

**Book Review: Gail Dines, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality* (Spinifex, 2010) ISBN 9781876756871 \$34.95 AUD**

**Michelle Evans\***

For some years I have been writing about the legal regulation of pornography on the internet. I have argued that instead of censoring pornography on the internet (which is an almost impossible undertaking), Australia should adopt the civil rights ordinance drafted by Catharine A MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin. This ordinance empowers those harmed by pornography to take direct action against the makers and distributors of the pornography as an issue of sex discrimination.<sup>1</sup> I have looked at the ways in which the ordinance could be applied to the internet, the ways that Australia's laws should be changed, and how to overcome jurisdictional problems given the international reach of the internet.<sup>2</sup>

I first chose to focus on the harms of internet pornography because of the broad international reach of the internet and the fact that the internet now pervades our lives. The internet is everywhere and all around us – in our homes, workplaces and universities, and on our i-pads and mobile phones. This means that pornography, so easily accessible on the internet, most often instantaneously and free of charge, is also all around us all the time. It is no longer relegated to sleazy cinemas and sex shops in the 'bad part of town' and thus, gains a certain legitimacy through its ubiquitousness.

It is the ubiquitousness of pornography that Gail Dines has focussed on in her book, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*. In *Pornland*, Dines examines how pornography has saturated our lives to such an extent that it appears to be a normal part of our modern popular culture. Dines analyses how this desensitises us to pornography, thus legitimising it as an acceptable part of popular culture. Dines outlines how pornography has infiltrated popular culture in the preface to her book:

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\*Senior Lecturer in Law, Murdoch University, Western Australia.

<sup>1</sup> For a copy of the ordinance, its history Dworkin, Andrea and MacKinnon, Catharine A., *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality* (Minneapolis: Organizing Against Pornography, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Michelle Evans, 'Australia's failure to address the Harms of Internet Pornography' (2011) 2 *The Western Australian Jurist* 129; and Michelle Evans 'Censorship and Morality in Cyberspace: Regulating the Gender-Based Harms of Pornography Online' (2007) Volume 11 *Southern Cross University Law Review*, 1.

Howard Stern regularly features porn on his show, and for this he was the second-highest paid celebrity in the world in 2006; Hugh Hefner's life, with his blonde, young, and embarrassingly naive "girlfriends," is the topic of the hugely popular *The Girls Next Door* on E! Entertainment; retired mega-porn star Jenna Jameson has written a best-selling book and appears in numerous popular celebrity magazines, and Sasha Grey, the new, more hard-core Jenna Jameson, is featured in a four-page article in *Rolling Stone* in May 2009 and appears in a Steven Soderbergh movie. Kevin Smith's movie *Zack and Miri Make a Porno* is warmly received by movie critics; pole dancing is a widely popular form of exercise; students at the University of Maryland show a porn movie on campus; and Indiana University invites pornographer Joanna Angel to address a human sexuality class. I could go on, but these examples illustrate how porn has seeped into our everyday world and is fast becoming a normal part of our lives that it barely warrants a mention.<sup>3</sup>

Dines is well qualified to write a book about pornographic harm, inequality and its normalisation in popular culture. She is a Professor of Sociology and Women's Studies at Wheelock College in the United States, and helped establish the activist group 'Stop Porn Culture'.<sup>4</sup> Dines has absorbed herself in the world of pornography in order to find the truth behind an industry which profits from the sale and degradation of human lives, particularly women's lives. For over twenty years, Dines has attended pornography conventions, has spoken to hundreds of men and women used in pornography, hundreds of men and women harmed by pornography and has travelled across the United States to speak to University students about pornography, often resulting in openly hostile responses from some audience members, but also in life changing responses from others. Dines has also published extensively on pornography, inequality and harm.<sup>5</sup>

*Pornland* was originally published in the United States by Beacon Press in 2010. However, the copy I have reviewed was published in 2011 with Australian publisher, Spinifex Press, located in Melbourne. The stated aims of Spinifex Press are '...to publish innovative and controversial feminist books with an optimistic edge.'<sup>6</sup> Spinifex Press has shown its commitment to pornography as an issue of harm and sex discrimination against women by also publishing *Big Porn Inc: Exposing the Harms of the Global Pornography Industry* in 2011 to which Dines has also contributed a chapter.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Pornland*, ix.

<sup>4</sup> Gail Dines, 'Biography' <http://gaildines.com/biography/>; Stop Porn Culture, 'Home' <http://stoppornculture.org/>.

<sup>5</sup> See for example, Gail Dines, Robert Jensen and Ann Russo, *Pornography: The Production and Consumption of Inequality* (Routledge, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Spinifex Press, 'About Us' [http://www.spinifexpress.com.au/About\\_Us/](http://www.spinifexpress.com.au/About_Us/).

<sup>7</sup> Gail Dines, "Stop Porn Culture!" in Melinda Tankard Reist and Abigail Bray (eds), *Big Porn Inc: Exposing the Harms of the Global Pornography Industry* (Spinifex Press, 2011), 266.

In the 'Introduction' to *Pornland*, Dines provides an overview of the pornography industry as a money making enterprise where those used in pornography are being subjected to more extreme levels of sexual abuse to meet consumer demands as the market becomes inundated with pornography, particularly due to the rise of the internet. She states:

Many of the porn producers I interview freely acknowledge that they are in the business to make money, not to further our sexual empowerment or creativity. They see themselves caught up in a business that, thanks to the growth of the internet, is like a runaway train. What they will admit is that porn is becoming more extreme, and their success depends on finding some new, edgy sex act that will draw in users always on the lookout for that extra bit of sexual charge. Not one of the men I talk to seems particularly interested in how these new extremes will be played out on real women's bodies, bodies that are already being pushed to the brink of their physical limits.<sup>8</sup>

Dines notes that this saturation of pornography on the internet and the competition it engenders, have resulted in more violent, extreme and degrading pornography which are now commonplace on the internet.<sup>9</sup> The consequence is that the pornography that young men are first introduced to is excessively 'hard-core' when compared to the pre-internet, pornography magazines such as *Playboy* and *Penthouse*<sup>10</sup>, with pornography premised upon rape, incest, pain, torture and degradation now comprising the norm of internet pornography. The clear message that is being sent is one of inequality and misogyny. In the words of Dines:

The messages that porn disseminates about women can be boiled down to a few essential characteristics: they are always ready for sex and are enthusiastic to do whatever men want, irrespective of how painful, humiliating or harmful the act is. The word "no" is glaringly absent from porn women's vocabulary. These women seem eager to have their orifices stretched to full capacity and sometimes beyond, and indeed, the more bizarre and degrading the act, the greater the supposed sexual arousal for her. ... In the porn world, women are never concerned about pregnancy, STDs, or damage to their bodies, and are astonishingly immune to being called cunts, whores, cumdumpsters, sluts, bitches, hot slits, fuck-tubes, squirty skanks, and stupid hoes. They seem comfortable with the idea that their partner(s) views their sexuality as something unclean (as in "dirty cunt", "filthy little whore," or "nasty cum dumpster") and often refer to themselves in those ways. Indeed, women of the porn world seem to enjoy having sex with men who express nothing but contempt and hatred for them, and often the greater the insults, the better the orgasm for all involved.<sup>11</sup>

In chapter one, 'Playboy, Penthouse, and Hustler: Paving the Way for Today's Porn Industry' Dines commences her analysis of how this message of inequality has infiltrated our culture and our lives by looking at the history of three of the pornography industry's 'institutions',

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<sup>8</sup> *Pornland*, xvi.

<sup>9</sup> *Pornland*, xvii.

<sup>10</sup> *Pornland*, xvii.

<sup>11</sup> *Pornland*, xviii.

the *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Hustler* magazines. Dines undertakes a detailed study of the marketing strategies behind these magazines, for example, *Playboy* which, in marketing itself as an anti-family, aspirational men's luxury lifestyle magazine, tapped into the cultural and economic changes of the 1950's and the insecurity experienced by many men as a result. The lifestyle fantasy that *Playboy* offered its readers was one of luxury, consumerism and freedom from family and financial burdens and responsibilities. Despite its origins as a print magazine, *Playboy* has successfully survived the advent of the internet, branching into cable television, mobile phone pornography, reality television shows and an extensive range of *Playboy* products including, '...pencils, watches, handbags, lingerie, sunglasses, socks and even hot water bottles'<sup>12</sup>, interestingly, almost all of which are products marketed to women. There is probably not a week that goes by that I do not see a (usually female) University student wearing or carrying something that is *Playboy* branded.

Chapter 2, 'Pop Goes the Porn Culture: Mainstreaming Porn' expands further on this theme. In this chapter Dines discusses the infusion of pornography into popular culture through popular television shows such as *Sex and the City*, and popular magazines such as Oprah Winfrey's *O Magazine* which published an article encouraging women to use pornography to improve their sex lives. In this chapter Dines argues that it is no accident that pornography has slipped into mainstream culture, and that it has been a deliberate ploy on the part of pornographers to re-package their product as 'fun, edgy, chic, sexy, and hot.'<sup>13</sup> Dines uses three case studies to illustrate this argument. The first of these is the television show and now web site *Girls Gone Wild* in which frequently drunk 'amateur' (that is 'real') women strip for token prizes such as free tank tops or hats. Using *Girls Gone Wild* as an example, Dines succinctly summarises the way in which pornography has become normalised through seeping into popular culture:

What appears to be so important about "real" is that the GGW images are perceived by users as a documentation of reality rather than a representation of it. In place of the scripted and carefully crafted scenes of hard-core porn, the user supposedly gets to witness a real woman doing porn for the first time in her life. By using "real" women, GGW socializes users, suggesting that every day women are sexually available. These are women the user can imagine hooking up with for the very reason that they are not professional porn performers. This brings the porn story of "all women are sluts" right into the center of pop culture and

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<sup>12</sup> *Pornland*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Pornland*, 25.

subsequently the lives of men. Like reality TV, the viewer can insert him- or herself into the action by believing that what he or she is watching is actually real and not staged.<sup>14</sup>

The second and third case studies used by Dines to illustrate the mainstreaming of pornography into popular culture are Porn Star Jenna Jameson who has become a mainstream household name from her book *How to Make Love Like a Porn Star*; and major pornography 'studio', Vivid Entertainment, who despite a drop in DVD sales caused by the rise of the internet, has maximised new technologies such as pay per view television and the internet to maximise its profits whilst expanding pornography further into the mainstream.

The mainstreaming of pornography as a commercial product is further developed by Dines in chapter three, 'From Backstreet to Wall Street: The Big Business of Porn'. In this chapter Dines looks in depth at pornography as a multi-billion dollar a year industry and how the pornography has been a leader in innovating technological reforms such as file sharing networks, live streaming, video for mobile phones and online gaming. This has helped to ensure the corporatisation of pornography with many major companies investing in, and making substantial profits from it. For example, Dines notes that Rupert Murdoch owned EchoStar Communications Corporation which Dines reports, in approximately 2007, 'made more money selling hard-core pornography films through its satellite subsidiary than all of Playboy's holdings combined.'<sup>15</sup> Dines explains:

While these activities are in themselves unremarkably normal business operations, they signal that porn is becoming a mainstream, normal business – a legitimate business, one that is being taken more seriously by Wall Street and the media. These other businesses become allies and collaborators, with a vested interest in the growth and continued viability of the porn business.<sup>16</sup>

In the following two chapters, Chapter 4, 'Grooming for Gonzo: Becoming a Man in a Porn Culture' and chapter 5, 'Leaky Images: How Porn Seeps into Men's Lives', Dines provides a detailed analysis of the ways in which pornography detrimentally affects the lives of men by sending the message that masculinity means promoting and benefitting from inequality, that the dehumanisation of women is normal and natural, and that sex is about emotional detachment and exploitation of women. The mainstreaming of pornography means that men

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<sup>14</sup> *Pornland*, 29.

<sup>15</sup> *Pornland*, 52.

<sup>16</sup> *Pornland*, 51.

are exposed to violent and degrading images of women that become normalised and that feed off the emotional insecurities of many men. Dines notes:

These sorts of messages targeted at boys help shape the ways they develop their masculine identity. As boys turn into men, these messages are in turn absorbed into their sexual identities, and the more media they are exposed to, the more they become desensitized to the visual depiction of violence, no matter how brutal or sexualised that violence is. In this emotional economy, porn is appealing; it offers men a no strings attached, intense, disconnected sexual experience where men always get to have as much sex as they want in ways that shore up their masculinity.<sup>17</sup>

However, the harm to men, women and equality does not end there. Dines notes that once men become consumers of pornography, they will often seek out more and more degrading and violent pornography as the pornography they have been consuming becomes 'predictable' and 'boring'.<sup>18</sup> An example of this, given by Dines, is Max Hardcore, a well known pornography performer famous for his extreme sexual violence against women, have moved from the periphery of the pornography industry to the mainstream. It is also evident from many discussions on pornography internet chat sites, some of which are analysed by Dines, where fans express their appreciation for real violence. For example, seeing women crying, choking, vomiting and in real pain.<sup>19</sup> Dines reports that she has met many men who have become addicted to pornography, who feel disempowered, who feel that pornography has taken over their lives and who do not know how to stop using it. This, in turn affects their relationships with women (who are not the eager sluts that pornography shows them as being). It often ruins their sexuality because they cannot enjoy sex with a woman without reference to pornography, for example, replaying pornographic scenes in their heads.<sup>20</sup>

Dines, in chapter 6, 'Visible or Invisible: Growing up Female in a Porn Culture' discusses how women are affected by pornography in their everyday lives, whether they view it or not. Dines, in many discussions with young female University students, discovered that these young women feel pressured into brazilian waxing (something originally only seen in pornography that has now filtered down to popular culture), and often felt pressured into casual sex. Dines uses several telling examples to illustrate this point. For example, she observes how the fashion industry is often inspired by the sex industry; how singer Britney

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<sup>17</sup> *Pornland*, 62-63.

<sup>18</sup> *Pornland*, 68.

<sup>19</sup> *Pornland*, 70.

<sup>20</sup> *Pornland*, 90.

Spears hired a pornography director to direct her music videos; how popular television show *Sex and the City* frequently used plots in which pornography is featured as tame, harmless and something that should be embraced by women; and how women's magazines offer sex tips to women solely directed to male sexual pleasure (that is, pleasing and keeping a man). Dines is not suggesting, however, that all women blindly incorporate porn culture into their lives. She is sensitive to the complex and subtle ways in which pornography has influenced our culture. She explains:

Understanding culture as a socializing agent requires exploring how and why some girls and young women conform and how others resist. For all the visual onslaught, not every young woman looks or acts like she takes her cues from *Cosmopolitan* or *Maxim*. One reason for this is that conforming to a dominant image is not an all-or-nothing act but rather a series of acts that place women and girls at different points on the continuum of conformity to nonconformity. Where any individual sits at any given time on this continuum depends on her past and present experiences as well as family relationships, media consumption, peer group affiliations and sexual, racial and class identity. ... This does not mean, though, that we can't make predictions on a macro level. What we can say is that the more one way of being female is elevated above and beyond others, the more substantial proportion of the population will gravitate toward that which is most socially accepted, condoned and rewarded.<sup>21</sup>

In Chapter 7, 'Racy Sex: Sexy Racism', Dines examines how pornography exploits racial stereotypes. Dines notes that black men in pornography, portrayed as animalistic, aggressive, 'savage' and as always having giant penises, are often paired with white women who are debased and defiled, for a mostly white audience by the black man or men, and that this pornography is predominantly made by white directors and production companies.<sup>22</sup> Black women are also stereotyped as 'aggressive and mouthy' with an 'attitude' that must be forced into submission by violent and degrading sex. They are seen as more dehumanised than white women in pornography because they are represented as impoverished and unkempt 'ghetto sluts and hos' who 'need a pimp to turn them into presentable prostitutes.'<sup>23</sup> Dines also notes the racist stereotype that Asian women are subservient ensures their frequent use in pornography. However, Asian men are scarcely seen in pornography, except in gay male pornography where they are shown as feminised and thus eager to be debased and defiled.<sup>24</sup> In this chapter, Dines effectively explains how sexism and racism in pornography perpetuate racial and sexual inequality in mainstream society:

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<sup>21</sup> *Pornland*, 112.

<sup>22</sup> *Pornland*, 121-122.

<sup>23</sup> *Pornland*, 127.

<sup>24</sup> For an excellent sex equality analysis of gay male pornography see, Christopher N Kendall, *Gay Male Pornography: An Issue of Sex Discrimination* (University of British Columbia Press, 2005).

The pornographic images that meld the racial with the sexual may make the sex racier, but they also serve to breathe new life into old stereotypes that circulate in mainstream society. While these stereotypes are often a product of the past, they are cemented in the present every time a user masturbates to them. This is a powerful way to deliver racist ideology, as it not only makes visible the supposed sexual debauchery of the targeted group, but also sexualises the racism in ways that make the actual racism invisible in the mind of most consumers and nonconsumers alike.<sup>25</sup>

In my opinion, the most disturbing and thought provoking chapter is the final one, chapter eight, titled 'Children: The Final Taboo'. Dines looks at how children are increasingly being sexualised in advertising and the media, with the inspiration for these sexualised images of children coming from the pornography industry. At the commencement of the chapter she gives the example of under-aged celebrities such as 12 year old Dakota Fanning and 15 year old Miley Cyrus in sexually suggestive poses in *Vanity Fair* and *Elle* magazines. In fact, on a recent trip to Singapore, I saw a perfume advertisement of a wide eyed, innocently dressed and underage looking Dakota Fanning with a large bottle of pink flowery looking perfume between her legs prominently displayed in a department store. Dines also notes the famous 1980's Calvin Klein advertisements where a 15 year old Brooke Shields is shown with the logo, 'Do you wanna know what comes between me and my Calvins? Nothing.'<sup>26</sup> She also notes how Klein's advertisements in the mid 1990's resulted in a Justice Department investigation because of his use of underage children in sexually suggestive poses.<sup>27</sup>

Dines also explains that 'as pop culture begins to look more and more pornographic, the actual porn industry has had to become more hard core as a way to distinguish its products...'<sup>28</sup> One way of doing this has been to sexualise children with a proliferation of internet pornography sites featuring teenagers, babysitters, and incest themes to name a few. Dines notes that would otherwise be child pornography is legal, provided that the children used in it are (allegedly) over the age of eighteen. She explains that this legality is due to the efforts of organizations such as the *Free Speech Coalition* in the United States who successfully challenged the *Child Porn Prevention Act* of 1996 as being too broad. The result was that the legislation has been amended so that an actual person under eighteen years had to be used for pornography to be classified as child pornography. This meant that computer

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<sup>25</sup> *Pornland*, 140.

<sup>26</sup> *Pornland*, 141-142.

<sup>27</sup> *Pornland*, 142.

<sup>28</sup> *Pornland*, 142.



generated images of children and adults ‘dressed’ as children (for example with lolly pops, pig tails, dolls, and waxed public) are entirely legal and extremely prevalent on the internet. Dines analyses the content of this pornography to illustrate that this ‘simulated’ child pornography has the same ‘symbols, codes, conventions, and narratives’ as actual child pornography.<sup>29</sup> Dines argues that the messages sent are the same as in actual child pornography, and it can be used in the same way – to groom children for sexual abuse. The fact that this sexualisation of children has pervaded popular women’s magazines and advertising affirms and normalises the sexualisation of children.

Whilst the content of the book is bleak, Dines offers some hope in the Conclusion, ‘Fighting Back’. Dines is aware of the extreme difficulty in fighting back against the pornography industry now that pornography has moved into mainstream culture, and due to the immense power of an industry that is backed up by its multi-billion dollar value. She advocates resistance on an individual as well as a collective level:

Fighting the porn industry demands that we resist both as individuals and as part of a collective movement. At the moment, most resistance happens at the individual level, and this is a promising start. I meet young women who refuse to date men who are users of porn, parents who teach their children media literacy skills, teachers who develop sophisticated sex-education programs, and men who boycott porn because of the ways it affects their sexuality. Absent a wider social movement, these individual forms of resistance make the most sense.<sup>30</sup>

On a collective level, Dines has tried to ‘unite these individual acts of resistance into a movement’<sup>31</sup> by establishing Stop Porn Culture to educate people about the harms of pornography. The group has two slide shows to ‘raise consciousness’ about these harms and also conducts annual seminars, including seminars where men and women can learn how to present the slideshows, which are also available at Stop Porn Culture’s web site. Dines acknowledges pornography’s harm to men as well as women and of the importance of men being involved in this anti-pornography movement. She writes:

A movement that resists porn culture needs to include men as they, too, are being dehumanized and diminished by the images they consume. Men’s refusal to collaborate with the pornographers will not only undermine the legitimacy of the industry, it will also drain it of its profits. For too long women have been the only ones fighting this predatory industry, even though we have long argued that porn also hurts men. What resistance to porn offers

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<sup>29</sup> *Pornland*, 144.

<sup>30</sup> *Pornland*, 163.

<sup>31</sup> *Pornland*, 163.

men is a sexuality that celebrates connectedness, intimacy and empathy – a sexuality bathed in equality rather than subordination.<sup>32</sup>

In my view *Pornland* is one of the most important books written about pornography in the last decade. It is eloquently argued, but at the same time is written in an accessible and clear style. It comprehensively outlines how pornography has invaded our culture, our sexuality, and explains its role in maintaining and promoting inequality in a way that can be understood by a broad audience. This audience could include parents, teachers, social workers, counsellors, academics, feminists, sociologists, lawyers, policy-makers and anyone, male or female, who is concerned about the impact pornography is having on our lives and on our children's lives. In my view, this, and Dines' inclusive and easy style will ensure that the important message in this book, 'that in a just society, there is no room for porn'<sup>33</sup> is delivered to a wide audience. I urge anyone reading this review to read *Pornland*, and to encourage others to read it. I applaud Dines for writing a book that gives voice to those harmed, and inspires its readers to fight to restore the equality that pornography has taken away.

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<sup>32</sup> *Pornland*, 164-165.

<sup>33</sup> *Pornland*, 165.