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AlterNet / By Tana Ganeva

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### The Anti-Male, Anti-Sex Falsehoods That Rule Discussions about Porn and Sexuality

*The latest missive in the war against porn, courtesy of the Atlantic, presents male sexual desire as brutish and violent. Really?*

January 21, 2011 |

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Thanks to the Internet, porn is ubiquitous. Thanks to the demands of web traffic, panicky articles about the impact of porn are getting to be that way too.

A common narrative goes like this: Porn used to come in two varieties -- the genteel erotica of Playboy, where women dressed like

rabbits introduced boys to sex in magazines pilfered from dad's collection, and the filthier stuff that lived in cum-stained whack-off booths patronized by perverts. The explosion of Internet smut in the 2000s smashed those two worlds together. Teen boys, your mom, your husband, and worried writers could now land in porn pits filled with dirty, hardcore sex just by typing "http://www.youporn.com/" into their browsers.

In these alarmist critiques, the rise of easily accessible hardcore is deemed bad across the board: bad for sex workers, bad for women desperate to sexually please their porn-crazed boyfriends or husbands, and bad bad bad for the "weak" male psyche.

Criticisms of porn are not without value, of course. Everything has an effect on our weak, malleable psyches these days, so why not pornography? Like mainstream popular culture in general, a lot of porn is rife with sexist, racist and classist stereotypes. While many porn actors defend the industry and insist that they, and not cultural critics, get to decide what to do with their bodies, there are also former sex workers who speak out against the abuses and inequities that plague porn production.

All that said, many of the pieces that decry porn's impact on the populations allegedly most vulnerable to its harms come off as needlessly prudish and alarmist about sex. Even worse, many end up trafficking in some pretty nasty assumptions about gender and sexuality themselves.

This month's contribution to the genre, published in the Atlantic, continues in that vein. Like many articles of this type, "Hardcore," written by Natasha Vargas-Cooper, is characterized by an obsession with anal sex. As in, everyone from teen girls to your square neighbors is allegedly having tons of it. These fanatic sodomites were inspired by the prevalence of this once-taboo practice in porn. Says Vargas-Cooper:

"Porn's new pervasiveness and influence on the culture at large haven't necessarily introduced anything new into our sexual repertoire: humans, after all, have been having sex—weird, debased, and otherwise—for quite a while. But pervasive hard-core porn has allowed many people to flirt openly with practices that may have always been desired, but had been deeply buried under social restraint."

But the article goes beyond puzzling over the impact of porn on society or the minds of teenage males, and more ambitiously promises to show "how the new

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world of porn is revealing eternal truths about men and women."

In a nutshell, the so-called "truths" the article purports to unveil are these: men's natural desires are predatory and aggressive. Women's sexual needs are the inverse of male desires, or something -- actually, she never quite describes female desire as a thing that exists on its own; just that it stands in opposition to the male sex drive, locking the sexes in eternal battle. "Men, so the conventional wisdom goes, tend to desire more than women are willing to give them sexually. The granting of sex is the most powerful weapon women possess in their struggle with men."

In this timeless war (also called a "warring dynamic based on power and subjugation") men are described as pretty nasty foes. "Male sexuality as an often dark force streaked with aggression," she contends. Hardcore porn is revealing in that it's, "overpowering and immediate; it is the brute force of male sexuality, unmasked and untethered."

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