

Launch speech for *Big Porn Inc.*

Readings Bookshop, Hawthorn, 15 September 2011

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In June this year Hugh Hefner opened a new Playboy Club in London. When asked about the feminist demonstrators outside, Hefner said: “Playboy and the Playboy Clubs were the end of sexism”.¹

The sad thing about this statement is that Hefner probably believes it. Hefner is at one with those post-modern radicals who believe girls are empowered through the exploitation of their sexuality and that participating in the making and consuming of porn is a valid part of that.

The idea of empowerment through sexual licence reached its pinnacle in the case of Natalie Dylan, a 22-year old Californian who a couple of years ago auctioned her virginity to the highest bidder. “I understand some people may condemn me”, she said. “But I think this is empowering. I am using what I have to better myself”.² In a perfect convergence of “girl power” and pure market thinking, she declared:

‘I don’t have a moral dilemma with it. We live in a capitalist society. Why shouldn’t I be allowed to capitalise on my virginity?’

Why not indeed? She said that if he requested it, the purchaser of Natalie’s virginity would be able to authenticate the quality of the product by way of a gynaecological examination, and then consummate the transaction in a brothel. Nice.

As if to underscore the perversion of the ideals of feminism, it turns out that Ms Dylan holds a bachelor’s degree in women’s studies.

The story of *Playboy* is the story of the normalisation of porn. Earlier this year I wandered into a Dymock’s bookshop in Canberra. There, unmissable at eye level,

¹ *Daily Mail* 8 June 2011

² Anon., ‘Shock jock to auction off girl’s virginity: Howard Stern announces his most controversial stunt yet’, *Daily Mail* 9 September 2008.

next to the “Great Holiday Fiction”, “School Holiday Reads” and “Books for Cooks”, was a display with a boxed set containing the first ten years of *Playboy*.

I suppose we should expect it; the porn industry has so successfully mainstreamed its product that even a “family company” like Dymocks doesn’t think twice before cashing in. When I expressed surprise to the sales assistant that Dymocks should be selling porn, she replied, a little embarrassed: “Well, it’s not porn really, not these days”.

We know what she means; the first ten years of *Playboy* were pretty tame by today’s hardcore standards. But if *Playboy* is not porn, then what is it? Light entertainment? A leisure product? Family fun?

It’s true that few today would object to the sale of pictures of naked women displaying bare breasts and some thigh (if my memory of teen years is reliable). Innocuous really, in an age where everything that the most perverse and disturbed mind can imagine can be viewed on the internet.

But Dymocks’ decision to sell the *Playboy* collection, and to place it in the most prominent spot, further breaks down the barrier between pornographic imagery and mainstream culture. When kids walk into Dymocks the message, explicit or subliminal, is that *Playboy* is acceptable everywhere.

And while the first ten years of the original stick mag (which Hefner originally wanted to title *Stag Party*) were tame, the last ten years are anything but. Would Dymocks stock a boxed set with the *last* ten years of the magazine? Complete with graphic close-ups of ... well, I don’t know what. But if *Playboy* has to compete with the internet, then inside its covers the term “explicit” has been redefined. And the *Playboy* empire’s online material is more graphic again.

Dymocks’ management does not have a problem asking the young women who staff their shops to sell magazines to men who use them to masturbate; but perhaps “not really porn” leads to “not really masturbation”. We would hope that Dymocks’ management would feel uncomfortable asking the young women to sell magazines with pictures of “extreme close-ups”. If so, where does the line fall between “not

really porn” and porn? 1980? 1990? 2000? When exactly did “not really porn” become porn?

According to its website, Dymocks is a “family owned business” that looks for “the opportunity ... to take the high ground”. If promoting soft porn is today’s high ground, the surrounding landscape must have sunk pretty low.

One of the more bizarre accusations made against people like the authors who appear in this powerful, new book, *Big Porn Inc.*, is that they are “anti-sex”. This accusation is made by post-modern academics who style themselves “pro-sex”. Of course, the authors are not anti-sex. They are anti-degradation, anti-exploitation, anti-coercion and anti-trafficking. In truth these are the people who want to *rescue* sex, to take it back from the pornographers and the post-modern apologists for the porn industry. The campaigning group Stop Porn Culture sums it up in their reworking of the famous slogan of the 60s: “Make love, not porn”.

In the midst of the sexual revolution in the 1960s and 1970s none could foresee that casting off the oppressive restrictions of “Victorian morality” would be more than a boon for the sexually repressed. It would also create a vast market for pornography driven by the customers’ demand for more and more extreme acts, to give expression to dark desires that had for centuries been hidden for good reason.

If the sexual revolution was intended to free us to celebrate our sexuality then modern porn is the betrayal of the revolution. What was meant to be beautiful and liberating has, in the hands of the pornographers, become ugly and oppressive. In graphic and disturbing detail, the authors collected together in *Big Porn Inc* show how this has happened.

The burgeoning resistance to the pornification of our societies is itself fascinating because it crosses the usual political boundaries. Despite their differences, the authors – from Australia and the USA, UK, India and South Africa – are united by an unwavering commitment to the dignity of women and girls and the courage to look unblinkingly at modern porn and its devastating effects.

The most worrying aspect of the corruption of sex and sexuality brought by the proliferation of porn is not that, as the laws were relaxed, an aggressive industry expanded to push the boundaries as far as they could, but that so many otherwise well-meaning and socially alert people have chosen to blind themselves to the impacts of that expansion.

Many still simply refuse to accept that modern porn is anything more than a few 'naughty pictures'—nothing to worry about, up to the individual, don't buy it if you don't like it.

In part, this blindness is due to the effectiveness of the sexual liberation movement of the 1960s and 70s in turning all critics of unbounded sexual expression into prudes and wowsers. Today, to make any judgement about other people's sexual activities is to be uncool. If asked whether a certain perversion is immoral, the best most can do is to concede that it is 'a bit weird'. Yet contrary to the posturing of the media studies academics who vie to show us all up with their ultra-permissiveness, perversion is not subversion.

But there is another, deeper, reason for the reluctance of the public to take a stand against pornography—their daily collaboration in the sexualisation of girls, including their own daughters. The close links between the sexualisation of girls and the proliferation of porn are analysed by a number of the book's authors, amongst them Maggie Hamilton, Gail Dines, Caroline Norma and Melinda Tankard Reist.

Huge industries that see themselves as respectable—the designers, manufacturers and retailers of children's clothing, the publishers of girls magazines, the music industry, the advertising industry, the television stations and cosmetics companies—all participate in making porn acceptable, even desirable, by mimicking its styles and grooming girls to its expectations.

In one devastating chapter after another, *Big Porn Inc* represents a powerful and growing reaction against the influence of the porn merchants and our society's willingness to let them get away with one outrage after another. The case built by the authors is overwhelming and will make every reader squirm. Reading it unleashes a cascade of emotions—shock, disgust, guilt, rage, and heart-felt admiration for the

victims of the porn industry, some of whom like Caroline and Stella tell their poignant stories in its pages.

Big Porn Inc is a landmark publication, sure to help open the eyes of the public to the modern scourge of porn and amplify the calls for greater decency and respect. Because without them there can be no true liberation.