

The purpose of this paper is to represent a view on the issue of pornography within the realms of gender and religion from a perspective that argues against the position I hold and perspectives I tend to agree with when discussing women, religious ethics, and pornography, as well as a perspective that has many criticisms against pornography and seeks to espouse the negative aspects of pornography. First I will begin with a discussion about the definitions of pornography, secondly I will discuss the argument Jane Caputi proposes regarding women, religious ethics, and pornography, and lastly I will propose the arguments, ideas, and notions that I agree with regarding women, religious ethics, and pornography.

Defining Pornography

In representing the notions and ideas of this view towards pornography, one must first define pornography. The way in which one may define pornography varies dramatically from one religion to another, one philosophy to another, and from one epistemology to another. So in order to present this side of the argument, one must first provide the definition of pornography being used throughout the first part of this discussion. I chose to focus a large portion of this argument based upon an article titled “Re-Creating Patriarchy: Connecting Religion and Pornography” by Jane Caputi and she uses a definition of pornography proposed by Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin. This definition is commonly used within many discussions that revolve around the issues relating religion, gender, and pornography and is more commonly known as the Indianapolis Ordinance. The definition that MacKinnon and Dworkin maintain states: “Pornography shall mean the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women, whether in pictures or in words, that also includes one or more of the following: (1) Women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy pain or humiliation; or (2) Women are presented as sexual objects who experience sexual pleasure in being raped; or (3) Women are presented as sexual objects tied up or cut up or mutilated or bruised or physically hurt, or as dismembered or truncated or fragmented or severed into body parts; or (4) Women are presented being penetrated by objects or animals; or (5) 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; [or] (6) Women are presented as sexual objects for domination, con-quest, violation,

exploitation, possession, or use, or through postures or positions of servility or submission or display. The use of men, children, or transsexuals in the place of women in paragraphs (1) through (6) above shall also constitute pornography under this section”ⁱ. This is one definition of pornography amongst many others. A second definition of pornography provided by The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy acknowledges porn as “sexually explicit material whose primary function is to produce sexual arousal in viewers”ⁱⁱ. I choose to primarily focus on these two definitions because they are used throughout this discussion.

Caputi’s Argument

Caputi uses this definition to suggest pornography as a “mainstream worldview based in sexualized denigration, voyeuristic objectification, and domination”ⁱⁱⁱ. From this she claims that “pornographic thinking engenders all of these”^{iv} while at the same time “the pornographic worldview also informs all patriarchal institutions,”^v particularly religion. The argument I am presenting essentially derives from the argument Caputi poses: “both pornography and patriarchal religion are founded in men’s appropriation, control, silencing, and self-serving definition of feminine sexuality. Both rely upon a hetero-sexist, gendered structure (i.e., masculine dominant and feminine subordinate)”^{vi}. She also argues that “pornographic sexuality derives directly from patriarchal religious moralisms”^{vii}. Now that one is able to recognize the argument being made, it is possible to discuss the foundational structure that forms this type of argument. Part of this structure is a specific focus on Christianity as a patriarchal religion that has structured gender which leads to the possible discussion of how pornography has been structured. Caputi begins by arguing that it was the “emergence of Hebrew monotheism” which focused on a male God that led to the “symbolic devaluing of women in relation to the divine to become one of the founding metaphors of Western civilization”^{viii}. She claims that there is yet another “founding metaphor supplied by Aristotelian philosophy, the notion that women are incomplete, irritational, and ‘damaged human beings of an entirely different order than men’”^{ix}. It is from these two founding metaphors that Western civilization has allowed for the development of the subordination of women.

She continues her discussion by arguing that pornography continues to affirm this subordination through patriarchal religions which hold that, “women are not made in the image of God”^x. Caputi argues that this view - that “women are not made in the image of God” - is

upheld through the origin story of Adam and Eve, which is not simply a story of “origin about the world, but, rather, about the origin of patriarchy”^{xi}. This is due to the idea that the Adam and Eve myth “reverses the biological fact that it is women who give birth to men by having Eve come out of Adam” allowing for individuals to perceive this event as Eve (woman) being second to Adam (man). From this point it is possible to focus on another female figure of Christianity, the Virgin Mary, as referenced by the Catholic Church as being “born without Eve’s stain, or ‘original sin’”^{xii}. The problem being suggested here is that by tracing the “etymology of the word ‘sin’ to a root that means ‘to be,’” this patriarchal religion is thereby deeming that the ‘original sin’ of women is actually to “manifest elemental being”^{xiii}. From this point Caputi moves forward to discuss snuff pornography and snuff religion through a prophecy from the Gospel of Peter. She claims that “the patriarchal religious condemnation of the flesh, the female, fertility, and matter itself leads inevitably then to the final gynocidal or snuff scenario: the patriarchal God’s destruction of the (Mother) Earth by fire”^{xiv}. Caputi claims it is from this type of snuff scenario that society has received this polarization between men and women as “the conquerors and the conquered”^{xv} and thus a subordination of women. Due to the fact that Caputi uses the Indianapolis Ordinance as a definition for pornography, this argument is also acknowledging the idea that these notions and claims can be said of men, children, and transsexuals. Now, from this notion that pornography perpetuates the subordination of women, many argue that using the term “women” does not mean this is a subordination of those belonging to the sex female, but the subordination of those belonging to any sex that are placed in a position of subordination, submissiveness, and the like.

My Position in Opposition to Caputi

It is from this last statement that I would like to present the arguments, ideas, and questions I tend to when discussing women, gender ethics, and pornography that go against the claims made by Caputi, MacKinnon, and Dworkin, as well as many others who stand behind their position. In order to discuss my position it is important to state that the definition of pornography I attend to is the definition provided by the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, however this does not negate the fact that I can acknowledge the definition provided by the Indianapolis Ordinance and argue against Caputi’s claims. I think one question to consider is how the claims made by Caputi generalize to those who do not tend to Christian theology or to

those with theistic views that oppose Christianity, in my case agnosticism. I'd like to argue that they are not claims one can generalize throughout theology and so one must rethink the way in which the notion of the subordination of women stems from religion. I think that if one does not have an argument such as Caputi's which uses the origin myth of Adam and Eve or the portrayal of the Virgin Mary to support this position, then one is left with the possibility that there is no such notion as the subordination of women stemming from religion.

Secondly, I think it is important to question a self-defeating aspect of these claims. Caputi claims that pornography, along with patriarchal religion, relies upon a gendered structure. The problem I see here is the reliance upon the idea that gender has already been structured. The question here is what does one then say of pornography if one were to undo this structure? For those who believe that gender has become a socially constructed idea, like me, the answers to this question allows for a different approach to pornography and gender ethics – an approach more commonly taken up by third wave, and as some would suggest, fourth wave feminists. One could go even further to ask what people who tend to other epistemologies would say of how gender has been structured and then address the issue of pornography from there. Since I attend to the epistemology that gender is a social construction, I think that society has attached its ideas of what gender is in order to develop a gender construct. These social ties and relationships to the gender construct allow individuals to differentiate people into separate gender categories. I think that this is a flawed conception of gender and that it is necessary for individuals to break away from this socially constructed idea of gender in order to, not only, form a different conception or way of defining gender, but also to be able to look at pornography from a different perspective that doesn't allow for the placement of individuals into separate gender categories.

A third problem I find with Caputi's claim is that is it fair to generalize the submissive position of women, or females, in heterosexual pornography to pornographies of all sexualities? I think not. Here I would like to point to claims made by Leslie Green in her article titled "Pornographies". She makes the argument that "if there are significant differences among sexualities – different social meanings, different structures of power, and different possibilities for change – then uniform regulations governing something called 'pornography' are liable to have different effects on different groups"^{xvi}. She makes two claims to support her argument: (1) "the meanings of gay pornography cannot be reduced to the heterosexual variant" and (2) "there

is no evidence that gay pornography harms men in the way that heterosexual pornography is alleged to harm women^{xvii}. I think that the latter statement brings up another wonderful, yet lengthy, discussion that I do not have time to discuss here, unfortunately, regarding the Harm Principle proposed by John Stuart Mill and the issue of pornography and gender. It is from these last two claims that I would like to introduce her concluding statement as a conclusion to this paper as well because it opens the door for much further discussion. She states, “If, in sum, we regulate *pornographies* as if they were all just *pornography*, how will the values of autonomy or equality really be affected? To ask this question is to answer it^{xviii}.”

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- ⁱ McGowan, Mary K. "On Pornography: MacKinnon, Speech Acts, and "False" Construction." *Hypatia* 20, no. 3 (2005) : 22-49. Accessed October 2, 2014.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3811113>.
- ⁱⁱ Malpas, J., "Donald Davidson", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.),
<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/davidson/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Caputi, Jane. "Re-Creating Patriarchy: Connecting Religion and Pornography." *Wake Forest Journal of Law & Policy* 1, no. 2 (2011) : 293-324.
- ^{iv} *Ibid*, 295.
- ^v *Ibid*, 296.
- ^{vi} *Ibid*, 297.
- ^{vii} *Ibid*, 313.
- ^{viii} *Ibid*, 301.
- ^{ix} *Ibid*, 301.
- ^x *Ibid*, 303.
- ^{xi} *Ibid*, 305.
- ^{xii} *Ibid*, 315.
- ^{xiii} *Ibid*, 315.
- ^{xiv} *Ibid*, 316.
- ^{xv} *Ibid*, 319.
- ^{xvi} Green, Leslie. "Pornographies." *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2000) : 27-52.
- ^{xvii} *Ibid*, 31.
- ^{xviii} *Ibid*, 52.

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