

**Disrupting Cause-and-Effect Narratives of Pornography and Violence:
A Contextual and Theoretical Case Study of Sexual Violence in Mainstream Media**

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Introduction

Project Methodology

Media images cluster on the periphery of contemporary culture as an inevitable consequence of modern capitalism and globalization. Despite its relative ubiquity within modernity, the advertisements that exist within Western culture do not enjoy a solely static relationship with the corporeal realm. On the contrary, visual media spur a multitude of different spectator reactions ranging from complete apathy to utter avowal. The often unstable dynamic existing between advertisements and viewers suggests that a binary opposition exists on the assumption that consumerist images are either completely meaningless or a harmful influence on society.

This research project and paper directly challenge the latter perspective, specifically the scientific and legal cause-and-effect model for understanding the effects of violent pornography on the behaviors of consumers. That is to say, the cause-and-effect model operates on the assumption that sexually violent pornography can incite violence against women. The goal of this project is to call into question the use of the cause-and-effect model to label and censor images deemed too dangerous and obscene for public consumption. In the effort to fracture the empirical research supporting the cause-and-effect model, its methodology will first be analyzed to reveal the problems underlying the experimentation. Secondly, the stability of the cause-and-effect model used to support censorship will be complicated by the introduction of two fashion advertisement campaigns that use imagery that eroticizes sexual violence against women. The conclusive argument that I will generate from the analysis of these fashion advertisements is the concept of the *media apparatus*. Based upon Hegelian and Foucauldian theories of aesthetics and

censorship, the *media apparatus* is a theoretical alternative to the clear-cut notion that pornographic materials cause sexual violence against women.

Definitions and Clarifications

Pornography is a subject that has facilitated many different discourses ranging from seeing porn as a means of sexual violence to it as an avenue for female self-empowerment. Pornography is an extremely subjective category because it is a genre-type that can take any guise. One person's porn could be another person's fine art. Because of the relative malleability of the meaning of pornography itself, it is important to define this term in relation to the arguments and discussions within this paper. The type of visual material that I will be calling pornography, or those having a "pornographic aesthetic," are celluloid or still images exhibiting high levels of sexual violence against women, specifically fantasies of rape and sexual sadism. The official type of pornography that this paper will focus on is known as gonzo. Gonzo is hardcore pornography with no limit to the extremity of the sexual acts depicted. Gonzo is also defined by the portrayal of harsh sexual scenarios such as gang rape and the use of intensely degrading language ("dirty talk"). The central aspect of pornography that I will examine here is the ideology about women that its violent aesthetic advocates: women cannot be sexually sated and thus constantly want sex from men; women will perform and enjoy any sexual act performed by men; and force is like foreplay to a woman (Jensen, 55-58).¹ As a final preamble, it must be

¹ There has been much debate within feminist discourse about mainstream pornography. Some feminist scholars such as Andrea Dworkin, Catherine MacKinnon, and Robert Jensen maintain that pornography, in all its various forms, mimics a visual tradition that sexually objectifies women and perpetuates their subordination. Other feminists, such as Sara Diamond in her article, "Pornography: Image and Reality," suggest that for women sexual expression and the open display of sexuality via porn can be empowering. Furthermore, empowerment from porn can also stem from the knowledge that as a constructed medium, women can change it (Diamond, 236).

stated that my own personal interest in the subject of pornographic imagery is not to claim a moral judgment on what type of imagery an individual should or should not find sexually stimulating. This objective is beyond the scope of this paper. Alternatively, it is my intent to question the litany over sexual violence in pornography and the effect it has on the behavior of its viewers by placing the ideology that fuels porn violence in context with a broader understanding of patriarchal-defined female representations in the media.

**Part I:
Modern Society's Hold on Media: Media's Hold on Modern Society**

At base value all images created by media corporations can be said to be visual constructs produced for capitalistic purposes. In spite of their purely consumerist origins, media can also be considered a visual signifier of a changing or evolving society. The dual function performed by visual material in the media reveals a grey area—a convoluted metaphysical state—where the image becomes both a construct of culture and its signifier, i.e., the media image is something a society creates, yet is also seen as something that can define and shape a society's culture. For example, clothing style in advertising at any point in time can be considered as solely superficial and temporary fads, but these fads often are historically looked upon at later dates as representations of certain decades and their ethos. This seemingly paradoxical status of advertisements begs the question of whether it is humanity itself that is reflected by the media or if human existence is changed or even influenced by visual material in the media. The complex inquiry that this question incites has been the root of many empirical and theoretical investigations into whether the relationship between media images and human behavior fits a cause-and-effect model.

The extreme pervasiveness of visual representations serves as a motivation for many scientists and theorists to evaluate their possible impact on consumers with quantifiable methods. For example, concerns regarding the increase in eating disorders, and other body dimorphic behavior, have spurred researchers in the social sciences to re-examine the impact images of thinness have on the spectator. The hypothesis gaining the most support within these studies proclaim that images have the ability to directly affect—or increase the likelihood of—certain behaviors in viewers (Bessenoff, 239).

Concurrent with the visual culture experiments conducted by social scientists are legal discourses, which have appropriated the conclusions of the social sciences' research and developed laws based upon the homologous theory that media images can become accomplices to particular objectionable conduct. Most notably in film, television, and especially pornography—statutes regulate the disbursement of sexual and violent images deemed too 'obscene' for general audiences, because these representations are considered to entice a spectator and cause them to mimic the actions depicted. A well-known example of these legal prohibitions is the Anti-Pornographic Civil Rights Ordinance authored by radical feminists Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon (Dworkin, 525, MacKinnon, 465, Segal, 8).

It is my belief that the effects of advertisement on the general public, as scrutinized by the social science and legal community, only superficially describes the dialectic transpiring between the spectator and the image. The conclusions of these researchers are flawed because the empirical evidence supporting the cause-and-effect hypothesis often settles on correlations, which do not further investigate the fact that much of the data in experimental results remain inconclusive. Facile notions of the viewer-image dynamic efface the actuality that advertisements are neither inherently passive nor active. In other words, they do not directly

affect behavior nor sustain the status quo. It is my belief that the relationship between the image and the subject is not as distinct as the social sciences, law, and feminist might want to accept, because images in media do not fit into a definitively active/passive binary and thereby can not be fully understood using the empirically based cause-and-effect model.

In the following section, I will first scrutinize in detail an empirical study focused on the behavioral effects of body idealization, specifically thinness, on young girls and women. This study will be presented as an introduction to my main discussion on pornography in the media, because the scientific methodology used by body image researchers has been the experimental template for gauging the behavioral effects of pornography on viewers. Next, I will discuss an example of a similar study on pornography and violence using the cause-and-effect model. My analysis will highlight how the scientific research methodology constructed and utilized in both of these studies obscures a more complex and less empirically tangible dialectic between media images and viewers. I will also explain why legalists and feminists tend to favor the quantifiable conclusions offered by the cause-and-effect model despite the research's questionable certainty, particularly if censorship is the prerogative.

Media's Hold and Quantified Affects

Advertising and Body Dismorphia

There has been a profusion of research conducted to try and articulate the dialectic between advertisement images and consumers. In a culture where eating disorders and other body dimorphisms have become an ever-increasing cultural reality and popular obsession, it is understandable that media advertisements have become the object of empirical research. These studies embody a greater cultural fear that body ideals promoted by mainstream media—such as

the thin ideal—may affect the self-image of young girls and adult women. In my opinion, the studies conducted by researchers in the social sciences have altruistic objectives, but focus too much on the conclusive allocation of blame, i.e., they readily position advertisement images as active agents that mediate the behavior of susceptible spectators. The findings produced by scientific studies become problematic when the diverse reactions of participants after they have observed advertisements are eclipsed by conclusions that seem to indicate definitive results.

Gayle R. Bessenoff's article, "Can Media Affect Us? Social Comparison, Self-Discrepancy, and the Thin Ideal", inadvertently illustrates the complications that occur when research methodology focuses primarily on concrete conclusions rather than addressing the dialectic between media image and spectator as a more complex, less concrete mechanism. The experimentation in the study described by Bessenoff was conducted to try and discover why the thinness ideal via the media affected women differently. At the center of their research was the theory of self-discrepancy, which offered a possible determinant for the multiplicity of women's reactions to advertisement imagery of thinness.

Bessenoff formulated self-discrepancy as a fluctuating spectrum, where individual women possess, in varying degrees, their awareness of lack—or as Bessenoff states, "... representations in the self-concepts of ways in which one falls short of some important standard" (Bessenoff, 240). The idea of a self-discrepancy continuum explains the diversity of the responses exhibited by women in traditional media experiments, while also providing legitimacy for the idea that advertisements are agitators of potentially dangerous self-awareness and behavior.

In Bessenoff's essay, the theory of self-discrepancy is comprised of three main hypotheses: differing self-discrepancy levels determine how women react to images of thinness

in advertisement, self-discrepancy in females can cause social comparison, and higher levels of self-discrepancy increases one's susceptibility to media ideals and prompts harmful behavior such as the development of eating disorders (Bessenoff, 241).

Bessenoff's study utilized the participation of one hundred twelve college-age females from a university in the northeast of the United States. These women were recruited from an introductory psychology course and received academic credit for their involvement in the study. Despite the fact that this experiment was volunteer-based, the female participants in the thin ideal study were pre-selected. Before being allowed to participate, each woman was given a quantitative test that determined whether they possessed high or low self-discrepancy levels; a number that would later be determined if they would be asked to become involved in the study and which test group they would belong.

In the study, there were two test groups where each woman was unsystematically given either thin ideal advertisements from popular fashion magazines (*Vogue* and *Glamour*) or non-thin ideal advertisements (such as for appliances)—Bessenoff describes these as “neutral-advertisement controls” (Bessenoff, 241-242). To supplement the advertisements provided to the women, several questionnaires were administered while they were viewing their assigned media imagery. These included a body image survey, mood scale, state self-esteem scale, automatic thoughts questionnaire, eating disorder inventory, and an extent thoughts questionnaire. Participants were told to scrutinize their images and answer a marketing survey based upon how their advertisements made them feel. The types of questions in the marketing questionnaire differed according to the thin ideal and neutral advertisement control groups.

The women exposed to the thin ideal were asked questions pertaining to their bodies and their individual drive to buy certain clothing—these women were asked, “How much do you

like this outfit?”, “Would you wear this outfit to a party?”, “How flattering would this outfit be on you?”, and “How flattering would other people think this outfit is on you?” The neutral control group was not asked to evaluate their bodies in relation to their advertisements—their questions focused primarily on the product, “How much does this product appeal to you?”, “How likely would you be to buy this product?”, and “How likely would your friends be to buy this product?” (Bessenoff, 243). The results of the experiment seemed to show that upon viewing the images and answering the questions referring to body image the women with a strong sense of self-discrepancy showed signs of an increase in weight anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression (Bessenoff, 247).

The methodology of the cause-and-effect body image study can be scrutinized for several limitations within the conclusive assessment of the experimental results: a) the female participants were not randomly selected, which is exhibited by the fact that they were all college students living in the same geographical and metropolitan region, b) the students were also carefully evaluated, and subsequently selected, based upon their respective levels of self-discrepancy and placed in two groups: those with high and those with low body-awareness, c) the women who did not react negatively to the thin-ideal images presented to them were the participants who displayed low self-discrepancy.

Points (a) and (b) support the notion that the participants were selected to favor a desired result of the experimental hypothesis that images affect behavior and self-perception. The relative age of all the women was fairly young, which could also have affected the results of the experiment. Furthermore, the women were initially tested prior to being admitted into the study to find out how susceptible they were to images of thinness and hegemonic beauty standards. Of those selected, only women with very high and low receptiveness to body image ideal were used

for the experiment, which could skew the results toward a more definitive effect response to the advertisements in the study. No participant was included who had moderate or liminal perceptions of their bodies or toward the representations endorsed by thinness-promoting advertisements. This is an important feature of this study because the exclusion of these types of participants makes the conclusions of the body image study seemingly more definitive at revealing that thinness in the media does affect all women who have some susceptibility to media representations.

Pornography and Violence

The body-image experiment discussed in detail by Bessenoff is extremely important because it serves as a model for other researchers interested in finding a causal relationship between images in the media and the behaviors exerted by viewers. Bessenhoff's study, and those like it, becomes especially important to the debate surrounding the effects of pornography on spectators. In the *Attorney General's Commission on Pornography Final Report*, the United States' Federal Government requested an official report from scholar Edna F. Einsiedel on the experimental research on pornographic imagery and spectator response. In the chapter of the Report entitled, "The Experimental Research Evidence", Einsiedel primarily focuses the bulk of her analysis on the laboratory observations of Neal Malamuth from the University of California, Los Angeles and Edward Donnerstein from the University of Wisconsin.

Malamuth and Donnerstein examined the responses of female and male subjects to rape fantasy in pornography in several stages. In the first stage, each participant's immediate response to both film and magazine pornography was collected. They were given questionnaires gauging their views on sexual violence after viewing the pornographic images, i.e., the likelihood of them

committing rape or the validity of rape stereotypes. The second stage of the experiment was concerned with long-term effects of pornographic stimuli. In a similar process as the first stage, several pornographic films of varying sexually violent content—non-violent, aggressive, and outwardly abusive—were shown to men and women over an extended period of time. Afterwards, a participant was asked to document their arousal levels to each film type. A final research approach utilized by Malamuth and Donnerstein entailed subjecting participants to a cycling montage of sexually violent and neutral images while having men and women in the study document the shock value of each visual (Einseidel, 249). Analogous to the Bessenoff study, Einseidel's final evaluation of the experimental results gathered by Malamuth and Donnerstein attests that violent pornographic images indeed increased the favorable reception to rape myths, caused a correlation to occur between exposure to pornography, arousal, and behavior changes, and fueled hostility in men toward female participants (Einseidel, 266).

Despite Einseidel's conclusive statements with regards to the effects of violent pornography on spectators, she is very careful to extricate several aspects of Malamuth and Donnerstein's empirical study that could impede the construction of a universal axiom on the subject. Einseidel explicitly states that humans are not homogeneous and react to erotic material differently based upon gender, personality, and their familiarity or previous contact with pornographic aesthetics. Other considerations that could weaken the experiment's validity include the fact that more men generally volunteer for sex studies, the majority of those who participate in these types of studies are usually open-minded about sexuality or pornography, the drop out rate for this particular experiment increased as it progressed, and the isolated nature of the study has no way to accurately predict real-world scenarios (Einseidel, 269-273, Segal, 11-13).

Conclusive Assessment on Traditional Empirical Research on Media and Behavior

Although the Bessenoff study on body image and the Einseidel report on pornography share many similar empirical methods of evaluating the dialectic between viewer and visual culture, they both assert that human behaviors can be directly influenced by exposure to certain kinds of imagery. Even though both analyses reveal many instances where the scientific methodology could render their assertions incomplete and thus conjectural, these faults are overlooked in favor of a simpler verdict. Simplistic quantitative models such as cause-and-effect are popular because it is an easier task to approach the dialectic between spectator and image as a causal relationship, especially when other branches of the social sciences can most effectively adapt this particular format (Cameron and Frazer, 248-251).

Sanctioning Porn: Censorship and the Cause-and-Effect Model

In the area of legal studies and judicial reform, the issues surrounding pornography, and the behavioral effects it might produce, has become a site where the cause-and-effect model of empirical studies on the subject has been readily adopted. Cause-and-effect models provide legal scholars and activists with an effective solution to culturally defined social or moral problems. For those who align their politics with anti-pornography campaigns, the idea that pornography can directly affect an individual's views and conduct becomes a persuasive reason for legalists to eradicate this particular aesthetic from mainstream visual culture. Scholar Andrea Dworkin is one such legal expert who has become one of the formative voices for the feminist anti-pornography perspective and the cause-and-effect model.

In 1983, Dworkin and her collaborator, lawyer Catherine MacKinnon, co-authored for the city of Minneapolis an amendment to their Human Rights Ordinance on the issue of pornography

(Dworkin, 525, MacKinnon, 465). The Ordinance promoted rhetoric that espoused the immediate dangers of pornography's use, widespread availability to the viewing public, and the misogynistic ideology imbedded within the aesthetic tropes of the industry. The Dworkin-Mackinnon Ordinance defined pornography and its harmful aesthetic as,

...the graphic, sexually explicit subordination of women whether in pictures or in words that also includes one or more of the following: women are presented dehumanized as sexual objects, things, or commodities; or women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy pain or humiliation or women are presented as sexual objects who experience sexual pleasure in being raped; or women are presented as sexual objects tied up or cut up or mutilated or bruised or physically hurt; or women are presented in postures of sexual submission; or women's body parts are exhibited, such that women are reduced to their parts; or women are presented being penetrated by objects or animals; or women are presented in scenarios of degradation, injury, abasement, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual (Dworkin 525-526).

Dworkin's above definition of harmful pornographic aesthetic originates from her conceptualization of how female subordination is generated ideologically through images. Gender inequality for Dworkin is sustained in part by sex politics, where the sexual act itself becomes a means for female subordination. In relation to pornography, this medium becomes the quintessential material model for sexualizing inequality (Dworkin, 527, Segal, 8). Female subordination is achieved via four elements: hierarchy, objectification, submission, and violence. Hierarchy is the layering of society, where women find themselves designated as inferior and perpetuated as such by institutional, societal, and physical sexualization. Objectification is the

process in which women become a subhuman commodity to be bargained, sold, and exploited as artifact for the perpetual reification of patriarchal control. The concept of submission is the response of those individuals who find themselves at the bottom of social hierarchy. Submission is taught to women as the only way they can survive as an inferior group, which in turn socializes the need to take orders, denounce agency, and internalize servitude.

The final component of subordination for Dworkin is violence, which is the product of hierarchy, objectification, and submission. Women are systematically made the repository of violence so that this treatment can become culturally validated as a normative reaction toward inferior objects. Dworkin sees pornography as an instrument of male supremacy, which is wielded to both sexualize hierarchy, objectification, submission, and violence, and also consecrate it as a societal referent for conduct that reifies sexual inequity. The goal of Dworkin's anti-pornography activism and subsequent legal reforms was to censor the voice of pornographers, because in her view the failure to do so protects the speech of torturers and sexual predators of women (Dworkin, 528-539).

There is no contestation that Dworkin's perspective and particular objective regarding pornography are unequivocally invested in a crusade for the dismantlement of patriarchal oppression and the resulting liberation of female subjecthood. In spite of her feminist agenda, the ideology that fuels Dworkin's anti-pornographic convictions is problematic because she uses the cause-and-effect model and universalizes it via codified law, without taking into account the problems within this model and the facile hypothesis of the empirical research concerning images and spectator behavior. I disagree with Dworkin's assumption that images of pornography (or what she describes as obscenity) are concrete and physical acts of sexual and ideological violence that can in turn affect spectators in a way that provokes them to mimic the

genre of pornography they are visually consuming, e.g., S&M, bestiality, rape fantasy, by performing these violent sexual acts on unwilling women. Dworkin's assertion, and those of typical studies conducted by social scientists on the subject, that censorship must be the corrective means to cease the sexual exploitation of women's bodies is reductive and deeply problematic. The remedial actions that accompany campaigns against sexually explicit visual material—most commonly the utilization of censorship—are remedial maneuvers that cover up the real interaction between these images, how spectators visually absorb them, and how they might influence behavior. In the following sections, a new approach to the issue of pornography and its effects on behavior will be formulated by first dismantling the characteristics that make “pornography” a distinct image type, then non-porn visual representations of sexual violence against women will be analyzed to reveal that cause-and-effect models and censorship are not effective tools at truly liberating women from sexualization, objectification, and sexual violence.

Part II: The Media Apparatus, Its Inception, and Theoretical Frameworks

My contextual and theoretical investigation of pornography specifically concentrates on the image-types maligned by Dworkin.² My analysis focuses on the images that exist on the edges of masculinist cultural consciousness. Sadomasochism and rape-fantasy might formally be positioned as culturally abject, but the ideology behind these violence-infused desires have an established role within the popular media of Western culture. The questions extricated by my contextual and theoretical analysis of pornography are more complex in that they strive to

² The main discussion of this section will not examine the aesthetics of other more marginalized forms such as queer, feminist, LGBT, or female-produced genres or aesthetics, except in the conclusion of the paper when the media apparatus is explained.

contest the very notion of censorship itself and the belief that images, or the ideology behind them, can so easily be eradicated from Western visual culture.

Titillating imagery of sexual violence is not a trope that is only confined to the pages of pornography, for these narratives are widely represented within the visual canon for advertisements of consumerist products. Sexual desire, in tandem with the desire for material goods, become purposefully linked in an effort to transform purchasable products into symbols of virility or attraction as well as aids to one's sexual prowess. Pornographic imagery is often used in mainstream advertisements because the ideology that fuels both of these visual scripts is based upon concepts reifying male dominance and power, female submissiveness, beauty myths, objectification and exploitation, and fetishization. Jean Kilbourne, the acclaimed filmmaker of *Killing Us Softly*, has made similar observations in her discussions on advertising and pornography,

Sex in advertising is pornographic because it dehumanizes and objectifies people, especially women, and because it fetishizes products, imbues them with an erotic charge—which dooms us to disappointment since products never can fulfill our sexual desires or meet our emotional needs. The poses and postures of advertising are borrowed from pornography, as are of the themes, such as bondage, sadomasochism, and the sexual exploitation of children (Kilbourne, 271).

In Kilbourne's view, advertisers of popular products use pornographic imagery as a way to sell goods more effectively. Because these advertisements and products never really satisfy the sexual desire represented in these advertisements, the constant need for new products—which could possibly be more effective at fulfilling the promised results of an erotically charged product—becomes a cyclical capitalist project. An important aspect of Kilbourne's argument is

that there is a connection between a constant perpetuation of image types and a strong impulse to achieve the mythical ideals within these collective representations. Contrary to Kilbourne's statement, it is my argument that pornographic aesthetics are not merely borrowed by advertisements within mainstream media, but are one and the same. They both are sustained by an ideology that privileges male superiority and female submissiveness through sexual role-play.

Sexual role-play within a contextual analysis of visual culture can be defined as the way individuals are relating to each other sexually (in postures, facial expressions, body placement, or setting), the erotic charge given to these specific behaviors (via shadowing, costuming, sexual symbolism, or the amount of body exposure), and the cultural ideology governing the entire scenario (vis-à-vis who is dominant and subordinate, and what factors make this distinction true within the image). One of the prime argumentative inferences guiding the war against the mass exposure of pornographic imagery to general audiences is that sexual role-play in pornography is dangerous and infective, while also casting a negative and exploitive gaze upon the monolithic category of woman—the hegemonic social construction of normative or idealized femininity. Recalling once again the words of Andrea Dworkin, who catalogues various examples of some of the troublesome sexual role-play pervading pornographic aesthetic,

It is women turned into subhumans, beaver, pussy, body parts, genitals exposed, buttocks, breasts, mouths opened and throats penetrated, covered in semen, pissed on, shitted on, hung from light fixtures, tortured, maimed, bleeding, disemboweled, killed...pornography is the power and the act (Dworkin, 522).

For Dworkin, the sexual role-play in pornography creates a visual setting where women specifically become usable objects—depersonalized vessels for male pleasure—as a consequence of how they are situated within the image's frame.

Women as mere bare skin and body parts is given eroticized meaning with visuals monumentalizing and idealizing the phallus in its corporeal (penis) and figurative sense (phallus). The penis and the phallus are transformed into quantifiers positioning the penis and penetration as the seat of all possible, and worthwhile, human pleasure, while the concept of the phallus uses the cultural power given to the penis as a broader justification for male authority and female subordination. The argument circulating around pornography is that it visually symbolizes the most extreme of any optical manifestation of both tumescent and phallic superiority. In order for male domination and authority to become the most privileged, and still able to be culturally intelligible, within this extremist visual realm, the vision of “woman” as a potentially autonomous being must be symbolically annihilated, corporeally destroyed, and rendered as complicit to masculine control (Mulvey, 5, 14).

From the extreme emerges the image of sexual violence, torture, disembodiment, and degradation that to many intellectual thinkers such as Dworkin is the quintessential purpose of pornography. The basis on which censorship is recommended for pornographic visual paraphernalia stems from not only the extreme misogyny that the genre represents, but also that the severity of the violence in the images will perpetually increase and consequently will cause readers to act out the erotic role-play seen in pornography on real sexual partners.

The censorship of pornography is a relative success story, even after it has been continually challenged as a violation of First Amendment rights—which was the main constitutional issue raised that eventually defeated Dworkin and MacKinnon’s Anti-pornography Ordinance in Minneapolis (Duggan et. al., 130). Censorship can manifest itself in varying degrees and can be enforced by both subversive legislative sanctioning or cultural self-policing. Because of formal and informal measures, the mainstream visual consciousness of Western

culture has been able to formally filter itself free from “official” pornographic material; this can be proven in part by the very noticeable and socially abject subterfuge of censorship: back store shelves, tabooed retail establishments, black-covered books and magazines, red light districts, systemized visual rating scales, mandatory government compliance, and general convictions concerning a whole class of socially amoral recreation activities.

For censorship to be able to exist, even in a setting where freedom of speech is revered, it necessitates the construction of a morally objectionable antithesis. The antithesis serves to position censorship as an honorable prerogative justifying a certain way of being, behaving, thinking, and understanding of normalcy. The effectiveness of censorship is based upon its ability to align itself with normative and acceptable notions of public behavior, gender roles, and sexuality, which allows it to cast a immoral shadow on cultural products that transgress hegemonic attitudes. An example of this dynamic is represented in the good versus evil distinction, where various components that form the concept of evil are used to define the qualities constituting the good—the good is thus a comparative category composed of what it is not. In relation to censorship and pornography, good versus evil transforms into a dichotomy that shifts between healthy, ideal, and visually sanctioned sexual roles versus the pathological, harmful, and condemned.

There remains a paradoxical question that resides inside the use of censorship as a protective and moral measure against the possibility of escalating violence toward women vis-à-vis the mass distribution of pornographic visual material in the mainstream media. If pornography is firmly policed and filtered from the most accessible media outlets, then how does violence against women continue to be an issue? Furthermore, how is it that women and the violence against them continue to be sexualized in mainstream advertisements? What separates

dangerous pornography produced by “sadists” from pornographic tropes used by advertising firms? It is these inquiries that complicate the empirical and Dworkin-based model dynamic between the visual and the spectator, because they nuance the fragility of the claim that violence in imagery can directly cause comparable behavior.

The intricacies of the cause-and-effect argument suggest that some displays of violence are more capable of affecting behavior than others. But this very claim can only find validity in the premise that sexualized and aggressive images of women, which already circulate in the mainstream, are inherently less extreme, are dissimilar from the objectives of pornography, and do not employ the same aesthetic choices in the construction of consumer advertisements. There are several advertisements that exist in print and within the visual realm of the Internet, which—through their visual analysis and contextual dissection—can be utilized to blur the seemingly concrete lines between popular media and sub-culture pornography.

The Pornographic Aesthetic: A Case Study

In 2005, the global fashion houses Dolce & Gabbana (D&G) and Diesel introduced advertisement campaigns that quite blatantly utilized and mass-produced a pornographic aesthetic. Although different in technique and composition, the advertisements created by D&G and Diesel shared a similar ethos and ideology with that of hegemonic definitions of pornography. As a case study, a group of three D&G and Diesel advertisements will be visually deciphered to extract the pornographic content, i.e., the symbology, tropes, body placement, or design choices that may or not be clandestinely diffusing throughout each individual image campaign.³

³ See Appendix Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4 for the images discussed in this portion of the paper.

In the first D&G advertisement, four women pose in front of a camera with a male figure at the celluloid helm. All figures within the image fill up the frame, an effect in part generated by their position in the immediate foreground. The most immediate visual feature of this image is the way the advertisement's spectator is introduced to the scene. The body positions of these figures form a near-perfect visual dichotomy between the masculine voyeur and consumable femininity. The metal table that is placed between the man and women creates this dividing effect. The dominant force in the masculine and feminine divide is solidly attributed to the male at the left, particularly because he holds the camera as his symbol of sexual power. Sex and control is visually connoted by the use of the camera itself—it literally is harnessed to the male figure as an extension of his own body and he grips the stem of the camera in a forceful manner.

Furthermore, one could read the camera and how it is positioned with the male figure as phallic. The camera base almost seems to arise from the man's genitals, while his hand on the stem above simulates masturbation. The female figures on the contrary are made submissive by their body positioning, because the postures they express are less confident and controlling. Each woman is rendered small and frail via the intentional arching of their backs, placing their hands on cinched hips, and laying completely prostrate to the man and the camera in the case of the woman on the table. The sexuality of the women is implicitly denoted by their dress, which is a modern take on the traditional trope of the "leather and lace" of the dominatrix. The metallic, low cut, and corseted waists mimic the costuming of a sex fantasy, which I believe is enforced by the setting of this image. The room is sterile- white with a distinct science fiction feel issued by the small dark windows on either side of the interior. The fantasy becomes even more sexualized with the women's homoerotic interaction with each other. One woman lays her arm

over the shoulders of another female, who seems to be reaching under the skirt of the woman lying on the table.

The next two advertisements from Dolce & Gabbana (Figure Two and Three in Appendix) have a very different composition but share a similar pornographic aesthetic. The fundamental fantasy at the heart of these images is glorified rape. I will begin my visual analysis of these images with a discussion of the advertisement on the left and then will proceed to explain the similarities and differences that appear when the image of the right is examined.

In Figure Two, the rape fantasy uses traditional Western visual tropes of Orientalism to create a harem scene in this advertisement. The Orientalist components in this scene, which make this a setting reminiscent of a stereotypical harem, are the faucets, tiles, and beige fresco walls that all together connote the feeling of a bathhouse. In Orientalist paintings, writings, and photographs, baths were common settings where women of the harem were positioned. Bathing and harem women are visual parallels that become explicitly sexual in nature, especially for the implied male spectator. Foremost, harem baths were often represented as populated by nude, or semi-nude, women (Nochlin, 44-47). Traditionally, the spectator is positioned as a secret male observer to bare and languid female figures (Leeks, 31). In the D&G image in Figure Two, the women in the photograph are not entirely naked, but their dress is white—denoting bathing towels that can be strewn off easily or simple frocks that will cause a titillating effect when made wet. These aesthetic choices were chosen with male desire in mind, which is represented by the female figure's look-at-ness, a visual posturing that John Berger, in his book, *Ways Of Seeing*, describes as the female surveyor from within, which “determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. Because the surveyor of

woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object- and most particularly an object of vision: a sight” (Berger, 47).

Orientalist depictions of harems and bathing women always hint at the fact that these women were objects for the pleasure of a single man (the so called sultan), who had full sexual access to any women in this space (Leeks, 30). The presence of multiple men within the scene reveals that a single male gaze (sultan) is not what is driving the dynamic of the scene; instead it is the perspective of a multi-male harem raid. The advertisement alludes and sexualizes this raid-like aesthetic through the body dynamics between the female and male figures. Force and dominance is exhibited by each male figure, whose body positions suggest that they have each “caught” or will forcibly take their female target. The man in the center of this advertisement subjugates the female beneath him, the female by the left-most wall is caught in the grip of the man descending over the stone barrier, and the man in the far background has his gaze fixed on the only female who does seem to be free from a male oppressor. In the foreground, this woman stands crouched behind the center male figure and seems to be looking off into the distance for an escape path as she pushes against the wall behind her. But to undermine this glimpse of female agency within the scene, the man’s steady gaze in the background is firmly set on her and implies that she is not going anywhere.

The spectator visual is included in this rape fantasy as another comrade in the scene. The implied male gaze of the spectator is guided toward the woman in the forefront as a possible obstruction to her flight. The other two female figures in the image look docile, complacent, and doe-faced in expression, which in combination enforces a certain idea that women do not oppose to sexual force and that they are merely static objects for the pleasure of men.

In the D&G advertisement in Figure Three, rape fantasy is again illuminated but in a different manner. The men surrounding the central female figure are all converging on her prostrate body. These men's actions suggest that this woman is an entity that somehow needs to be suppressed by the men. If one looks at how the woman lying on the ground is costumed, her potential agency and power are visually referenced by her leather clothing, scarlet lips, and black stiletto heels. Within feminist film analysis, the image of black leather, heels, and red lipstick are all visual markers for the phallic woman. The phallic woman is a powerful feminine figure within imagery constructed for the male gaze. But because she is powerful, this figure must be punished in some extreme way so that she still becomes submissive and masculine authority within the scene remains intact (Mulvey, 6-7). The fact that the woman at center is fighting back heightens the fantasy of this image, in that no matter how much she struggles, the man holding her down or the men surrounding her will inevitably be the most powerful subjects within the scene. The spectator position is placed level with the men in the advertisement, which is a technical clue that the viewer is supposed to relate and join the men in this rape fantasy.

Dolce & Gabbana are not the only mainstream fashion company who produced images in 2005 that displayed a strong pornographic aesthetic. The Diesel brand issued a mass campaign entitled, "The Guide to the Pursuit of Hedonistic Pleasure," which showcased several images displaying different S&M scenarios. Figure Four is an example from this Diesel campaign. This advertisement shows a man lying on a fur blanket and a woman straddling him from behind. The woman in this scene is problematically racialized by use of an "exotic" fur blanket, her leather fringe jacket, and the fact that she is pretending to scalp the man beneath her. The visual referents for "exoticized" stereotypes of race categories, such as the animal skins and the pretend

scalping, are common tropes used within hegemonic pornography to sexualize women and make the sexuality of especially women of color seem more “primitive” (Jensen, 65-66).

Despite the violent scalping the female figure performs, her power and agency within the scene are nullified by her extremely static body, i.e., her figure does not display a real sense of movement, which, in addition to her closed eyes, leaves her looking like a mannequin. Furthermore, the fact that she is feigning the scalping of the man—as seen by the fact that she is holding a wig—suggests to viewer that the violence is also just a performance. One could infer from this image that the female figure is solely emotionlessly acting out this fantasy through the complacency of her expression, which mimics the facial expressions seen of the women in the Orientalist D&G advertisement. Her static countenance eradicates any possible pleasure that she may experience by being in control of this S&M encounter. The only pleasure that the viewer does see is a satisfied smile of the male figure indicating that the goal of this sexualized scene is to appeal to masculine desire, while the female subject remains a body that can be molded to fit a man’s fantasy whatever it may be.

Pornographic Considerations

In the case study of several advertisement campaigns by fashion brands Dolce & Gabbana and Diesel, each image was visually deconstructed to reveal the pornographic aesthetic governing each advertisement. The analysis of these two specific examples from contemporary media demonstrates how mainstream advertising does in fact utilize the same sexually violent visual tropes utilized by the porn industry. One might find the parallel paradoxical, especially when the issue of censorship is discussed in tandem with both pornographic aesthetics and the formidable efforts to purge these types of images from the general viewing public. The D&G and Diesel advertisements expose some interesting questions, which when explored, provide a

foundational entrance into the perception and understanding of a new model—the media apparatus—and how this mechanism offers an alternative means toward framing how images function within visual culture.

The first important discussion regarding the images in my contextual case study is the question of how Dolce & Gabbana and Diesel can employ androcentric and extremely misogynistic images featuring rape fantasy and sadomasochism if anti-porn feminists, scientific observations, and legal theorists have classified these types of imagery as dangerously effectual media? In addition, where do the Dolce & Gabbana and Diesel images fit in the epistemological scheme designed by social scientists such as Malamuth and Donnerstein and feminists such as Andrea Dworkin for the use censorship to prohibit potentially behavior-inducing scenes of sexual violence?

Needless to say, the presence of the image types represented by the Dolce & Gabbana and Diesel advertisements complicates the neat exposition offered by anti-porn activists and researchers for the cause-and-effect model of image consumption and the division between pornographic representations from its visual antitheses. The vexing aspect to these images becomes apparent when one tries to rationalize their place in the cause-and-effect model. Although it is commonplace for fashion advertising, and the industry in general, to use components of hegemonic understandings of sexuality and the male gaze to sell products, this characteristic in fashion media is not directly associated with pornography or the sex industry. Furthermore, it also must be acknowledged that these Dolce & Gabbana and Diesel campaigns did incite backlash, but were not subject to a strong codified mandate to censor their material. Conversely, Diesel has been praised by the industry and its media designers for the images it

produces as a company that conjures up innovative ways to construct clothing advertisements (Fort, 14).

Separating pornography from pornographic aesthetic in advertising is a division that inadvertently says that the use of androcentric rape fantasy and sadomasochism from one media outlet to another differ in some way. In other words, pornography's use of sexually violent images can influence violent actions while these tropes in common advertisements do not. This dichotomy explains why D&G and Diesel can circulate their advertisements with little to no codified prohibition, while popular porn rags such as Hustler or Penthouse, and film-types such as gonzo are pushed to the abject margins of mainstream visual culture via censorship. An analogous conclusion could also affirm that the relatively insubstantial discourse concerning the harmful effects of mainstream advertisements extolling the pornographic aesthetic points to a designation that only materials officially catalogued as pornography can potentially induce mimicry fantasies or incite actual latent sexual violence.

Discussions of cause-and-effect in relation to fashion advertisement predominantly revolve around their repetitive use of ideal and impossible body types. And even still, the concern for the possible development of body dimorphic disorders, in especially female viewers, is understood as a perceived problem that is not solely based in looking at the image but also takes into account other aspects of a subject's life that might affect her body outlook. Conversely, pornographic material is something that is thought in many ways to be more immediate and insidious than body ideals, because it involves the total destruction of the female symbolically, and to many scholars and scientists, physically as well. Furthermore, cause-and-effect understandings of pornography have a unique sexual component that constructs porn consumption as an addiction, where one arousing experience like the rape of a woman, can lead

to an ever-increasing need to replicate the fantasy. In addition, this fantasy does not stay static, i.e., enacting the same sexual scenario over and over again, but instead strengthens in the severity of its sadism—which reaches its apex with the corporeal application of the fantasy on women.

When looking at how social science's and feminist legal scholarship's use of the cause-and-effect model to separate highly effectual images (pornography and sexual assault) from less immediately hazardous types of behavior changes (thin ideals and body dysmorphia), it can be clearly seen that the mainstream pornography that gains the most attention and scrutiny has some kind of unique, identifiable quality to its depictions of sexual violence against women. Where does the line cross between pornography and advertisements that sexualize violence but yet are not porn? This question is an important one, because the answer is what eventually decides which material will be formally censored as pornography or be mass circulated as advertisement. The media apparatus is the theoretical solution that can begin to critically deal with this seemingly concrete binary.

While analyzing the D&G and Diesel advertisements it can be difficult to find some distinct difference between these images and similar versions within pornography. Identifying what should be considered censorable or not becomes nebulous, because both the porn and advertising industry have many commonalities that make differentiating them not so precise. Both the porn and advertising industry are billion dollar corporate ventures with the same capitalist goal to produce images for consumable products (Dworkin, 522). Even further similarities show that these industries do not solely create images to promote what is being sold, i.e., simple images of the product, but instead wish to produce images that are visual narratives, which have their own plots and meaning behind them. Fashion advertisements in particular are a

prime example of a media that produces story narratives with images both to sell products and become an object of visual importance itself. In comparison, pornography is an industry that also counts on story lines and scenarios as an important aspect of its industry. A broader look at both porn and fashion advertising reveals that both use sexual violence as a main story line and do it to position women as submissive and sexualized objects of the male gaze (Kilbourne, 270-272).

Despite the similarities that exist between porn and mainstream fashion media, they are not placed in the same genre of visual material that uses fantasy, violence, and sex for a viewing public. The crux of the matter is that empirical cause-and-effect models and censorship cannot function as regulatory processes without the division between dangerous aesthetics in pornography and permissible ones in advertising. Without this binary, censorship would become a moot cause and lose its power to govern human sexual behavior. The empirical research that advocates censorship must actively find cause-and-effect pattern of behavior to incite fears that help spark mass prohibition campaigns.

I am asserting here that it is important for research on image effects of pornography to only investigate images officially classified as pornography. Mainstream advertising with a strong pornographic aesthetic is not utilized as a variable in the experiments, because their prerogative to validate the cause-and-effect model would be shattered if participants reacted to these advertisements in a similar manner as soft and hard-core pornography. This would generate a blurring effect, where lines of absolution would be dissolved to reveal a dialectic between viewer and image that was far too subliminally complex for cause-and-effect explanations and the remedy offered by the idea of censorship.

It is my assertion that the label of “pornography” is an arbitrary term that does not adequately describe the types of images that can use stereotypical representations of masculine

and feminine desire, sexual violence, nudity, sadomasochism, and fetish for capitalistic and entertainment purposes. A more effective term, which does not construct loose dichotomies between paralleling image types, would be “pornographic aesthetics.” In its formal meaning and definition, the pornographic aesthetic does not label images as pornography or not; instead the term highlights the fact that any material can be “pornography” if it embodies the visual tropes encompassing the pornographic aesthetic. In other words, the lines between pornography and non-pornographic fantastical images of sexual violence are purposely dissolved.

Dialectic manifests itself between an image and a viewer, an interaction that has only been framed by social science, legal studies, and social activism via a cause-and-effect relationship. This under-theorized interaction is the media apparatus. The theory of the media apparatus asserts that there is nothing inherently different in the use of sexualized violence against women from one hegemonic media representation to the next. They all reside within a visual continuum that serves the same purpose—to symbolically reinforce patriarchal dominance and do so by sustaining feminine stereotypes and the subordinated status of women. These images also do not incite sexist behavior or patriarchal ideology, because it is already implicit within society’s customs and unconscious beliefs, personal interactions, and institutions. To clarify, sexually violent images are not just mere reflections of patriarchy and behaviors already perpetrated against women, but reciprocally interact with customs and ideology. This functions to validate and normalize via visual representations both the symbolic and literal interpretations of sexual violence against women.

The idea that images of sexual violence in porn and advertising are all of the same aesthetic, no matter what medium of visual representation (sculpture, art, photography, film, advertisement) is an idea that has been discussed by critics of anti-porn feminists and censorship

of pornography. Lisa Steele is a feminist scholar who has also observed, and written about, the similarities between porn and hegemonic advertisement's use of sexual violence (Steele, 56-62). According to this schema, images of sexualized violence are not distinguishable "types," but instead all tap in the same tropes and meanings that make up the foundations of Western visual culture. In other words, these types of images that use violence to position women as disposable objects and inferior subjects to men occur in different media forms, but have the same access to cultural aesthetics, a stock-pile of patriarchal tropes and symbols.

Images are just as passive or active as the world/society in which they reside. Part of civilization's goal is not living totally within our own psyches, but reaching for the representational, more intuitive realm—thus visuals are not products or shapers, instead they are like appendages of the whole society in which we live. This is how advertisements support Western capitalism and more generally can normalize cultural ideals through repetition and overabundance. Patriarchy, the system that classifies the current state of civilization, can only reproduce what is already present within society. It is not that either sexualization of women and the erotically charged violence against them originates within solely visual narratives or seemingly violent behavioral effects. Instead, these tropes are dually generated and promoted by patriarchy as a whole via behaviors and representations.

The question remains where do these concepts come from? How did it become commonplace within culture and image customs to fully promote the goals of patriarchy? The system that framed what are the bones of what we call Western civilization, both material and metaphysical strides (rationality, the arts, religion, science, language, embodiment, physicality, intellect) are all infused with patriarchal ideology. These ideologies become metaphysical designations that ascend to the realm of custom and imbed themselves within visual

representations. Customary ideals are powerful because they are the site of human existence and interaction where patterns of behavior and thinking can take holds and grow with little or no questioning. When, where and how did patriarchal attitudes, beliefs, and values become dominant and customary? This is indeed difficult to determine because we have no frameworks for a civilization that was not controlled by patriarchal ideology and socialization (Mill, 19, Beauvoir, 30). This is precisely how images of sexual violence against women are one and the same within all outlets of visual culture and why their current dominance within the *media apparatus* cannot be diminished by simply censoring one type (pornography) from the mechanism.

As stated above, censorship has been the most popular means of trying to deconstruct the images that make up Western visual culture. The labeling and censoring of specifically pornographic visual material has historically been used since the sixteenth century. During the eighteenth century, obscene literature and caricatures were used as political ammunition to humiliate and critique the politicians of the time. Individuals in powerful positions within society censored these materials because they felt threatened by them and feared the public reception of these satirical images (Hunt, 356-359). The subsequent prohibition of sexually explicit material in the Victorian era had a more moral prerogative. The issue of sex became an area of much concern, in part because sexuality and sexual expression were seen as representative of a society in whole. Thus the labeling of the obscene versus the acceptable was part of a greater regulatory project to establish a code for ideal citizenry, the betterment of society, and an increased role of institutions in the shaping human life. In all the cases where pornography became an issue of social contention, it was within the self-interest of the prohibitor to try and actively use the regulation of sexual expression as a means for greater social change.

The question that resides within historical censorship of classified pornographic material is whether prohibiting these materials actually instigated a change of behavior. According to Foucauldian theory on repression, the answer to this question would solidly hold that censoring sexual expression deemed obscene does not cease its proliferation within society. Foucault's hypothesis on repression asserts that the censorship of sex facilitated a relative explosion of discourses around sex, whether in the service of those prohibiting these materials or its relocation underground where it flourished through innuendo and covert illicitness. In describing the issue of sex and censorship and the aftereffect caused by prohibitory sanction against seemingly pornographic material, Foucault states, "It is quite possible that there was an expurgation—and a very rigorous one—of the authorized vocabulary. It may indeed be true that a whole rhetoric of allusion and metaphor was codified" (Foucault, 17) What this statement maintains is that pornography was given an official name and set criterion, but its subsequent prohibition was unable to stop the perpetuation of the pornographic aesthetic outside of codified porn.

Foucault offers a discursive formula for how censorship can incite the very thing that its prohibitory regulations seek to dismantle. The first offensive against an object of censor is to generate a working definition that can designate it as "different" from acceptable materials, a process that Foucault defines as the policing of statements. The second stage of censorship is characterized by the act of designating the settings and environments where the use of the prohibited object—in this case pornography or obscene language or material—is not acceptable or ethical; Foucault offers a list of examples: at social gatherings, between parents and children, teachers and pupils, masters and domestic servants. As an adjunct to the second stage of censorship, society becomes a restrictive economy where regulations are issued to determine in what locations censored materials are suitable. Contemporary examples of this are rating systems

developed for television and film, which serve to hinder highly sexual content from gaining mass distribution in mainstream visual culture, and urban districting decisions that restrict where sex shops can locate. The third stage of censorship in the repressive hypothesis is the locus of its paradox, when censorship provokes a proliferation of illicit sexual expression rather than a decrease (Foucault, 18). Even more paradoxical is the fact that it is usually the very institutions admonishing explicit pornographic aesthetic that facilitate its furthered discursive power.

If we once again look at contemporary examples, the paradox within the censoring practices of regulatory institutions can be found in the television and film rating systems. Television and film have strict rules and regulations on sexual content, yet subsequently use sex and the sex appeal of actors to sell movies and boost television ratings. Another example is the America Broadcasting Company and Disney Corporation promotion of childhood innocence and abstinence, while simultaneously sexualizing and fetishizing child stars. To explain the reasoning behind the paradox inherent in the repressive hypothesis Foucault states,

The medical examination, the psychiatric investigation, the pedagogical report and family controls may have the over-all and apparent objective of saying no to all wayward or unproductive sexualities, but the fact is that they function as mechanisms with a double impetus: pleasure and power. (Foucault, 45)

Power and pleasure are for Foucault important outcomes fueling censorship and the paradoxical resurgence of the object of censor via “allusion and metaphor.” Power within the Foucaudian repressive hypothesis is described as the pleasure gained by means of exercising the ability to question, monitor, watch, spy, etc. Pleasure is explained as stemming from the power display of pursuing taboo pleasure, or alternatively pleasure gained via power displays such as showing off

one's ability to transgress prohibited sexual expression, being scandalous, or out rightly resisting censorship.

The interplay between power and pleasure within the repressive hypothesis is not mutually distinct, i.e., one party does not solely find power, while the other only pleasure. Instead, power and pleasure are pursued and found by those who both censure and resist censorship. Censorship and the discursive backlash it instigates are “circular incitements” that to Foucault create “perpetual spirals of power and pleasure” that are promoted by “countless economic interests which, with the help of psychiatry, prostitution, and pornography, have tapped into both this analytical multiplication of pleasure and the optimization of the power that controls it” (Foucault, 45-48). In other words, the repressive hypothesis is a mechanism that uses censorship as a way to, whether it is institutional or individual, exert power and gain pleasure from it.

It could be said that the cause-and-effect model and the censorship campaigns of anti-porn feminists become institutions of power that must gain power and pleasure from regulating some aspect of society by decreeing that the enemy of a culture is one particular group of violently sexual images—pornography. It is my belief that the cause-and-effect model and censorship do not actively malign all sexually violent media, because then blame could not be set and solutions could not be easily achieved if all types of representations of women and violence within culture were scrutinized. The division between porn and non-porn, even if they share an analogous aesthetic, are purposeful distinctions made to ensure that patriarchy always subversively sustains itself within cultural self-awareness. The censorship of one type such as pornography has in essence become the scapegoat that fools society into thinking that it is these images that are normalizing patriarchal views of women and the system in general. As a result,

other similar representations can be seen as acceptable and can be widely distributed. The media apparatus succeeds to blur that distinction and consequently nullifies the regulatory power and pleasure of censorship while shifting focus away from cause-and-effect to how these image types succeed to bolster patriarchy on the unconscious, interpersonal, and institutional level (Cudd and Jones, 78-80).

Conclusion: The Media Apparatus at Work for Changeability

In this research paper, I have revealed through a contextual and theoretical case study of sexual violent porn and advertising that censorship of pornography alone cannot fulfill feminist goals of truly ceasing misogyny, hostility, and sexism from Western society. Instead, the image tropes existing within violent pornography are also prevalent in mainstream advertising. Thus, using censorship and the cause-and-effect model are simplistic remedies to a more complex problem.

The media apparatus shows that sexually violent imagery of women, and the ideology all of these image types espouse, need to be analyzed in a broader context—mainly how both porn and advertising sustain patriarchy simultaneously and how can this be changed. The media apparatus is a better model for understanding the dynamic that exists between images and spectators because it does not focus on just one small group of culpable images. Instead, media tropes are homogenous within all outlets, whether it is pornography or fashion advertising. Understanding this enables one to see how hegemonic media as a whole uses the same visual codes to help normalize patriarchal ideology through the imagery it produces. In relation to pornographic aesthetic, sexual violence within both visual materials labeled pornography and in mainstream media project into cultural consciousness that women are submissive to men, they

are disposable objects of male desire, and forced sex is something acceptable and necessary for male dominance. These images are consumed by viewers not as catalysts for violent action, but as justifiers for already present investment in patriarchal ideology.

The media apparatus is a mechanism that at base level only functions as a means of reinforcing and perpetuating a dominant type of societal structure. This means that it, and the types of images within the apparatus, can be changed to begin a visual de-construction and de-normalizing of patriarchy and sexism. Some examples of feminist media and porn being produced to try and circulate within the media apparatus to challenge the system are the LGBT film company Outcast Films, the feminist porn company Pink and White Productions and the feminist periodical Bitch Magazine. All of these alternative media outlets strive to insert within the media apparatus new images that try to transgress normative patriarchal tropes of male dominance with different ideologies about women and their sexuality.

Some examples include using and filming porn in un-fantastical scenarios with people of differing looks and body types. Another tactic is displaying different ways in which actual women achieve pleasure or fetishize outside them solely being dominated and used by a male figure. These companies demonstrate a few of the multiple ways in which the dominant form of pornographic aesthetic can begin to change in definition—from subordination to a new cultural self-awareness that is free of patriarchal tropes guarding deep-rooted customs, something Western society has never seen.

Appendix

1.



Figure One: Dolce and Gabbana, 2005

2.

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

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decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Figure Two (left) and Three (right): Dolce and Gabbana, 2006-2007

3.

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Figure Four: Diesel, 2005

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