



## **XXX: A Woman's Right to Pornography**

*Wendy McElroy*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online ➔](#)

# **XXX: A Woman's Right to Pornography**

*Wendy McElroy*

## **XXX: A Woman's Right to Pornography** Wendy McElroy

An unconventional argument for the preservation of pornography asserts that pornography can serve to benefit the feminist movement and promote sexual freedom for women, and explores the historical relationship between women and pornography.

## **XXX: A Woman's Right to Pornography Details**

Date : Published March 31st 1997 by St. Martin's Press (first published 1995)

ISBN : 9780312152451

Author : Wendy McElroy

Format : Paperback 243 pages

Genre : Feminism, Nonfiction, Sexuality, Politics, Gender



[Download XXX: A Woman's Right to Pornography ...pdf](#)



[Read Online XXX: A Woman's Right to Pornography ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online XXX: A Woman's Right to Pornography Wendy McElroy**

---

## **From Reader Review XXX: A Woman's Right to Pornography for online ebook**

### **Leandra Vane says**

This is a book about porn, yes, but the focus of this book is mainly on preserving and promoting individual rights. I thought perhaps this book might take on reasons why porn improves women's sex drive or relationships, but that's a bit more of a Cosmo article than a scholarly book. Overall I was engaged and interested. My favorite chapter was chapter four: A Critique of Anti-Porn Feminism. The arguments presented really illustrate how anti-porn feminists do a lot of damage and limit many choices and rights of women, just to keep people from looking at porn. I also enjoyed reading about individualist feminism and the need to protect individual choices.

A more detailed review may be found on my blog, The Unlaced Librarian:  
<http://theunlacedlibrarian.blogspot.c...>

---

### **Anya Leninjav says**

I have been following Wendy McElroy's website ever since I've had the internet, and I've probably been looking at porn just as long! I've always been rather put off by some of the puritanical streaks in modern feminism which reminds me more of sour-faced church ladies obsessing over victimhood narratives than independent and forward looking women. The anti-porno crusaders are at the top of the list of girls I wouldn't invite to a party!

This book is interesting in its own right, though I wouldn't say it influenced by views too much. I was already in the camp of 'do anything you want and charge for it' before I read McElroy, and I still am.

---

### **Soluus says**

I stumbled on this entirely by chance and being the horny teenager I am, the subject piqued my interest, and I was not disappointed.

I've always been a feminist with the view that radical feminism blatantly 'pissed me off', that seeing hardcore feminists bash the opposite sex constantly, putting them down made me angry; it is not sexual equality, it is the search and demand for sexual elitism. I've also always held the view that a woman should be able to do with her body as she pleases, and that any and all choices she makes are her own and not the law's; as such, I've never condemned prostitution or pornography and have viewed it as an active, conscious choice. What a woman does -- or what a man does for that matter -- behind closed doors is nobody's business and therefore shouldn't be interfered. This book was a combination of these factors, for me, and I found myself agreeing with much of what was said by the author since she was a self-titled individual feminist.

I think I expanded my understanding of present views rather than learning new information while reading this book, which is not a bad thing; I could relate and I was interested in the research carried out by McElroy. I can't help, however, but think there's no real catharsis in this, but that point was made throughout: that it

was impossible to come to any real conclusion about pornography as an industry and the women within since science has no way of measuring violence on women caused or influenced consciously or subconsciously by pornography.

What I did take away was new views on prostitution: that it was better to decriminalise rather than legalise. I highly agree with this on one hand, because it gives women the freedom to work as sex workers without legal repercussions; on the other, they aren't really protected by the law because it is purely a private, personal choice (assuming coercion is not at play). There are downfalls to both sides, but if anything it made me respect female sex workers even more so than I already did.

No real catharsis, but enforcement of my own active views. A good, informative read.

---

### **Nikki says**

Everything a geek would like to know about the porn industry, with a healthy dose of feminism. She speaks directly to the ill effects of "radical feminism" & its alignment with the political right on some issues, like pornography. An interesting historical perspective on censorship & the right to privacy.

---

### **Jolene says**

I picked up this book because it was contrary to my previous opinions of the pornography industry. Though I did not adopt the opinion of the author, my opinion did still change. Though McElroy presented her view on the subject, she also presented views held by different schools of feminist thought: radical feminist, liberal feminist and individualist feminist. The latter is the school of thought to which the author subscribes. In addition, McElroy describes a comprehensive history of women and sex in Western culture, including the spread of contraceptive rights and the right to choice. Overall, this book is a stimulating and provocative read, combining wit and sharp intellect with historical analysis, feminist theory, first-hand research in the industry. I thoroughly recommend this book to everyone.

---

### **Dave Burns says**

This book is slightly out of date, having been written before the invention of the world wide web, But the interviews still fascinated me, especially the chapter on the history of censorship and 19th century feminism.

---

### **Danielle says**

Very well written and argued. The author takes the standpoint that the creation, expression and enjoyment of pornography is healthy and vital to a woman's rights and freedoms.

She points to how the definition of pornography and what is deemed inappropriate has drastically changed throughout the years... for instance, the US Mail used to confiscate all brochures and information related to sexual health.

Another argument is that sexual expression is as important as any other, and to repress expression is to

repress the validity of the people who have those opinions/thoughts/feelings. Therefore, to deny women the right to pornography (of whatever definition) is to deny them their sexual voice and equal standing in society.

The book is full of anecdotes and is surprisingly easy to read.

---

### **Rob says**

(5/10) Wendy McElroy is a libertarian feminist, which isn't the worst political position in the world, but is limited in pretty obvious ways. "Limited in pretty obvious ways" best describes her defense of pornography as well. I'm fairly sympathetic to that perspective, but even so I couldn't help composing frustrated counter-arguments in my head, which is never a good sign.

The most valuable part of XXX is the interviews and perspectives of the actual adult video industry, which is a much more nuanced and contradictory place than most like to admit. This seems to be counterbalanced by McElroy's arguments, which generally ignore the content of actually-existing pornography in favour of arguing about abstract rights. And every once in a while she works in a weird shot at sexual harassment laws or something else that makes you wonder if you've been tricked into reading a Cato Institute paper. There are good parts, but on the whole this book was disappointing.

---

### **micelle says**

goodreads suggested this book to me after marking multiple sexuality-related books as 'to read.' i bought it on half.com for about a dollar, in conjunction with (of course) dworkin's intercourse. aware that i already erred towards more of an anti-porn (at least as it is) stance, i decided to start this one first. i wanted to like it-- really! despite my previous sentence, i don't believe that porn itself is inherently bad and i'm interested in how and if it can be improved. and yet...

i don't like it.

and i had a feeling i wouldn't as soon as i saw the table of contents. chapter titles touting the benefits of individualist and liberal feminism raised some immediate red flags. two movements that purport to challenge the system while not really doing anything to actually subvert the conditions which create it. but still, i pressed on. i bought the book, i'd marked it as a 'to-read', it wouldn't hurt.

it also didn't really help. pretty early on in the book, mcelroy calls sexual harassment laws the result of overly "politically correct" nu-feminist tendencies. the (presumably straight and cis) male porn producers she meets up are likened to her gay friends (she's "very lucky" to have friends in that community), in that they are suspicious of being judged for their sexual preferences just as LGBTQ individuals are.

i mean, i guess.

the overarching problem with this book is that it's based off a false premise (the false premise being: women doing anything they want to do is inherently feminist). individual decisions exist in a vacuum, a magical place where societal influence does not exist. while mcelroy criticizes radical feminists' anti-porn stance for erring towards the side of biological determinism, she apparently does not believe that cultural conditioning

exists either. so what does. i don't know. everything appears out of thin air, i guess. in which case, what is the point of feminism at all?

but, okay. can watching or performing in porn be empowering for certain women? why not. there are 7 billion people in the world and nothing is out of the realm of possibility. what this book fails to do is address pornography in any other way. how is pornography shaped by cultural values? how does it replicate or subvert these values? we don't know. which is essentially her retort to radical feminists' claims that pornography incites violence. at the same time, she is certain in her claim that pornography is actually capable of reducing violence. what makes her methodology more valid than the radical feminists' in this way? again, we don't know.

i think i get what mcelroy was trying to do here, i really do. it's undeniable that sex workers have been talked down upon and disregarded and all kinds of other negative verbs in all kinds of movements, including the feminist ones. she sympathizes with them, she is angry for them; so am i. should sex workers be respected? yes, of course. should the conditions which shape sex work in a patriarchal society be evaluated? yes, of course. yet she dismisses radical feminists as she-devils driven purely by ideology without recognizing that she herself is driven pretty strongly by her own ideology: anyone should be able to do anything they want at any time no matter what. taken in context with the rest of the text, what this essentially means is that there is no room for critical analysis ever. (again, what then is the point of feminism exactly? i don't know.)

what i found most enjoyable about the book were her interactions with sex workers themselves. i do appreciate that she interviewed and surveyed them. sex workers are fully capable individuals and their opinions should always be involved in such a discussion. this book, however, did not do them justice.

---

### **Julia says**

Seriously, fuck Catherine MacKinnon. McElroy, a former president of Feminists for Free Expression, does a fantastic job picking apart the messy and ultimately failing argument that pornography is bad for women. Censorship and attempts to externally regulate (through governmental regulation or morality campaigns) sexuality is what is bad for women. This would be an easy book to navigate even if you're not familiar with the tensions in feminism regarding what to "do" about pornography, and even though I am familiar with the old debates, McElroy does an excellent job bringing a historical perspective that really draws out her point that when feminists and religious conservatives make friends, it's never a happy ending. My one dislike is that the book is now over 10 years old, and so doesn't cover internet porn. I wish she'd do a re-write.

---

### **Warwick says**

Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, 1989  
**Wendy McElroy, *XXX: A Woman's Right to Pornography*, 1995**

It's difficult to talk about porn. It's hard not to speculate on the hidden motives of the people involved in any discussion, I find. Those arguing against it tend to come across as though they merely find it distasteful on a personal level. Those arguing for it are presumed to be avid consumers.

Then again, you often see people defend it on free-speech grounds while, as it were, holding their own nose: ‘Censorship is bad – though of course *I* would never look at that stuff.’ I find these arguments unsatisfactory, so if I begin now by saying that I really like porn, it’s not to make everyone uncomfortable but to connect cards with table and also to establish my own set of dubious credentials in this area.

I like it, but I’ve never viewed it uncritically. I find a lot of things about it problematic – though, admittedly, not usually at the time. In fact I’ve spent a ludicrous, quite unjustifiable amount of time analysing how exactly I feel about porn. Perhaps, I suppose, this is because I’m looking for some kind of intellectual absolution, but also I think it’s because it concerns so many areas – free expression, gender relations, sexual psychology – that I have always found utterly fascinating.

In some cases the argument about porn is framed in terms of raw legality. Just last month, British MPs banned a whole load of ‘extreme’ pornography (including – bizarrely – depictions of face-sitting, an amendment which led to protesters’ gathering in front of parliament for a joint singalong of Monty Python’s ‘Sit on my Face and Tell Me that You Love Me’). Andrea Dworkin herself famously drafted a set of anti-porn laws with Catharine MacKinnon, ordinance that was enacted in certain US jurisdictions and also written in part into Canadian law; though it’s usually considered to have been a disaster for women and minority groups.

Anyway, this debate is still live in many places, but for me it’s tangential. I consider it too easy to argue that porn should not be against the law. What interests me far more is whether it can be considered moral and ethical in feminist terms, and I’m open to the idea that the answer might be ‘no’. In fact that’s exactly the line taken by some famous porn fans like David Baddiel, who said (I’m quoting from memory here), ‘I know porn is revolting and misogynistic. The point is, so am I.’ Which is disarming, but I’m not sure I’m prepared to surrender that much ground.

Criticism of porn generally takes two forms: the argument that it is fundamentally abusive in its production (a manipulative industry run by men, coercing women with damaged backgrounds into humiliating sex acts); and the argument that, no matter how ‘free-range’ its production, it is damaging in its effects on society (promoting a grossly unhealthy image of women, sexualising violence, distorting young people’s sexual education).

One of the things I wanted from Andrea Dworkin’s *Pornography* (as opposed to Andrea Dworkin’s pornography, which is something else entirely) was an elaboration of these anti-porn arguments. So I was disappointed to see that she spends really very little time on either of those lines, instead using the bulk of the book to describe what she sees as the male psychological context from which pornography arises.

For Dworkin, ‘[m]en are distinguished from women by their commitment to do violence rather than to be victimized by it’, and therefore – in all cases – ‘male sexuality is expressed as force or violence’. ‘The penis must embody the violence of the male in order for him to be male. Violence is male; the male is the penis; violence is the penis’ – on such simple (or facile) equations she builds her argument. Rape, on this view, is not an anomaly but ‘the defining paradigm of sexuality’, and Sade (whose excesses of cruelty I consider to be different in kind, not just degree, from modern pornography) is taken to embody ‘the common values and desires of men’. Indeed Sade’s central evil is that he is ‘utterly and unredeemably male’.

I suppose it makes sense, if you subscribe to this outlook, that you would spend little time examining the actual circumstances of making porn, or the people involved in it. Dworkin dismisses the women on screen in a couple of lines; she considers them to be rape victims and certainly doesn’t bother talking to any. Wendy McElroy, in *XXX*, is more hands-on: one of the most interesting parts of her book (which is less well-written

than Dworkin's but just as heartfelt) is a chapter consisting of extended interviews with several actresses in the adult industry.

McElroy wanted to know primarily whether any had been coerced into anything, or seen evidence of coercion in the industry (all said they hadn't, though some spoke about seeing on-set 'peer pressure' on certain low-budget productions). She was also interested in what they got out of it personally, and here the responses varied widely from financial to sexual reasons. Nina Hartley (something of a legend, she's still involved in the industry twenty years after this book was written) observed that – as with many careers – those who enjoy their work tend to do better than those who are driven solely by the paycheck. Her own philosophy: 'Sex isn't something men do to you. It isn't something men get out of you. Sex is something you dive into with gusto and like it every bit as much as he does.'

This is one aspect of the porn industry that has changed a lot even since McElroy was writing in 1995. As porn has become more mainstream, especially in the US, the route into the business has shifted; in the past, actresses mainly drifted into it from other kinds of sex work like dancing or modelling. Though this still happens, they've been supplemented by a growing number of women who set their sights on the business from the beginning. I think perhaps Jennas Jameson and Haze were a turning-point (though I'm no expert); certainly more modern stars like Asia Carrera and later Sasha Grey or Stoya have been very vocal about how much they enjoyed, and wanted to work in, the industry.

Now...I feel very cautious when I make this argument, because part of Dworkin's case is that men believe that all women 'want it really'. In no way am I arguing – nor would it ever occur to me to think – that working in porn is something most women would want to do or enjoy doing. I am simply making the banal observation that some do, and they do not consider themselves victims of rape or anything else.

Dworkin can't accept that anyone could take part in porn of their own free will – or if they do, it must be a free will corrupted by male-supremacist society to the point where it can no longer be taken as their own. That means she's forced into what seems to me to be the absurd and antifeminist position of denying their agency completely: less sophisticated women may *think* they know what they want, but Andrea Dworkin knows better. Stoya or Sasha Grey might see themselves as intelligent and articulate businesswomen with a lot of sexual curiosity; Andrea Dworkin sees only 'the dummy forced by the pimp-ventriloquist'.

Who's objectifying who now?

As for porn's effect on society and all of us, for Dworkin it couldn't be worse. She links it directly to rape, violence, incest, murder, and an assortment of related evils. Indeed to make her point, no comparison is too outrageous:

The Jews didn't do it to themselves and they didn't orgasm. In contemporary American pornography, of course, the Jews do do it to themselves—they, usually female, seek out the Nazis, go voluntarily to concentration camps, beg a domineering Nazi to hurt them, cut them, burn them—and they do climax, stupendously, to both sadism and death. But in life, the Jews didn't orgasm. Of course, neither do women; not in life. But no one, not even Goebbels, said the Jews liked it.

No, that's true...it's almost as though porn isn't quite the same thing as *the fucking Holocaust*.

So a certain amount of bluster has to be picked through in order to reach the actual arguments. Her book opens by describing in detail several horrific cases of rape and sexual abuse, whose perpetrators Dworkin characterises as ‘acting out pornography’; the victims therefore are – follow the sleight-of-hand! – ‘women who have been hurt by pornography’.

I thought this was an astonishing way to describe victims of sexual abuse. Not only does this argument ignore the obvious fact that, even if a correlation could be shown between sexual abuse and porn consumption (unproven after several studies), that would in no way establish any causality – but also, as McElroy points out, it only serves to diminish the responsibility of the abusers themselves. (Indeed there have already been cases where defence lawyers have asked for a convicted rapist's exposure to pornography to be taken into account as mitigation.)

One of the things I liked about McElroy's book was that, unlike many defences of porn, she doesn't just defend against anti-porn arguments, she actually makes a case for its positive benefits. Porn and feminism are, she claims, natural bedfellows that share a common interest in exploding traditionalist views of women as wives and mothers with rigidly controlled sexual freedom. Pleasure – entirely absent from Dworkin's account – becomes a key concept. Far from corrupting women's idea of sex, porn can be, McElroy argues, a way for women to explore and expand sexuality in a safe and controlled environment:

Pornography presents women with their wildest fantasies – from voyeurism to wearing Bo Peep costumes to mock rape. This cornucopia is served up in the privacy of a woman's own bedroom, on a television set that can be turned off whenever she has had enough. She does not have to defend herself against persistent advances, or "give in" rather than be hurt by a man who will not take no. She is in absolute control of the timing, the content, the duration, the climax.

What remains in question here is the nature of pornographic depictions of women (and men), and what animates them. Dworkin is explicit: porn is ‘the elucidation of what men insist is the secret, hidden, true carnality of women, free women’. Perhaps more accurate, I'd suggest, is that it expresses a *fantasy* of women's ‘carnality’, rather than a secret belief – but implicit in both those descriptions is the problematic idea that women don't in fact *have* a hidden carnality that society has done its best to suppress, and many women have been trying to say exactly the reverse.

What I see at work underneath the contrasting porn theories of Dworkin and McElroy is a vast, raging argument over the nature of libido, an argument that's still just as fierce now. Do men simply want sex more than women? Some studies reckon they do, on average, and various dubious biological reasons have been suggested. Still, in my opinion it's a stupid question, because there is no ‘men’ and no ‘women’, only individuals, and averages tell you very little about a given man and a given woman.

McElroy wants to argue that many women have an interest in sex just as pressing and valid as that of men, though patriarchal society has worked to suppress it, and porn for her is both a symbol and a tool of this interest. Dworkin – though she doesn't exactly challenge this directly – has a more adversarial view of sex in general, and so she prefers instead to defend women's right to a so-called low libido:

For centuries, female reluctance to “have sex,” female dislike of “sex,” female frigidity, female avoidance of “sex,” have been legendary. This has been the silent rebellion of women against

the force of the penis, generations of women as one with their bodies, chanting in a secret language, unintelligible even to themselves, a contemporary song of freedom: I will not be moved. The aversion of women to the penis and to sex as men define it, overcome only when survival and/or ideology demand it, must be seen not as puritanism (which is a male strategy to keep the penis hidden, taboo, and sacred), but as women's refusal to pay homage to the primary purveyor of male aggression, one on one, against women. In this way, women have defied men and subverted male power.

I consider this paragraph to be, essentially, bollocks – but nevertheless I kind of agree with both of them, to the extent that I think every person has the right to whatever high or low drive they like. The reason I favour McElroy's argument is not just that I'd prefer her to be right (which, if I'm honest, I would) but also that she does not consider all women to be a monolithic class with unified desires in the way that Dworkin tends to, and I am at heart an individualist.

Libido aside, then, isn't porn just fundamentally degrading? For McElroy, degradation is in the eye of the beholder:

Usually, the term *sex objects* means that women are shown as "body parts"; they are reduced to being physical objects. What is wrong with this? Women are as much their bodies as they are their minds or souls. No one gets upset if you present a woman as a brain or as a spiritual being. Yet those portrayals ignore women as physical beings. To get upset by an image that focuses on the human body is merely to demonstrate a bad attitude toward what is physical. If I concentrated on a woman's sense of humor to the exclusion of her other characteristics, would this be degrading? Why is it degrading to focus on her sexuality? Underlying this attitude is the view that sex must be somehow ennobled to be proper. And, for that matter, why is a naked female body more of an "object" than a clothed one?

All reasonable points, though a little disingenuous – I think it's unarguable that at least some porn is deliberately intended to be degrading, and sought out for that reason. This is something that's become both more marked and, conversely, more balanced over the last decade or so: while one part of the industry has become increasingly gonzo and extreme, at the same time there has been a rise in big-budget, high-production-value 'couples porn' like the wildly successful X-Art. Nor is it easy in practice to make out a gender divide in consumers for each type; women have become actively engaged with all areas of the porn industry in a way that mirrors, perhaps, the explosion of written genres like erotic romance which are overwhelmingly written and read by women.

For Dworkin, though, it is not enough to have a greater representation of female sexuality. Male sexuality needs to be excised entirely. Male sexuality is poison; it is violence, it is rape. And porn is just one means by which male society teaches men how to abuse and tyrannise women.

I find it hard to believe I'm the only man that does not relate to her idea of how men watch porn. My main feeling when I'm watching it, apart from the obvious arousal (assuming it's any good), is some kind of diffuse astonished gratitude, like I'm being given some disproportionate gift from a stranger. And I think even if you stopped me in the middle of watching the most degrading porn imaginable, I wouldn't see the slightest link between what was on the screen and the idea that women shouldn't also be high court judges

and CEOs.

But for Dworkin, it is axiomatic that men take what they are seeing absolutely seriously: 'Women do not believe that men believe what pornography says about women. But they do. From the worst to the best of them, they do.' And I know she must be right sometimes, because I see the way some men talk about women and I have to accept that a lot of porn reinforces their ideas. For instance. When I was trying to work out what I was going to say about all this I watched a video where Sasha Grey talks about how she got into the business (this is a YouTube link, totally safe for work). I found it vaguely cheering in the sense that she's obviously a smart and balanced and articulate person; but then I saw one of the highest-rated comments underneath it was: 'How did she get into porn? She sucked some dick. Because that's what whores do.' And I have to reassess every time I read chilling things like this. I like to think that there's a distortion effect from the internet, and that people like this are in a minority, but I would be insane to pretend they're not out there.

For me it comes down to a distinction between how male and female sexuality is seen in theory and in practice. In theory, female sexuality is great and male sexuality is revolting: so erotica good, porn bad; a woman with a sextoy is strong and independent, a man with a sextoy – *ew*. But in practice, things are reversed. Men who actually *have* a lot of sex are celebrated, whereas we all know what happens when it's the other way around. Sucks to be all of us!

I wondered if my own attitude to porn would change when I had a daughter. It didn't, really (except obviously for the fact that the amount of free time anyone had to look at porn, or anything else, disappeared). What has become more acutely obvious to me is how the exercise of female sexuality is derided from some quarters. After we watched the documentary *After Porn*, Hannah and I had a conversation about what we'd do if our daughter ever went into porn. I can't say I'd be enthusiastic about it, but I know for sure I wouldn't think any less of her, and I would be furious about the way some people talk about these women. In this regard Dworkin's arguments don't help at all, because ultimately she still considers everything to do with (male) sexuality disgusting and corrupting.

Perhaps it's true, in the end, that you can't consider porn to be exactly a boon for feminism. To me, McElroy is straining a touch too hard to make her case. Still, I think her instincts cut to the heart of the division in feminism to this day:

As a teenager, I struggled with who I was sexually. (This, despite the fact that my sexual preferences fall well within statistical norms.) I turned to feminism for encouragement and enlightenment. I was lucky. Back then, feminism still offered a vision of sexual liberation, not of sexual oppression and bitterness. Feminism still had a sense of rollick and raunch, which was invigorating. I met women who were as confused as I was by sex, men, and their responses to both. We had late-night sessions over wine during which we hashed it out.

I worry about the younger generation of women who have to go through the same sexual angst that confronts us all. If they turn to feminism, will they find a sense of joy and adventure? Or will they find only anger and a theory of victimization? Will antiporn feminists call their deepest desires "degrading"? Will their fantasies of rape or being dominated be labeled in political terms as "the eroticization of oppression"? How much of themselves will they have to disown in order to be sexually correct?

And there's the essential problem. Porn is fantasy enacted: if much of it is sexist or politically incorrect, that's

because it comes from your subconscious, which, as I've said before, could not care less about your social or political convictions. This goes for men and women equally. Indeed people often fantasise about things precisely *because* they're socially unacceptable. If you start by objecting to the expression, you end up by objecting to the thought-crime – and it's hard to see a way to square that circle.

---

### **Charlie says**

I stumbled into this book; I was not seeking a feminist view of pornography. It is investigative journalism and what is discovered by Wendy McElroy is that the popular belief which states with smug certainty that all women in the adult entertainment industry are victims of abuse is a lie. What begins for the author as a journey to expose the scandal of pornography ends with the author changing her position radically. A must read for every feminist.

---

### **McKenzie Richardson says**

It is difficult for me to decide on a rating for this book. There were so many things I liked about it but also so many things I hated.

I really liked how McElroy distinguished various types of feminism (radical, liberal, individualist). Such distinctions are important to understand regarding any issue of gender/sexuality. Most of the critiques I have been met with in regards to feminism have opposed radical feminism, which is not representative of all types.

As many have already pointed out, this book is much outdated, having been published in the 90s. However many of the points made are still valid (stigma against sex work, morality laws, etc.) even with the rise of access to pornography through the Internet.

Within the book, I think there were a few flawed understandings of psychological research. In Chapter 4, McElroy offers a critique of radical feminist research on pornography. Many of the drawbacks she sees in the studies (researcher bias, validity of simulated results in a lab, etc.) are true of most research on social issues. Most likely such problems were addressed in the discussion section of the research article. While McElroy points out these issues, she offers no suggestions on how to improve research in order to find more comprehensive results.

At one point McElroy states that while a causal link cannot accurately be made between the rise of pornography and the rise of feminism, "such a connection seems reasonable to assume." (141). McElroy seems to ignore the differences causation and correlation and while she does state that cause and effect cannot be proven, her assumption shows her own bias.

Another time McElroy's arguments made me a little uncomfortable was when she suggested that sexual objectification is not a bad thing. She argued her point well, but I think she took her conclusion way too far.

My favorite part of the book was the focus on actual people in sex work. McElroy included interviews and surveys, which really helped humanized the women that were discussed. At one point she notes that criminalizing pornography would create an even more hostile environment for the real people involved in it.

I enjoyed how human-focused some of the arguments were.

Overall, I think McElroy did a good job and on most points I agree with her.

---

### **Sam Grace says**

The whole text of the book is at <http://www.zetetics.com/mac/xxx/>

---

### **Shannon says**

This book was beyond laughable. While it was certainly dated through no fault of its own (published in the '90s, before the rise of Internet porn), the writing and arguments were pathetic. The author even at one point bemoans how "PC" sexual harassment laws are. Read this for a laugh.

---