion Questions are designed to inspire preliminary discussion about the issues the video addresses prior to viewing.

Key Points provide a concise and comprehensive summary of each section of the video. They are designed to make it easier for you and your students to recall the details of the video during class discussions, and as a reference point for students as they work on assignments.

Discussion Questions provide a series of questions designed to help you review and clarify material for your students; to encourage students to reflect critically on this material during class discussions; and to prompt and guide their written reactions to the video before and after these discussions. These questions can therefore be used in different ways: as guideposts for class discussion, as a framework for smaller group discussion and presentations, or as self-standing, in-class writing assignments (i.e. as prompts for “free-writing” or in-class reaction papers in which students are asked to write spontaneously and informally while the video is fresh in their mind).

Assignments for each section encourage students to engage the video in more depth—by conducting research, working on individual and group projects, putting together presentations, and composing formal essays. These assignments are designed to challenge students to show command of the material presented in the video, to think critically and independently about this material from a number of different perspectives, and to develop and defend their own point of view on the issues at stake.

OVERVIEW

Once relegated to the margins of society, pornography has emerged as one of the most visible and profitable sectors of the cultural industries. There are now an estimated 420 million pages of pornography online, and, each year, 13,000 porn videos are released and over 900 million videos rented. While assuming this unprecedented role in the mainstream of our popular culture, pornography's content has become more extreme and harsh, more overtly sexist, racist, and violent.

The Price of Pleasure explores how these pornographic messages help shape our gender and sexual identities and affect our relationships. The film moves beyond the liberal-versus-conservative debates so common in the culture to paint a myth-busting and nuanced portrait of how pleasure and pain, commerce and power, liberty and responsibility have become intertwined in the most intimate areas of our lives.

Special Note: The pornography discussed in this documentary represents current trends in mainstream pornography that is industrially produced in the U.S. and marketed primarily to heterosexual male consumers. Many of the films excerpted or described herein are directed by industry award-winners or appear on the industry's lists of best-selling and top-renting movies.

This video contains explicit sexual activity, language, and violence. It is important that educators preview the film prior to screening it with their students.

PRE-VIEWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever viewed a pornographic image? Why or why not? If so, how were you first exposed to pornography? Explore your reactions to what you saw.
2. What are your current feelings about pornography? Have you ever thought about how pornography portrays men, women, and sexuality? What are your initial thoughts about this? Do you think these portrayals can have an affect on our relationships? Why or why not?
3. Should speech considered sexist or racist be protected under the First Amendment? Why or why not?
4. Compare what you know about the current images of pornography with your knowledge of the erotic imagery of other – even ancient – cultures and civilizations. What role do you think a commercial culture plays in the difference of pornographic images?

INTRODUCTION (12:15)

Key Points

- Many children are exposed to pornography at an early age. With the internet, not only are children exposed at younger and younger ages, but they are more likely to see video of the aggressive penetration of a woman than they are to see a still image of a naked woman.
- The internet has contributed to skyrocketing rates of production and consumption of pornography. There are an estimated 420 million pages of pornography online, and, each year, 13,000 porn videos are released and over 900 million videos rented.
- The pornography industry's estimated annual revenue is \$10-14 billion – more than the NFL, NBA, and Major League Baseball combined.
- Telecommunication and media corporations like Time Warner, CBS, and News Corporation collectively earn \$1 billion annually from pornography, either by direct distribution through video on demand or by producing and licensing porn-related content and cross-promoting it through their various media holdings.
- As the pornography industry has amassed tremendous wealth, it has been accepted by the establishment as legitimate business and has also gained political and legal power. In 1991, the pornography industry founded the Free Speech Coalition, a lobbying group that has repeatedly won important legal battles. In 2002, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the ban on virtual child pornography, granting the pornography industry the right to produce images that simulate child pornography, using computer-generated technology and youthful-looking adults.
- In movies, sitcoms, and other forms of mainstream media, watching pornography is depicted as both normal male behavior and even a bonding experience. On his radio show, media mogul Howard Stern legitimizes pornography by talking about his and other men's use of pornography and by routinely interviewing porn performers.
- The gap between pornography and popular music videos is closing. Gregory Dark is a director of extreme pornographic movies that has since gone on to direct music videos for pop singers Mandy Moore and Britney Spears. Also, porn performers are increasingly cast as central characters or background dancers in music videos, and, in hip-hop, performers like Snoop Dogg are even producing their own hardcore pornographic videos.
- In America today, it is nearly impossible to escape the clutter of erotic and pornographic imagery.

Discussion Questions

1. How has the internet changed both the content and accessibility of pornography? Do you think that the pornography industry would be as successful without this new method of distribution? Why or why not?
2. What are some of the ways that pornography has been pushed into the mainstream? Do you think this mainstreaming has normalized pornography? Why or why not? How does the normalization of pornography affect the culture and the content it produces?
3. Should the content of pornography be protected under the First Amendment? Why or why not? How about when the Free Speech Coalition successfully struck down the ban on virtual child pornography in 2002? Should the pornography industry have the right to produce images that simulate child pornography, without using real children, with computer-generated technology and youthful-looking adults? Why or why not? If virtual child porn and real child porn can arouse some people, will concerns regarding the effects of virtual and real child pornography be the same? Why or why not?
4. What aspects of our popular culture are rife with erotic imagery? What aspects are not? Why is sex used to sell products and services? Who primarily controls the messages in advertising and other forms of media?

Assignments

1. a) Keep a media journal. Write entries throughout the day about the media you consume. Pay special attention to programming and advertisements that contain erotic imagery. Don't limit yourself to just one type of media. Watch television shows and movies, read newspapers and magazines, surf the web, etc. How are the images you encounter similar to those in pornography? How are they different?

b) Need more structure? Research Gregory Dark's popular media. Rent his horror film, *See No Evil*, produced by World Wrestling Entertainment, and watch his music videos on YouTube. Keep a journal and write entries about the content and the images you encounter. How are they similar to pornography? How are they different?
2. Research the history of hip-hop. How has hip-hop culture changed over the decades? More specifically, how has this movement of cultural expression by and for working class black and Latino youth been commodified to such extremes that it's possible for current hip-hop performers to produce their own pornographic videos?
3. Look into the U.S. Supreme Court's 2002 ruling in favor of virtual child pornography. Research other legal battles the Free Speech Coalition has lobbied for since its founding in 1991. How has their presence changed the current state of pornography?

PORN STARS: MYTHS AND REALITIES (6:31)

Key Points

- Jenna Jameson has been a central figure in legitimizing the pornography industry and has made being in pornography appear to be a glamorous career choice. Robert Jensen, a professor of journalism at the University of Texas at Austin, argues that this image “masks the fact that very few women actually sustain a career in pornography and acquire any kind of wealth.” He then explains that it’s not women -- but men -- who produce and distribute pornography, who make most of the profits.
- According to the World Modeling Agency, more than a thousand women come to find jobs in the pornography industry each year.
- Robert Jensen explains that pornography has been commodified within capitalism: “Pornography takes the most intimate, the most private spaces of our lives, our sexual experiences, our connections to other human beings at the most basic level, and sells them to us.”
- Former porn performer Sarah Katherine Lewis has no college education or work experience. The only jobs available to her are food service, retail, low-skill, low-wage work, or the sex industry.
- Although most female porn performers appear to enjoy what they are doing on screen, Black Mirror producer Joe Gallant admits, “I just want to at least pretend that she’s liking what she’s doing.”
- Fans of pornography argue that pornography is all about choice: The choice to make it, to be in it, and to watch it. Sarah Katherine Lewis argues that if your best choice is pornography, then “there’s a real problem with the labor system.”

Discussion Questions

1. Pornography producer Brandon Iron observes, “This is America, and that’s a great free enterprise system when a girl can make a quarter-million dollars a year just with her body.” Explore your feelings about this statement. What concerns, if any, do you have about free market capitalism?
2. Robert Jensen argues that pornography has been commodified within capitalism. Explore your thoughts about the process of commodification. What should be commodified? What should not?
3. How did the treatment of women in this section’s pornographic scenes make you feel? Explore your reactions.
4. Fans of pornography argue that it’s the choice of the performer to be in pornography and the choice of the viewer to watch it. How does this make you feel? Do you believe in a larger, social responsibility? Or do you think responsibility lies more with the individual?
5. Do you agree with Sarah Katherine Lewis’ statement: If a woman’s best choice is pornography, then there’s a real problem with the labor system?

Assignments

1. Research the role of women in the American workforce. Compare and contrast these roles throughout America’s history. Where do you think women stand today?
2. There have long been debates about the sex industry and the similarities between pornography and prostitution. Look into the laws forbidding (and allowing) prostitution in our country. How is pornography similar to prostitution? How is it different?
3. Read a chapter from “How to Make Love Like a Porn Star: A Cautionary Tale,” by Jenna Jameson. Explore your reactions to Jameson’s autobiography.

JUST A FANTASY? (15:32)

Key Points

- Some fans of pornography argue that pornography is merely fantasy. Conversely, Gail Dines, professor of sociology and women's studies at Wheelock College, argues that pornography is a worldview, an ideology, and a way of understanding relationships.
- 70% of pornography's audience is straight men watching alone.
- Human sexuality has become an opportunity for private enterprise. Corporations make money off of human needs, wants, and desires. In the process, they begin to shape those needs, wants, and desires.
- The pornography industry sponsors several trade shows and conventions throughout the U.S. At these events, hundreds of exhibitors sell pornographic videos and sex toys to tens of thousands of fans: overwhelmingly men.
- Whereas we've become increasingly more aware and critical of racist stereotypes in the mass media, pornography has not reflected these same developments. The images of African American men and women are incredibly racist. Black men are depicted as out of control sexually, and black women are portrayed as animalistic and unable to get enough sex. Other ethnic minority groups are exploited by the porn industry as well.
- Men who watch pornography do not typically look at women in pornography as real, live human beings. They see them simply as sex objects. Robert Jensen fears that many men may be unable to resist the pornographic, fantasy world in the real world. For example, a large group of male New York Jets fans gathered inside the stadium, hollered obscene chants at women, and tried to get them to strip.
- Pornography is involved in about 70% of sexual abuse cases. Watching pornography may lead to one partner wanting to recreate the on-screen actions and perhaps even film them.
- Pornographer Ernest Greene believes that male domination and power are natural components of sexuality. He also believes "evildoers do evil things and don't need pictures to tell them how."
- Pamela Paul, author of "Pornified," interviewed over 100 people (80% male) who considered themselves casual users of pornography. Paul found that most casual users think that pornography enhances their sex life. Paul also found that pornography dictates most men's thoughts about sex. Men who use pornography often have trouble achieving orgasm with their partner unless they are actively thinking about pornography.

Discussion Questions

1. Is pornography just a fantasy? Why or why not? How does pornography shape and/or reflect our understanding of human sexuality?
2. Explore your reactions to the men's responses at the Adult Entertainment Expo in Las Vegas. What role, if any, does male domination play in female sexual fantasy? Why is anal sex in pornography so popular? Would you play a board game called "Pimps and Hos"? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think racist imagery is so prevalent in pornography? Do you think the mass media has been successful in correcting some of the stereotypical imagery they produce? Give specific examples.
4. Have events similar to those at the New York Jets football stadium occurred at your school? If so, what happened? Explore your thoughts and feelings about the event.
5. Do you believe Ernest Greene's statement that "evildoers do evil things and don't need pictures to tell them how"? Do you think images can shape our thoughts and actions? Why or why not?

Assignments

1. Watch D.W. Griffith's 1915 film, "The Birth of a Nation." How are the depictions of black men similar to those currently in pornography? How are they different? How do the images compare and contrast to the images in other forms of popular media?
2. Ernest Greene (under his real name, I.S. Levine) co-authored a book about pornography with the late Robert J. Stoller, professor of psychiatry at UCLA, called "Coming Attractions: The Making of an X-Rated Video." Read some of the interviews in the book and explore your thoughts on pornography.
3. Read Pamela Paul's book, "Pornified: How Pornography is Damaging Our Lives, Our Relationships, and Our Families." Paul argues that pornography, like alcohol and cigarettes, should be discouraged and that both the government and the private sector should make efforts to subdue consumer demand. Do you think that the federal government should have the right to regulate private business? Why or why not?

EMPOWERED BY PORN? (7:46)

Key Points

- The pressure to be hypersexual is increasingly present in women’s daily lives. Television shows and books instruct average women to spice up their sex lives with pornography. For example, Carmen Electra made a workout video teaching women striptease and pole-dancing routines.
- Ariel Levy, author of “Female Chauvinist Pigs,” followed the Girls Gone Wild crew during Spring Break. Young college women would approach the video crew, eager to flash and strip for a hat or a t-shirt. One 19-year-old girl told Levy, “The only way I could see someone not doing this is if they were considering a career in politics.”
- At hip-hop events, women often request the song “We Want Some Pussy,” by 2 Live Crew. A media industry consultant in the film doesn’t understand why more women do not take offense to that kind of hip-hop music.
- College students, from schools like Harvard and the University of Chicago, have begun to produce their own pornographic magazines. For example, a Boston University student named Alicia Oleyourryk put out a magazine called Boink. Oleyourryk has made appearances on the Tyra Banks show, Howard Stern’s radio show, and has also been approached by two different television stations to make some sort of reality series. Oleyourryk recently signed a six-figure book deal with Time Warner.
- Elizabeth Wrigley-Field, a college student, thinks that women often join sexism, instead of fighting it. “It’s just giving up on the idea that we could change the terms of how women are thought to be,” she says.
- Porn performer Joanna Angel graduated from Rutgers University with a major in English Literature. Angel believes that any kind of porn – no matter how harsh, violent, and/or sexist – can still be feminist, as long as the women involved are in control of what they’re doing.

Discussion Questions

1. Aside from pornography, what other forms of popular media pressure women to be hypersexual in their daily lives? Give specific examples. Do you think men are given the same pressure to be sexy? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think a lot of young women participate in Girls Gone Wild video shoots? Compare and contrast this participation with women singing along and dancing to a song called “We Want Some Pussy.” Is it the same as a black man singing and dancing to the lyric, “those drug-using niggers in the city”? Why or why not?
3. Is there any situation where heterosexual pornography can be feminist? Why or why not?

Assignments

1. Read Ariel Levy’s book, “Female Chauvinist Pigs.” What does Levy say about the current role models for young women? How do these role models compare and contrast to those of the past? Why do you think these role models earn our adulation?
2. Write a letter to the editor of a college pornographic magazine. If your school has a pornographic publication, consider actually submitting it to the editors. If not, consider sending it to other active college publications in the country. Explore your personal feelings (and be sure to stay organized).
3. Do a research project on the history of feminism in America. How do you think the Women’s Liberation Movement of the mid-1960s related to the Sexual Revolution of the 60s and 70s? In regards to feminism and pornography, research both the anti-pornography movement and the sex-positive movement. Does this research alter your view on pornography in any way whatsoever?

HARDER AND HARDER... (11:48)

Key Points

- Pornography is very diverse. There are many different kinds of erotic depictions, from low-budget, ugly or mean porn to high-fashion looking pictures.
- A team of scholars from New York University, the University of Massachusetts, and the University of Rhode Island examined 304 scenes from the most popular videos released in 2005. The research team found that:
 - 89.8% of the scenes included either verbal or physical aggression;
 - 48% contained verbal aggression, mostly name-calling and insults;
 - 82.2% contained physical aggression;
 - 94.4% of the aggressive acts were targeted at women.
- The research team also found that female performers frequently expressed enjoyment in response to aggressive behavior, and that spanking and gagging were the most frequently depicted acts of aggression.
- 41% of the scenes examined contained “Ass to Mouth” (ATM). ATM is when the male inserts his penis in the woman’s anus, and after removing it, puts it in the woman’s mouth. One unidentified male said, “It turns me on that a girl is willing to do something that most girls find kind of disgusting.”
- The content in pornography is getting harsher and harsher. Joe Gallant, of Black Mirror productions, admits that he thinks the future of American porn is violence. Torture-like scenes are already produced to titillate and sexually arouse.
- Gail Dines says that pornography has sexualized violence against women to such an extent that the violence is now invisible.
- According to Dr. Richard Wolff, pornography is “a sign or a reflection of the failure to question an economic system that rewards enterprises for profit-maximizing, endlessly market-expanding.” Wolff believes the pornography industry will continue to expand into one market after another, and if there isn’t a market, they’ll create one.
- Robert Jensen argues that pornography is no longer seen as a deviant sexuality. It’s now very conventional. “It takes us into our own lives and into our own bedroom.”

Discussion Questions

1. Explore your reactions to the findings of the research team. Were there any statistics that surprised you? Did you wish they sought out to find the worst-case examples? Are you glad they researched only the most popular videos? Why or why not?
2. Did you know that torture was used in pornography as a means to sexually arouse? How does that make you feel? Explore your overall thoughts about the use of torture.
3. How is the success of pornography a prime example of America's failure to question an economic system that rewards private enterprises for profit-maximizing and endless market expansion?
4. What did you think of the ending? What do you think the filmmakers were trying to say? Do you think the ending feels like the filmmakers' statement? What may be that statement?

Assignments

1. Conduct a similar study to the research team in *The Price of Pleasure*. Instead of examining pornographic videos, go to the library and look through the current issues of popular fashion magazines. Tally the total number of advertisements that use sexual imagery. Also, tally the number of advertisements that use physical or symbolic aggression. Were the aggressive acts directed more toward men or women? Why do you think this is so?
2. Interview students on campus about the pornography they consume. Ask them what they like and dislike. Be sure to ask them about what they see as the future of pornography.
3. Read the New York Times article, "A Disciplined Business," available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/29/magazine/29kink.t.html>. Do more research on that company. What do you think of a company making so much money on the torture-like treatment of women?
4. Watch the 2006 film *Shortbus*, directed by John Cameron Mitchell. Write a film review comparing its sexually explicit content to the pornographic content critiqued in *The Price of Pleasure*. Did you like the film? Could you recommend it to others? Why or why not?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Other MEF Films on Related Issues

- Dreamworlds 3: Desire, Sex & Power in Music Video (2007)
- Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats & Rhymes (2006)
- Killing Us Softly 3: Advertising's Image of Women (2000)
- Spin the Bottle: Sex, Lies & Alcohol (2004)
- Tough Guise: Violence, Media & the Crisis in Masculinity (1999)
- War Zone (1998)
- Wrestling With Manhood: Boys, Bullying & Battering (2002)
- Writing About Media w/ Peter Elbow (2008)

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