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## **Increasing women's sexual agency with feminist pornography?**

A study on and with a feminist organization in Copenhagen on feminist pornography, heterosexuality and sex

Christine Dreyer Alexandersen  
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Supervisor: Irina Schmitt

## Abstract

Feminist pornography as phenomenon is used as point of departure for discussing and laying out discourses on heterosexuality, sex and sexual agency in women. From a group conversation with the board members of the (for the researcher familiar) feminist organization *Selskab for Ligestilling* in Copenhagen I explore if feminist pornography has the potential of contributing to, and increase sexual agency in women. Acknowledging pornography as on/scene suggests that researching (with) a familiar group allows for in-depth conversation and analysis. Queer theory as overall frame gives access to pornographic studies as potential disruptor of what is considered sexual. Besides from legitimizing women as sexual agents pornographic studies thus also opens the opportunity for disrupting heterosexuality. Pornographic studies scholars' emphasis on authenticity in pornographic material in this case lays out the differing ways women's sexuality and desires are expressed: from explicit sex to epic films and erotic features to something beyond heterosexual sex acts. This shows that sexual agency is expressed and negotiated in multiple ways. With an emphasis on the contradictions in heterosexuality, queer theory and pornographic studies will thus serve to show how heterosexuality itself possesses the key to its own deconstruction.

Keywords: Feminist pornography, heterosexuality, sexual agency, authenticity, pornographic studies, queer theory.

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# 1 Introduction

The 1<sup>st</sup> of July this year, 2009, was the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of legalization of pornographic pictures in Denmark; the first country in the world to legalize pornographic pictures. Some of the arguments in the '60s were intertwined in the paroles of sexual liberation, with the legislation of pornography also becoming a project for many feminists. However, when the legislation of pornographic pictures finally came in 1969, it did not take long for some feminists to grow skeptical about the legislation, and about pornography in general. Pornographic pictures had quickly been employed by an increased consumerism and commercialization, as images of half-naked women appeared in magazines and increasingly in public spaces to sell everything from underwear to perfume to cars. The call for liberated sexuality for everyone had morphed into commercial exploitation of women's bodies.

Voices against sexualization and pornofication have often been overheard and neglected as prudish and sex scared, and the tendency of sexualization and pornofication has not disappeared. On the contrary, it has been increased and expanded. It is apparent in the music and fashion industry, popular culture in general and in bedrooms. The feminists who were once legitimately fighting for legislation of pornographic pictures and with support from that time's intellectuals are today perceived as hypocrites of their own mission when speaking up in skepticism.

Besides the frustration of simply not being heard when speaking up against pornofication, I share the question of where sex liberation went for women. Setting pornographic images free was meant to free sex and sexuality for everybody. However, the sexual liberation in itself was influenced by the very same patriarchal culture it fought against. Therefore it became primarily, if not solely, a sexual liberation for heterosexual men. However, this tendency might be changing. While some feminists have maintained the critical perspective on sexualization and pornofication, other feminists have put on the trickster suit and embraced sexualization as frame to do feminist work from within, while keeping up the agenda of changing the sexualized society as it looks today. Instead of rejecting pornography and the huge industry it has become, these feminists insist on empowering the genre; revolting it so to speak. They open the field of pornography as something empowering for women and thus create the opportunity to look at pornography in new and other ways. Could *feminist* pornography in the long run produce new attitudes toward sexuality, and contribute to the sexual liberation in women that never came with the sex liberation in the late 1960s and early '70s?

*Science* has influenced the way we think about sex and sexuality too. When statistics and other more or less scientific research show that men (are supposed to) think about sex a certain amount of seconds, minutes and hours a day, it might be true they do; and it might even be true that similar

research on women shows they rather think about sex in a certain amount of hours, minutes and seconds a day (see in example Baumeister et al. 2001: 266). Nevertheless, I claim this research in itself rather reinstates and reproduces *the idea* that men have a more active sex drive and women have less, than it actually states any truth about sex. Sadly this kind of research's only *real* result is to make women feel guilty and ashamed if they have more sex drive than an eventual male sex partner; and makes men feel dysfunctional if they do not feel like having sex all these seconds, minutes and hours a day.

This is another reason why we do need more research about sexuality; to tell us more and other 'truths'. Speaking more explicitly about sexuality, exploring and researching it more, will help us understand other social institutions in our lives as well, such as marriage, monogamy, love, relationships, families, etc. We already 'speak sex', to use Linda Williams' term (Williams 2004: 2) implicitly through TV series and films where we see (and learn about) hierarchies of sex, about who is expected to be passive versus active in sexual relationships. Even though we do not necessarily see the exact sex acts, we implicitly are given the idea of what is going to happen as soon as the camera has left the scene. It is not unusual to see a man about to "climb a woman", indicating a specific kind of sexual act, intercourse, about to happen. Such images suggest a limited repertoire of sexual encounters. It is not a new topic in feminist scholarship and activism to refer to a greater variety and to a broader understanding of what 'sex' might actually be, beyond phallogocentric understandings. Sex-positive feminist activists have been 'on the scene' (at least) since the 1960s, and there is in fact a history of pornographic material by women for women (see in example works and performances of Annie Sprinkle since the 1970s, the erotic novel collection *Herotica* by Susan Bright, 1988, and Nancy Friday's *My Secret Garden* from 1973 and *Women on Top* from 1991). However, production of women's and/or feminist pornographic films that are accessible to a wider audience has been a more recent development. Pornographic film producers like Nina Hartley and Candida Royalle have certainly opened the field for women to make pornographic films, however, their films are not necessarily considered *feminist*. And the same goes for the three *Pussy Power* films from 1998, 1999 and 2004 in a Danish context. They were made to embrace an increasing female audience of pornography but they have not necessarily been received as *feminist*. However *pornography* as a genre is changing. In recent years pornographic film festivals have blossomed (in Berlin for example, there has been one every year since 2006) with people who have interests in renewing the genre (PornFilmFestival Berlin 2009). And in Canada a specific "*Feminist Porn Award*" has been given since 2006 (Feminist Porn Awards 2009).

I enter a field that is changing and thus seemingly negotiable. Could this relatively new genre of feminist pornography open up new and other ways of speaking about sex and sexuality?

For this thesis my interest is to explore if feminist pornography can help women identify themselves as sexual agents in an increased sex-mainstreamed society which is not very often weighing or benefiting women's sex drive and sexual empowerment. The task of this thesis is thus to explore the following research question:

*How can feminist pornography contribute to, and increase sexual agency in women?*

In order to discuss this question I will use a group discussion with board members of a feminist organization in Copenhagen called *Selskab for Ligestilling* (Society for (Gender) Equality). This is a feminist organization of which I am board member myself. The organization, the group and thoughts on being a researcher in a familiar group will be presented and elaborated on in chapter 3. From the conversation I had with the board members of *Selskab for Ligestilling*, I will show how discourses about sex, pornography, feminism and heterosexuality are intertwined in one another and constantly moving and thus in the position of being challenged and potentially changed.

With the analysis I aim to contribute to the field of feminist and new pornographic studies suggesting that feminist pornography has potential for contributing to, and increasing sexual agency in women.

## **1.1 Feminist pornography**

As introduced above, feminist pornography is a relatively new phenomenon that is still negotiated and discussed how to be used. This short chapter will thus primarily work as a clarification of how the term should be understood for this thesis.

When I speak of (feminist) pornography I refer to moving-image pornographies, specifically pornographic films. Despite this restraint I am going to use the concept of *feminist* pornography as broadly and diffusely as it is used in Danish and international discussions. There are several, and differing, genres within the genre. For example, the Canadian *Feminist Porn Awards* specifies that to be eligible to an award, at least one of the following rules must be pursued: 1) *A woman had a hand in the production, writing, direction, etc. of the work.* 2) *It depicts genuine female pleasure.* 3) *It expands the boundaries of sexual representation on film and challenges stereotypes that are often found in mainstream porn* (Feminist Porn Awards 2009). To give an example of what *feminist* might entail for these pornographies, here are some of the winner categories from 2009: "*Steamiest Trans Scene*", "*Sexiest Straight Movie*", "*Hottest Mature Couple's Movie*", "*Steamiest Educational Series*" and "*Sexiest Dyke Movie*" (Feminist Porn Awards 2009).

We do not have a similar award in Denmark. However, when the Swedish-born (Spanish-living) feminist pornography producer, Erika Lust, took the award in 2008 for *Movie of the Year* with *Five Hot*

*Stories for Her* (Feminist Porn Awards 2009), it was discussed on the website of one of the biggest newspapers in Copenhagen (Jeng 2008).<sup>1</sup>

As I will show in the analysis, the group also treats feminist pornography as a very broad concept. Most often it will be referred to and described as something opposite to conventional pornography and something focusing on female or women's pleasure, which might tempt one to stick to a definition of 'women's' and maybe even *heterosexual* feminist women's pornography. However, some of the members speak specifically of feminist pornography as something opposite to heterosexual pornography and use the terms heterosexual and conventional pornography synonymously.

I did not want to limit the possibilities of what the group might find attractive and desirable as potential feminist pornography. Putting restraints on my definition of feminist pornography would thus restrain the outcome, the discussions and reflections on my material, which is why I ended up keeping a broad specter. Sara Goodman asked me in a meeting whether I was going to define feminist pornography as *what feminists make of pornography* or if I was going to analyze what feminist pornography *should* be. This is a question I have kept in mind when reflecting on my own immediate instinct of *not* defining the phenomenon further than what different feminists make of it. However, as I will show in my analysis, our group discussion is very much surrounding the question what feminist pornography *should* be about, what one would like it to be about and the opinion of not wanting any pornography, feminist or not, is also represented.

The thesis will in addition show that the idea of any kind of feminist pornography seems more vital for the feminists interviewed than defining specifically *which* feminist pornography is the proper one.

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<sup>1</sup> Erika Lust has gained a degree in political science, specialized in feminism, from Lund University (Lust 2009b).

## 2 My theoretical framework

For this thesis I am particularly interested in exploring how feminism, femininity, sexuality and heterosexuality are navigated and negotiated within the inescapable heterosexual norm that surrounds and influences our possible ways of living; how are they negotiated when put to a feminist table speaking about (feminist) pornography? I want to explore how the inescapability of the heterosexual norm both restricts and creates opportunities for interrupting a stable perception of heterosexual women, feminism and femininity in order to discuss if feminist pornography has the potential of contributing to, and increasing sexual agency in women.

I am influenced by queer theory and pornographic studies and my thesis will in its stride to explore how feminist pornography can contribute to, and increase sexual agency in women, be a negotiation of these theoretical positions.

First I will introduce my queer theoretical influences in the chapter “History of Sexuality and Queer Theory”, and present how I will use these influences in my analysis. *History of Sexuality* refers to Michel Foucault’s pioneering work on sexuality and power. I am also relying on Judith Butler’s extensive works on the heterosexual norm, and I will present the articles *Revisiting Bodies and Pleasures* from 1999 and *Against Proper Objects* from 1994, as examples of her thoughts.

While Foucault and Butler frame my overall understanding of sexuality as historical and cultural phenomenon, and of queer theory, Danish queer theorist Dag Heede and his work with ‘queering the cannon’ is of main interest for this thesis. He suggests that there is ‘queering’ potential in institutions considered *normal*. With his own works of ‘queering’ Danish national authorships, as in example Hans Christian Andersen and Karen Blixen, he gives a practical example of how ‘to queer’ something perceived as normal, heterosexual.

Where Foucault and Butler explain how the heterosexual norm “works” and how it only makes very little room for agency, as that agency will always already be in relation to that norm, Dag Heede draws attention to exactly that little room for agency. His ‘queering the cannon’ project becomes relevant for my analysis task when trying to see ‘disturbing potential’ in the mainly heterosexual field I am researching.

In “Entering the Pornographic Fields” I will introduce pornographic studies and the scholars I am influenced of from this theoretical genre. Linda Williams have developed further on Foucault’s thoughts on sexuality and put them to a pornographic studies frame and so her theories become ‘natural’ as prolongation of my interpretation of Foucault’s understandings of sexuality.



Anne Sabo's research pursues liberating potentials in women's and feminist pornographies. In her investigations she has found several and differing suggestions of how to 'disturb' the pornography norms so to speak and emphasizes films with liberating potential for women.

Mette Grimstrup puts pornographic studies to a Danish context with her analysis of women's pornographies in Denmark. Her analysis of authenticity is especially interesting for this thesis.

## **2.1 History of Sexuality and Queer Theory**

Like many other feminists before me, I am heavily influenced by **Michel Foucault** and his perceptions of sexuality and power. For this thesis I am specifically referring to his *History of Sexuality*<sup>2</sup> from 1976. Here he shows how sexuality is historically and culturally constructed and how different societal institutions, as in example the Christian church, have influenced the way we perceive sex and sexuality in the Western world today. He exemplifies how we on one hand perceive ourselves as sexually liberated creatures in comparison with "those hundred years ago" when sex was something hidden and obscene. On the other hand he shows how we are still interweaved in this tabooed attitude to sex so the way we actually talk about sex is in the way we articulate how it is dirty, private and secret; thus still expressing the taboo we try to 'ascribe' ourselves from (Foucault 1976: 36). Further Foucault shows how some sexual practices are neglected on behalf of others, historically. That heterosexuality is today perceived as the proper kind of sexuality if not 'the only' kind of sexuality he shows is a historical construct rather than a biological one as is commonly argued today. He exemplifies how in antique Greece it was considered normal for old married men to have young male lovers, which today is considered an obscene sexual practice (Foucault 2003:11). Foucault thus shows how heterosexuality is today considered the norm; however, on the other hand not more of a norm than prescribed historically, and thus in constant challenge and in potential of change.

In his thoughts specifically on *power*, we get a more explicit idea of how much room he gives to agency. He describes how power is both *everywhere*, inescapable *and* in resistance:

"You cannot escape power, it is always already present and even constitutes what you try to oppose it"  
(Foucault 2003: 88, my translation).

"Power is everywhere; which is not because it includes everything but because it comes from all places" (Foucault 2003: 99, my translation).

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<sup>2</sup> I will be referring to the Danish translation: *Viljen til viden: Seksualitetens Historie 1*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2003.

“Where there is power there is resistance, and yet, or rather therefore, this resistance never stands in an external relation to power” (Foucault 2003: 101, my translation).

Foucault thus opens the possibility of resistance within the (however inescapable) norm.

In **Sara Mill’s** *Discourse* from 2004, she gives examples of how feminist scholars have investigated discourses of heterosexuality and femininity from a Foucaultian perspective. Those examples show the dimension of exploring how power relations are manifested *and* resisted in everyday life (Mills 2004: 70). Putting Foucault’s theoretical universe into the context of everyday situations, strengthens the basis for analyzing how sexual agency in heterosexual feminist women are negotiated and navigated without solely perceiving ‘women’ as “heteronormative zombies” (Mills 2004: 82). Mills refers to Dorothy Smith when suggesting how femininity is not a fixed and *always* subordinated notion: “To explore femininity as discourse means a shift away from viewing it as a normative order, reproduced through socialisation, to which women are somehow subordinated” (Smith in Mills 2004:79).

**Judith Butler’s** continuous thinking and theorizing on the heterosexual norm and agency within this norm, as well as her important thoughts on sexuality and gender cannot be ignored when studying heterosexuality.

In her article *Against Proper Objects*, from 1994, she warns about the contemporary tendency of dividing feminist concepts and questions of sex and gender into the divisions of queer studies focusing on sex and sexuality, and into feminist studies taking care of women’s and gender studies (Butler 1994: 1). She argues that with this kind of distinction:

“feminism is figured as concerned not only with one aspect of “sex” – putative anatomical identity – but with no aspects of sexuality” (Butler 1994: 3).

This would mean an acceptance of a dichotomous perception of gender, per se, a perception of ‘men’ versus ‘women’, and then a perception of sexuality in relation to these, exclusively. She argues that this kind of distinction between gender and ‘women’s’ studies versus sex and sexuality studies would undermine, or even make it impossible, for feminists to continue the tradition of enhancing sexual freedom (Butler 1994: 3). She outlines how the anti-pornography movement throughout the 1980s has treated sexuality as a gendered division either expressed as power subordination, or as domination, exemplified in ‘women’ being the subordinate, and ‘men’ thus the dominating (Butler 1994: 7). Besides from creating the implicit sexual hierarchy where heterosexuality is superior, it also creates a fixed perception of heterosexuality, thus holding that heterosexuality consists of the ‘man’/‘woman’-binary where one (‘the man’) will always dominate ‘the other’ (‘the woman’). Besides Butler’s notion in *Undoing Gender* that *heterosexuality* does not belong exclusively to heterosexuals

(Butler 2004: 199), heterosexuality is a topic, a system, to be explored in other ways than describing its domination patterns (Butler 1994: 7). And this is what I intend to do in this thesis; to explore heterosexuality as heterogeneous, and not necessarily – or at least not solely – heterosexist per se.

In *Revisiting Bodies and Pleasures* from 1999, Judith Butler further elaborates how gender and sexuality often are explored distinctively. Looking into Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, she both argues with his works and asks questions about how we should understand and perceive sexuality and gender from his works. She claims, in line with her arguments from *Against Proper Objects*, that sexuality and gender have often, 'in the name of Foucault', been interpreted as distinctive concepts; an interpretation she finds more harmful than productive, and not necessarily what Foucault meant (Butler 1999: 17). She emphasizes the importance of asking questions about how sexuality and gender interrelates, exceeds and disrupts the contents of their own meaning;

"asking [...] crucial questions about the formation of sexuality across genders, about how identification works within lesbian and gay sexuality, how it is implicated in heterosexual desire, how heterosexual identifications are implicated as well in homosexual desire, [and] how normative gender does not always line up with normative sexuality." (Butler 1999: 17f)

Especially the last aspect of this sentence, that normative gender does not always equal normative sexuality, is of specific interest in this thesis' analysis when dealing with what could be perceived as normative gender at the same time will show that the sexuality expressed is not solely normative.

In the article *Subject, Psyche and Agency – The Work of Judith Butler*, from 1999, **Lois McNay** discusses Butler's room for agency. McNay emphasizes the importance of being aware and alert to the creativity of agency (McNay 1999: 176), and following my own agenda for this thesis, she underlines that:

"Change arises from the constitutive instability of the symbolic and discursive structures which invest the body with meaning. The cultural necessity for a performative reiteration of these symbolic norms highlights the extent to which they are not natural or inevitable and are, therefore, potentially open to change" (McNay 1999: 177).

In a Danish context, queer theorist **Dag Heede** expands his inspiration by both Foucault and Butler in his project of "queering the cannon" (Heede 2003: 17f). His primary interest is in disturbing the norms and 'queering' whatever looks normal, to show that 'queerness' is everywhere; it is just a matter of being able to and wanting to see it (Heede 2003: 5ff). One could say he emphasizes the above mentioned ideas of agency and 'the heterosexual norm' and takes them one step further when practically 'queering' what is considered normal (Heede 2003: 5).

I see his ideas as inspirational for my thesis when trying to see 'queerness' in an institution such as heterosexuality. As Heede describes, heterosexuality is often connoted to heteronormativity which he finds is not necessarily accurate (Heede 2003: 8). There is norm-disturbing potential in heterosexuality which I will look for when analyzing. Following Heede, we do not necessarily need to look into 'queer communities' to find queerness. It is right there in front of us, in all these institutions considered *normal*. The potential might be contradictory, but it is there. I see opportunities in these contradictions and an opportunity to re-set, review and remodel, to recreate a genre, pornography as well as heterosexuality.

Foucault, Butler and Heede frame possibilities and obstacles for agency, in my thesis exemplified in how femininity and feminism are expressed, navigated and negotiated within a heterosexual norm we cannot fully escape. Using Foucault, Butler and Heede as overall understanding of sexuality, power and the heterosexual norm, they lead me to look for disturbance; to search for norm disruptions. As an overall disrupter I will introduce the relatively new theoretical discipline of pornographic studies.

## ***2.2 Entering the pornographic fields***

From early on in the process I have used Linda Williams and her *Porn Studies* from 2004 as support to my own research. She develops Foucault's thoughts to encompass a frame theorizing pornography. Further Anne Sabo's research and search for women's and feminist pornographies that can liberate women sexually shows the broad specter of pornographic film suggestions to increase sexual empowerment in women to navigate, explore and negotiate in a sexualized society. From a specific Danish context, Mette Grimstrup's works on women's and feminist pornographies explore the authenticity of women's pleasure in pornographic genres. I see these pornographic studies scholars as potential 'porn' trouble makers, disturbing the norms and queering the pornographic cannon.

In the following I will introduce their works to show how pornographic studies are useful to understand and explore the potential of increasing sexual agency in women, contributed by feminist pornography.

### **2.2.1 An opportunistic genre**

**Linda Williams** introduces her *Porn Studies* claiming that: "feminist debates about whether pornography should exist at all have paled before the simple fact that still and moving-image pornographies have become fully recognizable fixtures of popular culture" (Williams 2004:1). In her newer *Screening Sex* she further claims that "it is a waste of time to continue to blame the increased sexualization [...] on the rise of pornography" (Williams 2008: 7). In *Porn Studies* she argues that we

are simply “compelled to *speak sex*, whether to protect ourselves [...] from AIDS [...] or simply as a result of watching *The Sopranos*, *Sex in the City*, or *Queer as Folk*” (Williams 2004:2, my emphasis).

“Speaking sex” is the term Williams uses to explain how this “is the particularly modern compulsion to confess the secrets of sex described by Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality* [...] [and that p]ornography [...] is one such discourse of sexuality” (Williams 2004:21, footnote 2). In *Screening Sex* she makes an important distinction between speaking sex and speaking *about* sex. With help from Foucault, she points out “that sex is a discursive construct more than it is a preexisting object” (Williams 2008:327, footnote 8).

This is why it is, following Williams, more correct to say we speak sex rather than just speak *about* it. Sex thus becomes relevant to us all as it is intertwined in our language of pleasure, power and knowledge; sex is not only something which is repressed or liberated (Williams 2008:12f). It then becomes clear that sex is not something fixed, but rather something to be understood in relation to “a social and cultural history of sex” (Williams 2008:7). Similarly with pornography Williams argues “screened sex has always been and is now even more central to our culture” (Williams 2008:21).

In *Porn Studies* Williams coins the theoretical term “On/scenity”. In relation to pornography, on/scenity she describes as the paradox of “a culture bring[ing] on to its public arena the very organs, acts, bodies, and pleasures that have heretofore been designated ob/scene and kept literally off-scene” (Williams 2004:3). She explains that on/scenity is a rather conflicted term compared to obscenity, as obscenity is associated with sexually explicit acts seeming unspeakable and thus kept off-scene. On/scenity, on the other hand, describes the tension between both the unspeakable *and* the speakable. Thus it shows how sex and sexually explicit acts as those seen in for example pornography are constantly in negotiation between the off-scene and that which “peek out at us from under every bush” (Williams 2004:4).

Williams’ terms of “speaking sex”, “on/scenity” and her Foucaultian understanding of sex as something to be understood in a historical, social and cultural context, frame how pornography and sexuality are perceived in this thesis.

**Anne Sabo**’s motivation to enter the field of feminist pornography and pornography produced by women reminds me a bit of my own. In the article *A vision of new porn – How women are revising porn to match a time of greater gender equality* from 2007, Sabo enters the field of feminist and women’s pornography to see how feminist pornographic producers revise the pornography genre in “a time of greater gender equality” (Sabo 2007:221). In a time when pornography on one hand has become increasingly popular, and legitimate also in the increasing sales of sex toys and books, at the same time

as young women still experience gender inequality in their everyday lives (Sabo 2007:222), Sabo finds it worth investigating what pornography can offer young women. She reviews different genres within feminist and women's pornographies and analyzes possibilities and obstacles in them. In the article she outlines Candida Royalle's and Anna Span's films as examples of how different the specter within the feminist and women's pornographic genres is.

Royalle specifically makes films from 'a woman's point of view' and with an erotic sense to them (Sabo 2007:224f), and Span keeps many of the contents from conventional pornography, such as 'cum-shots' (men's ejaculation) and 'meat shots' (referring to close-up shots of genitals and penetration). Sabo argues how they are both examples of how to challenge 'the male gaze'<sup>3</sup>. For example, Span believes that: "*to sexually objectify, that is to fleetingly view a person's sexual attractiveness separately from their personality/person, is a natural human experience, NOT just a male one, as traditionally depicted*" (Sabo 2007:230). This view challenges the idea that 'the male gaze' belongs exclusively to men and furthermore the idea that women simply obtain the gaze and adjust to it in order to affirm to it themselves. 'The gaze' is not specifically *manly* but rather *humanly*. Sabo's thoughts and analyses have thus given me an overview and analytical insight into the different genres 'within the genre', which will be helpful when analyzing what 'kind' of pornographies we in *Selskab for Ligestilling* are referring to when reflecting on what we would like pornography to entail in order to 'suit' us.

There are not many studies of (feminist) pornographies in a Danish context. Especially useful however, is **Mette Grimstrup's** work on pornography, women's and feminist pornography and sex and desire. In her master's thesis, *Lysende af lyst* (Glowing with Desire/Lust), she analyzes three Danish pornographic films originally promoted as Pussy Power films, and today collected on the common website innocentpictures.com. In her text Grimstrup explores how new pornographies such as women's pornography and queer pornography might represent new and other agendas than the kind of pornography assumed to represent quite fixed stereotypes of masculinity, femininity and heterosexuality. Grimstrup's analyses of the Pussy Power films show that they are not really challenging the androcentric tendencies recognized from conventional pornographic films (Grimstrup 2008:1). She suggests that if primarily accepting an idea of women wanting more soft-core alternatives to 'the hardcore phallogentric' versions of the pornographic genre, the films will first of all confirm a normal gender scheme and then focus on 'polishing' the genre making it softer 'for the women' (Grimstrup 2008:1). She suggests the real challenge for new feminist and women's

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<sup>3</sup> "The male gaze" was originally a term coined by film theorist Laura Mulvey (in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" from 1975) and this Sabo also refers to in her article (Sabo 2007:224).

pornographies lies in the search for an authentic lust that has so far primarily been illustrated by ‘the cum-shot’, the male ejaculation also known as ‘the money shot’. She adds the French lesbian- and queer pornographic film *One Night Stand* to her analysis suggesting this is a feminist and queer alternative to the conventional androcentric pornographic films. This film illustrates a female equivalent to ‘the man’s cum-shot’, *real* female lust (Grimstrup 2008:1). Grimstrup’s works will be specifically interesting for my analysis of how we in the feminist group surround our discussion on authenticity and what we consider and define authentic. This part of my analysis can be found specifically in the chapter “It has to seem real! The issue of authenticity”.

Pornographic studies work as primer discourse disruptor in this thesis, creating a moment when we can look at sexuality discourses anew. In this moment I will explore if time has come for a sexual liberation for women, if feminist pornography (with its wide specter of genres within the genre) can contribute to, and increase sexual agency in women.

### **3 *Selskab for Ligestilling (SfL)*<sup>4</sup> – feminists as research focus**

Pornography studies scholars Williams', Sabo's and Grimstrup's research primarily surrounds analyzing pornographic material. However the task for this specific thesis lies in exploring if feminist pornography can contribute to, and increase sexual agency *in women*. With an emphasis on 'women' it then made more sense to put the phenomenon of feminist pornography into a conversational context. However, researching sexuality and pornography in a time of on/scenity tensions had me consider a number of conversational options. Acknowledging sexuality and pornography as on/scene topics I realized that it would not be topics to discuss with 'anyone'. To keep an easygoing atmosphere in the conversation had me choose to have a group conversation rather than one-to-one interviews which might create too intimate a situation in relation to the on/scene topic. However, the conversation should still be *serious* in order for me to identify discourses on sexuality and sexual agency. As board member of a feminist organization it gave me the advantage of having conversation with a group which is familiar with each other beforehand. This allows for in-depth conversation rather than positioning obstacles likely to appear in groups where people are not acquainted.

The board members of *Selskab for Ligestilling* are my conversation partners in this thesis and thus their, or rather *our*, expressions and interpretations of sexuality, (feminist) pornography and sexual agency will be in focus.

Some historical notifications about the organization will introduce this chapter to show how the history of the organization influences how it is perceived today, both by the media but more importantly by other feminist organizations in Copenhagen. This is to give an idea of *SfL*'s position in the feminist environment in Copenhagen.

#### **3.1 *About the organization – the past and the present***

In the book *En køn historie*<sup>5</sup>, Bente Hansen historically describes the women's movement in Denmark from the 1970s when she was a front figure herself to today, drawing on different specters and

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<sup>4</sup> Society for (Gender) Equality (my translation). There is no accurate translation of the organization's name and the English translation seems even tamer than the organization's name maybe already is. This is why I am keeping the Danish phrase in the rest of this thesis. See the chapter "*Ligestilling* and Gender Equality" for a further elaboration.

<sup>5</sup> This title has several meanings as both the word *køn* and *historie* has a double connotation. As I will elaborate further in the chapter "Translation Trouble", I recognize *køn* as both sex *and* gender. In Danish, besides referring



organizations of the women's movement in Denmark. One chapter is about *SfL*, which at the time was called *Kvindeligt Selskab (KvS)*. Hansen has based parts of this chapter on an interview with Elisabeth Møller Jensen, one of the founders of *KvS*. I will refer to this chapter when describing the past of *SfL*. I also use overview from annual reports posted on *SfL*'s website.

The organization changed its name in October 2007 from *Kvindeligt Selskab* (Female Society, my translation) to *Selskab for Ligestilling*. The then current board members wanted to signal new and other values with a new name. There was common agreement in the board though not amongst all members of the organization to get rid of the explicit use of a female vocabulary in the name of the organization. The consensus was the organization was more feminist than it was specifically for women. It then changed its name to something appealing to everyone engaged with feminist and gender issues, and then more explicitly also welcoming men with feminist and gender equality interests (annual report 2006, [selskabforligestilling.dk](http://selskabforligestilling.dk)). That *gender* in this case associates to a man/woman dichotomy I will not reject, and I will return to this matter. For now I will restate there is no word for gender in Danish and when staying with *køn* as reference the context will not seem as biased.

*KvS* was founded in 1991 with the leader of *Kvinfo*, Elisabeth Møller Jensen (Hansen 2004:296). *Kvinfo* is a self-owned institution<sup>6</sup> in Copenhagen for information about women's and gender research. In December 2008, the board of *SfL* invited Elisabeth Møller Jensen to a talk about the organization's history and events to gain inspiration for future happenings. When not referring to Hansen's book, examples are from this occasion. It is worth mentioning that from this occasion we also learned Elisabeth Møller Jensen is not supporting the organization's change of name. She finds the name tame and also argued she found it unwise to change such an established brand as the name *KvS* had become. I will note the Danish word *Selskab* has the double meaning of both being a society however this use of the word also associates to some kind of "enclosed society" and the other meaning of the word is "company", which rather gives associations of "being in good company". Elisabeth Møller Jensen, for example, argued for the name *Kvindeligt Selskab* (Female Society/Company): "Who wouldn't like to be in female company?"

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to sex/gender, *køn* also means *pretty*. The word *historie* can both mean *history* and *story*. Thus the title has the several meanings of being, *A Sex/Gender History*, *A Sex/Gender Story* or *A Pretty History*, or simply *A Pretty Story*.

<sup>6</sup> Within The Danish Ministry of Culture (Kulturministeriet).

*KvS* was originally founded as a supporting group for *Kvinfo* and played the part of putting attention to the projects surrounding *Kvinfo* and women's and gender research in general. However, *KvS* stated itself as an individual activity from the very beginning and after ten years it became a completely independent organization (Hansen 2004:300).

The founders of *KvS* were aware the media was apparently tired of the feminist parades from the '70s and strategically offered new feminist signals to get attention from the media. *KvS* wanted to be a think-tank and centre for debate for women in art, politics, science and unions and wanted an appeal of high culture (Hansen 2004:296f) and sophistication. After a few years the organization was dominated by young members and they wanted the organization to be perceived as strong, young and attractive (Hansen 2004:300). However this also had the consequence that some of the older feminists felt left out. Some of *KvS*'s events were very extravagant – to attract the press – but some feminists found those happenings a bit over the top: too fancy, expensive and commercial (Hansen 2004:300). The press then established the picture of 'the new, trendy and attractive feminists' versus 'the old, ugly and angry women's libbers' (Hansen 2004:300).

Another feminist scholar and activist in Copenhagen, Ane Havskov Kirk, offers some interesting methodological thoughts and considerations about the feminist environment in Copenhagen in her bachelor's thesis: *Den feministiske ligtorn* (The Feminist Corn, my translation, 2008), and this has given an understanding of how other feminist groups in Copenhagen might perceive *SfL* as an organization. Kirk's focus is on how different feminists in Copenhagen position themselves politically and strategically with the case of prostitution/sex work and she has conducted conversations with feminists representing different women's and feminist organizations in Copenhagen. One of the current board members of *SfL* participated in Kirk's bachelor's thesis as conversation partner and this indicates the size of the feminist environment in Copenhagen which Kirk also refers to as rather small (Kirk 2008: 13). What I find specifically interesting with Kirk's research is her observation that the more the feminists she talked to positioned themselves outward, the less thoughts they had made of their own personal feminist standpoint; and the less the feminists positioned themselves outward, the more they had thought about their feminist standpoint (Kirk 2008: 35). This observation becomes important in order to understand *SfL*'s position and place on 'the feminist map' in Copenhagen. Kirk categorized the board member from *SfL* with the feminists mostly interested in 'a common feminist goal' rather than defining what *feminism* consists of. Even though this board member is not representing *SfL* as a group or organization, the point that *feminism* is not considered the most important definition issue illustrates that the aim of our group activities rather consist of 'the cause' than the essence of the cause. It is considered more important to make the group activities visible for others, feminists as well as non-feminists, than solely create a feminist room for members. Our

feminist room can then be described as more of a strategic room in the fight for a greater good – contributing to “the greater cause” then becomes more important for *SfL* than defining ourselves inward. A tendency of strategizing rather than defining becomes evident in this thesis, in example in our lack of definition of *feminist pornography* versus our emphasis on what the phenomenon (however undefined) can offer us, as women.

### **3.2 Speaking as and of women**

Not only are we gathered under a non-defined feminist umbrella; this also results in lack of defining our common ground as *women*. As pointed out by several feminist scholars the term ‘women’ can leave associations to universalizing principles of a united sisterhood. Especially black feminists have pointed this out as problematic, in the 1980s, as they did not necessarily feel represented by the issues taken up by white middle-class feminists (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002: 4). However, when speaking from the common position ‘women’ within the group, it intersects with our other “situated knowledges”, to use Donna Haraway’s terms (Haraway 1988: 581), as middle-class and white. We might acknowledge sharing the partial perspective of being white, woman and middle-class; however, we are not claiming to speak for *all* women. The aim of this thesis is thus not to find one objective knowledge of *women’s* sexuality but rather to lay out differently situated knowledges and discourses as they are truly perceived by these women.

An important notification in relation to our taken-for-granted common position as women is our change of name. Leaving the emphasis of a *female* society in the change of organization name to the ‘non-gendered’ *Society for (Gender) Equality* implicitly invites for other genders than the female one to join the organization, and the board. What will happen with the group’s practical perception of gender when “men” join in? For the moment our organization structure in example consists of a *forkvinde* and a *næstforkvinde* which are evolved as explicit words to indicate the discrimination in the regular Danish word *formand*<sup>7</sup>. In the group we are continuously discussing strategies of either keeping the word *forkvinde* or simply using the non-gendered word *forperson* which refers to ‘a person’ rather than any certain gender. My personal argument has been to keep the word *forkvinde*, no matter *who*

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<sup>7</sup> Formand is the Danish word for chairman. As with many other words and titles in Danish they are gendered. Words as police *man* (*politimand*) and cleaning *lady* (*rengøringsdame*) have increasingly turned into non-gendered words and the official titles today are then police *officer* (*politiasistent*) and cleaner (*rengøringsassistent*).

potentially would be holding that seat – however this suggestion has not been warmly welcomed and the discussion so continues.

Sharing common perception ground of (and *as*) *women* writes us into a gender frame. The organization's name implicating and consisting of *Gender Equality* emphasizes that frame. However, *gender equality* is not a satisfying translation of the Danish word *Ligestilling*.

### **3.3 Translation Trouble**

Translating has been troubling in writing (and thinking) this thesis. As Karin Widerberg writes in her article *Translating gender*: “[...]Going international[...] changes the voice as well as the story” (Widerberg 1998: 133). If written in Danish, this thesis would thus have looked very different, and have told a slightly different story. *Gender* does not exist in Danish vocabulary, and *sex* has other meanings than in English. And how can I even write about an organization whose name is not translatable to English?

#### **3.3.1 Sex, gender and/or ‘køn’?**

In Danish there is no word for gender and there is not the same distinction between biological and socio-cultural sex as exists and have been discussed thoroughly in an English context (see in example Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002: 5, and Lykke 2008: 32). The term *køn* has not met the same problematic distinction between *sex* (as in not gender) and *gender* (as in not sex). The Danish word *køn* “is not gender!” Widerberg proclaims (Widerberg 1998: 134). When *gender* was invented to have a word distinct from *the biological sex*, it had a contextual logic just the same as keeping the word *køn* today has. The *sex/gender*-distinction has become problematic as it is often used in a *biological sex* context versus a *socio-cultural gender* context. To stay with *køn* thus takes feminist studies beyond this problematic, however paradoxical this might seem<sup>8</sup>. When writing *gender* throughout this thesis anyway it thus includes *sex* and refers to a Danish understanding of *køn*, including both *gender and sex*. Maintaining *gender* is an aim for broadening the specter of *gender* understandings.

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<sup>8</sup> In a societal context I suggest that the main reason why Danish feminist scholars have “been left” with *køn*, is because feminism has not been acknowledged in either politics (and/) or university institutions to the same degree as in example Sweden where feminist studies have increasingly become acknowledged as academic discipline. In Copenhagen *kønsforskning* is still only a subdiscipline without own faculties etc.

### 3.3.2 Sex Trouble

Another important notion is that 'sex' in English vocabulary both refers to the biological sex and to sexual acts. In Danish *sex* simply refers to 'the sexual act', often insinuating that *sex* solely entails *intercourse*. *Sex* in this thesis will primarily refer to sexual acts and thus open for multiple understandings of *sex*. It will be emphasized if *sex* is referring to *the biological sex*.

### 3.3.3 *Ligestilling* and Gender Equality

The Danish word *ligestilling* is directly translated to *equality* and thus not necessarily gendered. However, the word is practically referring to *gender* equality. In example we have a Minister of (Gender) Equality (*Ligestillingsminister*) in the Danish parliament primarily taking care of *gender* equality issues. Because *SfL* is concerned with feminist and *gender* (in the broader *køn* aspect) issues I will be referring to *gender* equality rather than *equality* when speaking of the organization in English terms. As pointed out before, the Danish name *Selskab for Ligestilling (SfL)* will however be the preferred term throughout the thesis.

### 3.3.4 Transcription

The issue of translation affected my transcriptions as well. I spent a lot of time transcribing the Danish version to get familiar with the text and see how details from the conversation had affected the situation. I even tried to write the transcriptions as close to 'the real conversation' as possible, without commas etc. which also means it might not be the most reader-friendly version. It has primarily worked as a manuscript to myself in understanding how breaks in dialogues, sentences etc., in example by laughter, direct as well as indirect interruption, affects the power symmetries throughout the conversation. Further, I was not sure how close to the text I wanted to hold my analysis which is why I held the possibility open by having 'the whole script'. This means that the Danish transcription version is the most "authentic" one. Understanding Danish and being able to read the Danish transcription version will thus give privileged insight to my field.

The English translation of the transcriptions is primarily in relation to my analytical findings but however gives further insight to the group conversation as a whole context.

When outlining pieces of the dialogue throughout the analysis the page references will be from the original transcript version to keep the sense of the conversation length.

### ***3.4 The interview situation and my role as researcher***

Being familiar with *SfL* on one hand gave me access to in-depth conversation about ‘women’s sexuality’ without being perceived as an outsider ‘observing’ their discussion. On the other hand, being part of my own research field put me in a tense position where I had to find a balance between acting as the fellow feminist activist and friend and as researcher. This tension is both expressed in the group conversation itself where we on one hand discuss and interact “as usual” and on the other hand speak out from questions asked by me.

Before having the group conversation I had send each of the seven group members<sup>9</sup> (and conversation participants) a formal letter<sup>10</sup>, both by email and to their address. I had asked them to participate as my main focus for my thesis work at a regular board meeting and with a letter I wanted to emphasize my research was serious. We had agreed to have the group conversation at our next scheduled board meeting to make sure everyone would be able to come. A few of the group members showed further interest in my topic and asked me for recommendations of feminist pornography so they could prepare before the group conversation. Because feminist pornography and pornographic studies were new to me at the time, I chose not to recommend any specific films. I did not want to potentially narrow their perception of feminist pornography. However, I encouraged them in the letter to explore a bit on their own and bring the cover to a film they had found interesting, provoking or that had affected them in some way. None of them did and I was then the only one who had brought some material. Yet, some of them had done some internet searching but proclaimed that they did not really know where to look for it. Feminist pornography seemed new to all of us and big parts of our conversation then entailed what we would like it to be about.

Our group conversation was very similar to our common meetings, despite the fact we were now focusing our discussion on *feminist pornography* and the conversation was recorded by a dictaphone.

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<sup>9</sup> Besides from one person who is a deputy member and never attending the meetings in practice. I have personally never met her which is a reason why I did not invite her to participate. However I find it worth mentioning that she, besides from being member of *Selskab for Ligestilling*, also is member of *Pornofrit Miljø* (Porn Free Society, my translation) – an organization fighting against pornofication in public spaces and on public TV-channels. Considering the fact that she is not usually part of the board members’ group dynamic, and trusting that our group also represented critic against pornography, I did not open the possibility of having her in the focus group.

<sup>10</sup> See attachment: Letter to *Selskab for Ligestilling*

We were sitting in *Kvinfo's* kitchen, the usual meeting place, and we had dinner during the conversation, which we always have at our regular meetings as well.<sup>11</sup> The conversation was scheduled to last no longer than two hours and ended up taking a little more than 1½ hours. I had prepared some questions and topics to talk about but did not have any particular order of the questions.

In the letter, I held up the possibility for them to interfere with the way I interpreted them in my analysis. I therefore sent them the not fully finished analysis approximately three weeks before deadline and gave them one week to remark. Three confirmed my interpretations and four did not respond. Besides from the analysis draft, I sent them the Danish and English transcriptions of the conversations a week after, this only as information (and entertainment). The pseudonyms in the analysis are their own choice of name.

In the analysis I will often refer to 'us' and 'we' in the board of *Selskab for Ligestilling*, identifying 'us' as one group. At the same time I will be speaking of one board member saying this, and another sympathizing with that. We are thus representing different ideas. Differences "within the same".

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<sup>11</sup> Originally we had an office at *Kvinfo*, but due to increasing staff at *Kvinfo* we could not have office there anymore. However, we still have our board meetings in *Kvinfo's* kitchen, and our "office" today is a laptop.

## **4 Bringing sex and pornography to the feminist table – Analysis of the group conversation**

In the process of analyzing the material, I realized that solving my research question – *how feminist pornography can contribute to, and increase sexual agency in women* – would be a more complex task than initially imagined. At first it seemed we did not speak explicitly of sexual agency more than once during the whole interview. Then I looked more closely into how we were then expressing any given agency. As if following a Foucaultian script, I found that agency was defined in contradictory ways: intertwined in heterosexuality and feminism. In many ways we were confirming ourselves to a heteronormative picture, for example in our taken-for-granted way of speaking of women and men. We were often speaking of ‘women’ as one (not further defined) group however still differing in the individual examples we laid out during the group conversation, and of ‘men’ as one (not further defined) group. We did bring up the possibility of ‘men’ as just as diverse as ‘women’, however never to the same degree as with ‘women’. It seemed as if we simply did not find it pressing to go into further discussion of ‘men’s’ sexuality. We did not consider it interesting to discuss sexuality and pornography in relation to some hypothetical *køn* either. Rather we put examples from our own lives on/scene, to follow Williams’ thoughts; as if this once obscene topic finally was okay to talk about as a woman.

Our contradictory ways of expressing agency, shifting from academic positions claiming that gender is not fixed to speak from the everyday experienced position of ‘a woman’ shows how we are both confirming a heterosexual matrix as well as challenging it.

### **4.1 Analysis structure**

In order to understand the complexity of different and contradictory discourses articulated throughout the group conversation, I find it necessary to continuously illustrate how we in the group were often discussing different topics simultaneously. Rarely, if ever, were we only talking about one topic at a time. Often I will present greater pieces of the dialogues. This should give an idea of the many layers within the different overall topics while at the same time encourage to keep the thoughts open for any related associations one might get throughout my analysis.

The overall aim of the analysis is to show how sexual agency is expressed by the feminists from the board of *Selskab for Ligestilling*. However, since the research participants rarely speak explicitly of ‘sexual agency’ with this term, I name the first chapter “Sexual agency – sexual what?” and hereafter I go into an exploration of how we position ourselves as unique in sexuality and pleasure both within the group as well as in opposition to men’s sexuality and pleasure, thus the second chapter’s name:



“We are too unique to know what we want – re-inscribing gender through ideas of pornography”. An important expression of this uniqueness thus is that we share the common ground of wanting feminist pornography to portray *authenticity*. This is why the name of chapter three is “It has to seem real – the issue of authenticity”. In our group discussion one of the participants in particular was skeptical about feminist pornography and raised relevant questions about pornography and sex which is why I have dedicated the last chapter for that discussion: “Why all this sex and (feminist) pornography anyway?” This will lead to the analysis conclusion where I can finally respond to the research question: *How can feminist pornography contribute to, and increase sexual agency in women?*

## ***4.2 Sexual agency – sexual what?***

To explore if feminist pornography has the potential of contributing to, and increasing sexual agency in women I will first look into how sexual agency is perceived, reflected upon and negotiated in the focus group. As we learned from the Foucaultian universe explained by Sara Mills and her examples and outlines of different feminist scholars inspired by Foucault, heterosexual agency is negotiated and intertwined through different and contradictory discourses (Mills 2004:79). Femininity is thus not solely a subordinated device; it is both confirming to as well as resisting the heterosexual norm.

Within the group there is no clear definition of sexual agency. However, it is implicitly expressed in the way we are defining ourselves as individually unique in relation to our sexual desires and pleasures and in opposition to men’s sexuality, which is considered simple and not very unique internally among men. Further, our discussion is often about what we would like feminist pornography to entail as we apparently do not have much experience on the field beforehand. This underlines the image of a variety in women’s sexual tastes simultaneously as opening up the multiple layers of what women want in sex and pornography. Not actively and explicitly telling what one might want and desire sexually does not mean there is no sexual agency to be found in these women. The question is just what ‘kind’ of sexual agency. I am going to show how sexual agency is being navigated through tensions between femininity and feminism and how these are intertwined in the discussion. I will also show how authenticity is one of our few common grounds, though we also differ in opinions about how it is best expressed. Choosing to have a chapter where we discuss why all this sex and pornography should be necessary anyway, and in relation to sexual agency, is to show how this discussion in itself touches upon important questions such as if we, as women, consider ourselves ‘sexual beings’ and how this image of ourselves, as sexual or not, both have to be seen in a historical and cultural situatedness, *and* thus how this discussion becomes relevant, as well as influences a construction of *sexual agency*.

It has not been easy to catch 'what kind of' sexual agency has been drawn and sketched throughout the group conversation. The phrase in itself was not used explicitly more than once throughout our group discussion and this was when I specifically brought the concept to the table myself. Approximately halfway through the group discussion I asked the group if they thought feminist pornography could give women sexual agency. This created some confusion, and tension:

Christine: "Do you think that feminist porn could give women, or yourselves, more sexual agency?"

Louise: "Sexual what?"

Christine: "That you have the courage to own your own sexuality".

Louise: "I don't think I understand what you mean by *owning* one's own sexuality".

Christine: "That feminist pornography might *help* women".

Bunny: "That the woman becomes the main character".

Christine: "Yes. And to have ownership, be the agent".

Claudia: "It might be a possibility to explore your own sexuality instead of being repelled by it and find it totally gross and just turn off. Then some of it works and something might not work so well but it's at least not gross and then you might discover... For example, if you discover that the two men having sex might be quite exciting, it might give the possibility and basis for exploring oneself more and try some new things and redefine some things. And *that* I would think of as an enormous strength, plus it would be just another *toy* in the specter of possibilities you have. And I would clearly see it as sexually empowering. I don't know if it would work in practice. I don't know if you can produce a feminist porn film that works for me. But I find the project appealing and I'd wish you could".

(Transcripts, p. 52f)

The use of too academic a language when asking explicitly about sexual agency created some tension in the group. Louise seemed particularly annoyed by my question with her immediate response: "Sexual what?" and her further "I don't think I understand what you mean by *owning* one's sexuality". Besides from a perhaps academically arrogant appeal from my side primarily causing her annoyance she might have felt uncomfortable with my question as well. Insinuating that they may not have 'enough' sexual agency suggesting that feminist pornography could give them 'more' might be perceived as provocative. The insinuation of not already "owning one's own sexuality" might be perceived as provocative too. With this question I frame a discourse of women not having a sexual agency and needing something to help them obtain it.

Claudia comes to my rescue and starts talking about how feminist pornography could be a way for women to start exploring their sexuality. However, she never uses the word agency herself and we do

not talk explicitly about sexual agency again. Claudia, for example, rather speaks of “empowerment”, which is a phrase more often used throughout the group conversation. An important reason for not using the phrase sexual *agency* could be due to the word’s distinction and exclusivity to an academic language. When translating the term to Danish (*agens*) this is never used in everyday language.

Claudia quickly shifts to talk about how feminist pornography could be used as opposition to what we feel “repelled by”, “find totally gross” and by which we “just turn off”. Here she refers to the kind of pornography we imagine to know of already, however much actual experience we in fact have with it. She suggests we might find ourselves being turned on by new (and better?) things with help from feminist pornography, exemplified in watching two men having sex. Here she sketches an image as if we would never expect to see that kind of image in a conventional pornographic film; as if feminist pornography would have to distance itself very sharply from a conventional image.

She further opens up for another reflection that watching two men having sex might be sexually exhilarating despite considering oneself heterosexual. Besides from revealing this for the group the articulation of this desire might reveal further layers of desire within one’s own desire capability that one did not know of before actually talking about it; *speaking it*, to follow Williams’ terms. When bringing on/scene ‘the obscene’ shadows of one’s desires, ‘the obscene’ has the potential of disturbing ‘regular’ sexual desires and acts – because when heterosexual desire suddenly entails what is considered homosexual, is it then heterosexual anymore?

This shows that heterosexuality is not only heterosexual, and thus not solely normative. Disturbance *can* be found in heterosexuality – it might even possess the queering key to its own de(con)struction!

Staying with an elaboration of how sexual agency is or is not expressed in the focus group, I find Claudia’s last comments from the dialogue above very illustrative:

“I don’t know if it would work in practice. I don’t know if you can produce a feminist porn film that works for me. But I find the project appealing and I’d wish you could” (Claudia, transcripts p. 53).

This quote shows the contradictions regarding agency as it is mostly talked about in the group. Claudia says she does not know what she wants from feminist pornographic films, but at the same time she defines herself into an image of female complexity that her sexuality and desires are too individual and complex to sketch in a film. To speak oneself into this sense of complexity, uniqueness and ‘female mystery’ does indicate a kind of empowerment; however, mostly an empowerment that fits to a heterosexual matrix where it is ‘sexy’, or at least femininely connoted, to be sexually mysterious and maybe even a bit reserved. This is potentially to put oneself in a powerless situation, to make oneself agency-less almost. Yet, Claudia does ask for ‘something’. She might not know what it is, but she would

like that 'something' to be there, to be developed and screened for her, *in* the position of being a woman. To accept the terms of 'being a woman' within 'the heterosexual matrix' thus does not mean one accepts heterosexual normativity. From the position of being a woman, Claudia asks however vaguely for pornographic films that would suit her sexuality. She refers to a sexual need, however indefinable that still is, that wants to be explored.

The lack of explicit expression of agency or empowerment over one's own sexuality should be seen as symptom of lack of sexual history of or for women. However, could this be a symptom about to change with help from feminist pornography and an opening up for pornography representing other desires than the phallogentric one?

### ***4.3 We are too unique to know what we want – Re-inscribing gender through ideas of pornography***

An important notion in order to see how sexual agency in women is constructed in this context is in opposition to men's sex drive and desires. 'Men' and 'women's' sex drives and desires are constructed in oppositional ways. Men's desires are furthermore described and constructed homogenously, while women's are perceived as more fluid and described as more complex and less fixed than the desires men are assumed to have. Further there is a continuous lack of articulation about *what* we would want feminist pornography to depict. This is expressed through a construction of 'us' as women having each one's own unique sexuality to find, explore, etc. This is a continuing contradiction in the group conversation: that we on one hand define an 'us' as women as in opposition to 'men' and on the other hand we define ourselves as so individually unique in our sexualities that it is simply indefinable what we might want from feminist pornography, and out of sex.

The image of women being sexually complex, also in direct opposition and in relation to men, is expressed time and again throughout the group discussion. I suggest this positioning is crucial in order to understand any given obstacles in the question of feminist pornography as increasing sexual agency in women. If women insist on being so complex that they cannot, and will not, understand themselves sexually, then feminist pornography will probably not have the revolutionary effect I optimistically have set up as a potential for increasing sexual agency in women. An analysis of this will help understand how a construction of sexuality and pleasure in women as something unique and indefinable in this case is an expression of sexual agency.

Quite early in the interview Claudia asserts that women are more complex than men when it comes to being turned on sexually:

"I think that women are a little more complicated actually as to turning on--or that's my experience--than men are. And it is also difficult to suit some kind of formula that appeals to even 60 percent of all women" (Claudia, transcripts p. 13).

Claudia refers to her own experience when suggesting, and believing, that women are not as easy to turn on sexually as men. She defines women as so sexually complex that it would not be possible to formulate a pornographic "script" to fit even 60 percent of all women. It is first of all an indication of the fact that an equivalent 'script' for 60 percent of *all* men *would* be possible. This in itself is a strong perception of 'men' and 'women' as being dichotomously different from one another, per se. The distinction from a simple and 'masculine' kind of sexuality strengthens an image of a 'sisterhood of difference' sexual identity, which they (the men) do not and cannot by any chance possess. It also strengthens gender bias to create a female uniqueness in opposition to a male simplicity.

It is exemplified in the image of men's use of pornography as to how different they are from women:

Anja: "Most men that I have talked with that have, those who watch porn... They feel like, they have sort of a *user* attitude to it. Like you, like you have to... I don't know. Eh... Pff... Using toilet paper or something".

(Some giggle)

Anja: "Well, it's like. It's a bit the same for them. It's something they *use*. You know? And it's not something they necessarily take a stand on. And *if* they do, then they think it's a bit gross too. Well, then it's a bit... 'Oh, I feel a bit bad about it afterwards too but, you know, I had to relieve my pressure, or something.' Right?"

[...] Charlotte: "But they *need* it, to relieve the pressure. Or"?

Anja: "No. But it's kind of a user thing".

Christine: "It's easier".

Anja: "Well, they don't *need* it but it's a bit... Yeah. It's a little easier. It's a bit like taking the car instead of bicycling. Well, that's how (giggles) I imagine it. It is faster, right? Or something".

[...] Claudia: "That, one of my friends said too. He said it was like when you bought a pizza when you were hung over. Well, afterwards you felt a bit bad about it. You knew it wasn't a good idea but it was just exactly [...] what you needed".

(Transcripts p. 14f).

Here men's sexuality is constructed as something that is 'just there' and has to come out even as something men need physical relief from. The construction that men's sexuality is 'just there' makes it seem fixed and simple. Anja suggests men use pornography in other ways than women potentially

would when saying how she 'imagines' men to use pornography, thus indicating she cannot put herself in their place. The piece of dialogue reinstates the idea that *pornography* is for men, exclusively, and that we as women cannot really understand how and why they (the men) use it. Further, their presumably 'natural' use of pornography to find sexual satisfaction with is indicated as something to feel ashamed of and the explicit use of the metaphor when associating a 'pornography use' to a 'toilet paper use' further reinforces the 'dirtiness' associated with the practice.

This demonstrates that pornography is (still) intertwined in the perception of pornography as dirty, secret and 'wrong', when it comes to men and *their* use of pornography at least. Pornography is still connoted with notions of shame and secrecy in its concept of showing explicit sex acts. Here Williams' on/scene term is relevant to understand the tension between how those sexual acts historically considered shameful and 'obscene' are now increasingly put in the light of day; sex is not solely being hidden anymore, it is also put onscreen in TV shows like *Sex and the City*, etc., only the most extreme form is in pornography. And we should understand our perception of the phenomenon in the light of the historicity that we in "the Victorian age" (which is in fact not that many years ago) thought of sex outside marriage as a sin. Sexual acts should not happen for the sake of pleasure, but for the sake of having children; thus sexual acts were in the monopoly of one man and one woman in (happy?) matrimony, and kept in privacy (Foucault 1976:15ff).

Masturbation (sex only for the sake of one's own pleasure and not with the aim of having children) was thus considered a sin, and even harmful. Up to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century it was still a common 'knowledge' that masturbation could 'turn young men blind'. As for masturbation considering women, no 'guide lines' or prohibitions against this were necessary as women were not considered sexual beings (Weeks 2000:1). Sexology was not measured in relation to women. When occasionally exploring women's sexuality, it was always in relation to men's sexuality. Still to this day, we can find popular and even academically acknowledged science articles, etc., measuring female genitals in comparison to 'The Penis' (Braun & Kitzinger :218).

I suggest that Claudia and Anja's construction of their male friends' sexuality, including the male friend's own interpretations, should be seen in the light of sex' historicity: how sex has primarily belonged to certain *humans* – and not others – and how this sexuality in itself has been (and still is) perceived as shame- and sinful even for the ones who actually have a history of sex.

The participants furthermore re-inscribe gender bias through distancing themselves from and ridiculing 'the fact' that men have sexual tensions they 'need to' be released from once in a while, thus implying that women have none. However, it is useful to keep in mind the contradiction that Claudia

for example actually does ask for something to explore her sexual need with. I suggest, using Williams' theoretical terms that women's sexuality is still considered too 'obscene' – however increasingly to become, 'on/scene'. In this on/scenity tension, women's sexuality is thus intertwined in different and paradox discourses where women's sexuality is connoted to mystery, complexity, innocence yet wild, etc. This is the tension we meddled with when discussing and it explains the paradoxes of our outputs.

Pornography put on/scene as a feminist phenomenon challenges the taken-for-granted idea that we implicitly share in the group: that 'conventional' pornography *is* wrong and dirty. And thus we implicitly imagine that *feminist* pornography will offer 'the opposite' of conventional pornography.

During the discussion several suggestions come up, to what feminist pornography should consist of and even translate the phenomenon to be for women or something to watch with your partner. When speaking of the context wherein (feminist) pornography is used, it is never implied that it is something for solo use. While bringing on the example of a man masturbating to pornographic films, as showed in the example above, we never talk this explicitly about women's masturbation or single use of pornography, not even hypothetically. A Danish research project from 2005 about young heterosexual men's and women's use of pornography confirms the tendency that women use pornography more often together with a partner than alone; while the research results show men are more likely to watch pornography alone than women are (Hald 2006: 580). However, as referred to in the introduction of the thesis, I believe this kind of research tells partly 'truths'. The fact that women's sexuality is still to a certain degree researched in relation to men's sexuality and out from same methods and 'schemes' as men's sexuality has been researched (see in example Baumeister et al. 2001: 266ff; Bickham et al. 2007 and Wood, Koch & Mansfield 2006), how much do we actually 'know' about women's sexuality? Lack of knowledge about women's sexuality keeps women from thinking themselves as sexual beings in and *for* themselves.

Going back to why we in the group did not talk explicitly about women's masturbation, and not of any sexuality on our own, I see as symptom of the perception of women only being sexually powerful in relation to men and thus it is difficult and taboo to converse about. It is out of public space to discuss sexual single experiences in women such as masturbation. However it should be notified that it might also be easier to speak hypothetically about masturbation in 'men', in those we do not identify with. In Gayle Rubin's pioneering *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality*, she describes how sexual practices are divided into hierarchies of what is considered acceptable and what is not (Rubin 1984:13). "Heterosexual", "monogamous" and "coupled" sexual practices are outlined as "the good, normal and natural" practices. In opposition masturbation, in example, is outlined as

“abnormal”, “unnatural” and “bad” (Rubin 1984:13), no matter your gender. This might underline the explanation why masturbation is an edged topic in on/scene societies.

In the next example, I am outlining how gender is often re-inscribed in our group conversation. Claudia distinguishes between men’s and women’s sexuality and uses feminist pornography as an example of how it could be a helpful tool for men as well, in order to learn about women’s sexuality:

“And I also think, it might almost be perceived as a little educational. Oh that’s what turn women on. Or like okay, a little mood-setting thingy instead of just...” (Claudia, transcripts p. 14)

“Instead of just” - in these three words lie an insinuation that men ‘just’ do and women need something more than ‘just’, here exemplified in some “mood-setting thingy”. The idea that men are turned on (and never off?), “just like that”, is upheld by an insinuation like this and establishes the idea that women on the other hand have to ‘be(come) in the mood’ for sex. It is insinuated that feminist pornography should have an educational effect towards men, thus indicating that ‘women’ should be the educators, or at least be ‘the scale’ to learn from. It is hinted that women ‘just know’ what ‘good’/’proper’/’real’ sex is all about and that men can (and should!) learn something from that – which is paradox as we, the women in the group, struggle with describing *what* we want feminist pornography to entail. Feminist pornography is however perceived as a milder and ‘better’ version of conventional pornography.

Rikke, however, expresses it might be difficult for men to ask for something else than conventional pornography, to ask for “something with feelings”:

[...]Going back to that about... With what it is women need and such in relation to men... Then I think that they’re just as differing or that men actually are just as differing. There is just like one stream that dominates big time”.

(We say “Mm”.)

Rikke: “Then it’s hard to get through with, with something else”.

(We say “Mm”. And one of us says, silently, “I think so too”.)

Rikke: “Well, you might neither want to all bold sit there and say that you need something with feelings or something like that, right”?

Anja: “No exactly”.

Bunny: “While you sit there with your friends and such”.

Anja: “Yes”.



(We laugh)

Anja: "Yes. Aaw".

(We laugh)

(Transcripts p. 15f)

Besides from drawing an image of 'something with feelings' as being the opposite to conventional, and hardcore, pornography instead of in example referring to a *feminist* hardcore version as the opposite Rikke opens the opportunity to talk of men as heterogeneous and differing in taste rather than the simple and homogenous image we often draw of men in our group conversation. I will shortly repeat that a simplification of 'men' strengthens an image of a unified sisterhood, however, sharing 'the identity' that women are more complex than men, 'differing', and thus individually unique.

In the article *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*, from 2005, R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt take up the hegemonic masculinity-concept for redefinition and -discussion. They argue that on one hand masculinity is defined out from femininity (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005:848), and thus often in a privileged position. On the other hand, they emphasize *masculinity* as discursive (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005:841) just the same as femininity and hence call attention to the overlaps and blurring (disjunctions) between hegemonic and complicit masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005:839). They stress that bodies are both objects *and* agents of and in social practices (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005:851) and that bodies are no cultural "dopes" (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005:853).

So when Rikke opens up the opportunity of speaking of men in more differing terms it also disturbs an image of a unified 'sisterhood of complication' – we might not be that unique anyway? Rikke indicates that it would be difficult for men to ask for something else than conventional pornography because it would differ from the hegemonic masculinity norm to want, to ask and long for something else. Thus if they admit to long for "something with feelings" it would be the same as undermining one's powerful position as "something with feelings" is most commonly connoted with normative femininity and not with normative masculinity. In this piece of dialogue we, the group, help reinstate the image of what a 'real' man wants from pornography and sex as we cannot help laughing a bit when imagining a man sitting there with his friends and admitting that he would prefer "something with feelings". Anja's "Aaw" underlines how we, however sympathetically, pity that guy and thus put him back in 'the box' where men are the ones who do not prefer "something with feelings", while women are.

Pornography and feelings are generally separated features in our group discussion where pornography is associated to sex and then men, and feelings to love and then women. Pornography

and sex is further associated to be something simple and therefore, or anyway, shameful; where feelings and love on the other hand are connoted with something complex and therefore mysterious and interesting. Those 'general' associations might be a reason why some of the women in the group rather speak of erotica or soft pornography as a legitimate option for them; an alternative option to hardcore pornography. Somehow they connote hardcore to conventional and therefore masculine; and thus not something for them as women. This again shows how we, despite from our self-proclaimed feminist positions, *do* navigate and negotiate ourselves out from normative ideals of femininity, as in opposite to masculinity. However we do express differences in what we would like *feminist pornography* to entail and this indicates some kind of sexual agency in each one of us. I will try to explore *in* these differing constructions of femininity and what women might want from whether you call it pornography, sex or love if there is some kind of sexual agency to be found in the midst of these constructions and if so, then *what* sexual agency is expressed. I will show our differing ways of defining what we might want from feminist pornography, however surrounding the common topic that we all seemed to think of as the highest priority in any given feminist pornography: *authenticity*.

#### ***4.4 It has to seem real! The issue of authenticity***

As mentioned before, not many in the group had much experience with feminist pornography beforehand, including me. This resulted in long elaborations on what feminist pornography should entail. When analyzing the transcripts I realized a lot of time was spent discussing the kind of pornography we disliked and wanted to take distance from. The kind of pornography keeping distance from is proclaimed as 'fake'; meaning that it sketches 'fake' sex, a kind of sex the group does not perceive as authentic, a kind of sex we do not want to be represented by. Rather authenticity is asked for. Authenticity seems to be a key word throughout the group discussion and the one single issue agreed on. However, the contents of what to consider authentic differs and this in some way illustrates and underlines the uniqueness and complexity of women's sexuality we all are so eager to demonstrate. Our internally unique ways of defining authenticity also show that we *do* have sexual agency.

Louise: "So I think it would be really fantastic if you made some films that were, that were real, somehow".

Bunny: "But it doesn't have to be *women* who make... Well there might also be some men who can make porn films".

Louise: "Yes. That's no criteria for me, but that it has to show *real* female pleasure".

Bunny: "Yes"

Christine: "Mm".

Louise: "I think that's a good idea".

Claudia: "It would be fantastic".

(Transcripts, p. 6f)

Bunny suggests it does not necessarily have to be women making pornographic films sketching female pleasure; she suggests that men might be able to sketch female pleasure too. Notice how this diverges from the quote from Claudia in former analysis chapter indicating that 'women should teach men good sex'. However we do not delve in a discussion about this but rather emphasize and continue the conversation that feminist pornographic films should focus on female pleasure, a 'real', authentic version of it.

Several examples of what might be considered authentic are taken up during the conversation.

Louise: "If there was, like, which took point of departure perhaps in the woman? Or took point of departure in, in the couple? You know"?

Anja: "Yes".

Louise: "Maybe, took point of departure in, ehm, Mr. and Mrs. Denmark sex"?

Anja: "Yes".

Louise: "Instead of... Now I of course don't know how Mr. and Mrs. Denmark have sex. But, anyway".

Claudia: "Well that's also a bit what I mean with recognizability. Well there's no one who just--then the pizza guy rings the bell and then they just have wet briefs".

(Anja laughs)

Claudia: "Well, it's just...Well, I simply think it's so, well, embarrassing almost".

Anja: "Yes. It definitely talks down to your common sense".

Claudia: "Wauw. Two pages of manuscript to 60 minutes of porn film".

(Transcripts, p. 7)

For Louise the most authentic would be to focus on regular straight couples' sex. In Danish there is the term "Hr. og fru Danmark" which is a way to illustrate familiarity and a 'down-to-earth' atmosphere which is a further illustration of what one might consider authentic; something relaxed and 'everyday-like'.

Claudia continues that recognizability is exactly what is needed to make pornographic films seem more authentic. However she goes on to talk about the kind of pornography she does not recognize as authentic instead of referring to something she *would* find authentic. She states that “no one” would get turned on sexually by a pizza guy ringing the door bell. This image is often used as a cliché when speaking of conventional pornographic films and thus, in this context the person delivering pizza represents an element from a sex fantasy belonging to those we imagine to watch conventional pornographic films: “the men”. However, Claudia does not reflect that this cliché might in fact be used on purpose by the pornographers *because* it is a cliché and thus reminds the viewer that pornography *is* fiction and absurd and in opposition to ‘the real’, and thus not necessarily a mirror of (all) ‘men’s inner desires’. Neither does she consider that women *could* be turned on by such a cliché; ‘just like that’, without words, feelings or some “mood-setting thingy”.

Feminist pornography producer Erika Lust has actually tried to put some feminist spice into a scene based on the pizza guy ringing the door bell cliché. In her pornographic *Five hot stories for her*, consisting of five short films she, in “The Good Girl”, takes point of departure in a woman waiting for her pizza delivery (Lust 2007). However, the scene does not follow the same guidelines as one might imagine in a regular clichéd pornographic scene. The insecurity and awkwardness one might recognize from real life when taking initiative to having sex with a stranger, is sketched here and you hear them laugh together, talk a bit, flirt and they have eye contact. Some of these elements are exactly what we in the group miss from the conventional pornographic films.

In the following, Anja takes point of departure in conventional pornography, the kind of pornography we generally keep a distance to in the group, and goes on to suggest how authenticity *could* be sketched:

Anja: “And I can’t see any lust in it at all. I can’t see any pleasure in it. And I, I can’t see any authenticity in it. And I think it is exactly that authenticity which also... And I don’t know what it is then, that concept... But it’s quite funny because... I talked to my friend [X] about it, that thing about authenticity. Eh, where we talked about it. Where she said that she had watched a home video that also could make such feminist porn. There was something like (a) home video where she, where it was addressed to *lesbians* and where there was a woman who had videotaped herself while she had been masturbating and then afterwards she smelled her fingers”.

Christine: “Mm”.

Anja: “And that was something that aroused my friend extremely much because *that* she thought was result. That was something. That is something some women *do*. And that is just such a little *thing*, but that’s something that you *never* could imagine putting into a heterosexual, ehh, traditional porn film because *that*. It is such a tiny little detail that don’t have anything to do with the sex. But it has been.

But it anyhow shows that... You know? It shows such a kind of authenticity or something. That there actually... Well, I just found that really interesting”.

Christine: “Yes”.

Anja: “In reality it might be a bit about that too. It’s the little details. It’s the eye contact. It is, well, the way they smile to each other or those things, which are not in such a traditional porn film. *There’s no eye contact. There’s no smiles. There’s no laughter. There’s nothing, that... You know? Those things that are actually quite characteristic for when having sex or something”.*

(Transcripts, p. 8)

Anja tells how she has been talking about the topic of authenticity with a lesbian friend and how she had found it sexually arousing when a woman in a lesbian-connoted pornographic film had smelled her fingers after having masturbated. I find it interesting when she characterizes the woman smelling her fingers after masturbating a little detail not having anything to do with the sex. Reading this in relation to the theory and praxis of feminist pornography, I do not consider this as just a little detail. I see this as exactly an illustration of the authenticity in female pleasure asked for earlier. Here is actually an illustration of a woman smelling her own orgasm indicating that she actually had one, and on her own, without just choring along when the man comes in a conventional pornographic film. However it could be that Anja meant “a little detail” in the eyes of ‘the conventional pornographic films’ and not in her own opinion. Still, it is interesting how she refers to this “little detail” as not having “anything to do with the sex”. From conventional pornographic films we might expect sex to equal intercourse. However, in a pornographic film breaking with the ‘pornographic norms’ we might expect to think of sex as something else, and more, than intercourse. Associating that “real” sexual acts are equal to *intercourse* makes sexual acts seem as an act supposed to involve two people, a woman and a man, and thus reflect heteronormative ideals.

#### ***4.5 The authenticity in explicit orgasms versus erotic films***

In the seventies feminists promoted masturbation as an important tool for women to gain sexual agency. Betty Dodson in example had the pioneering *Liberating Masturbation: A Meditation on Selflove* published in 1974 to enhance sexual pleasure, especially in women. For 23 years she ran sex educational seminars for women teaching them how to masturbate. She still runs sex therapist practice with the overall aim to make masturbation the foundation of human sexuality (Dodson 2009).

This has broken the boundaries for what should be perceived as ‘real’ sex. Even in our own feminist activities in *SfL* we have considered taking up the issue of masturbation again, and run campaigns for

an empowering word for the female genitals<sup>12</sup>. Anja's example of masturbation showing authenticity should thus have been "valid" enough for her to perceive as a *real* sexual act instead of suddenly referring to intercourse as 'the real sexual act'.

However the female orgasm might have been illustrated otherwise than the woman tasting her own body liquids as "proof" of her orgasm. Grimstrup explains that the pornographic genre has yet failed to find a visual equivalent to 'the male cum-shot'<sup>13</sup>, and thus paradoxically (over?-)emphasizes this as "the maximum visualization and orgasm proof" (Grimstrup 2007:42). She finds it debatable if 'a female equivalent' should even be non-phallographic films' aim as women's pleasure would then be something to be measured, in relation to men's and thus not possibly 'something else' or 'beyond' "a phallic scheme". However, as she also points out it might simply be frustrating for female viewers *not* to be presented for female orgasms in pornographic films. Representations are, despite of the possible simplifications, a way to make a phenomenon visible and possible (Grimstrup 2007: 43). Women's orgasms are thus to aim for, following Grimstrup. In her analysis of the Danish *Pussy Power* films and the French queer pornographic film *One Night Stand* she outlines *One Night Stand* as the better example of how women's desires and orgasms can be sketched. From her analysis she finds that this is the only film that even puts on/scene women's orgasms, and further it shows a broad specter of them; thus showing that women's orgasms are not simply one other, opposite, version to 'the male cum-shot' (Grimstrup 2007: 56). It then understates uniqueness in women's desires (as opposing to men's 'simple' ones) too. However, that the film actually shows a variety of female orgasms represents a new and improved pornographic image compared to what we usually associate with conventional pornographic films.

Imagining women's orgasms to look different from what we are used to see (or imagine likely to be seen) in pornographic films might feel boundary-breaking though:

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<sup>12</sup> "Fisse" is the Danish word for "pussy". Even though it reminds of the Swedish word "Fitta", it has not gained a sense of empowerment which my sense is that the Swedish word "fitta" has increasingly gained – here I am specifically thinking of the performance of "The Vagina Monologues" in Lund, April 16<sup>th</sup> 2009 where the Swedish performers persistently used "Fitta" as the translated word, as if wanting to reclaim and empower the word. In Denmark the word "kusse" is often associated to the '70s women's movement thus often associated negatively as the word feminist is too. My estimation is that "kusse" is simply perceived as too empowering a word for many women to embrace.

<sup>13</sup> Men's ejaculation, also called "the money shot".

Anja: "then I saw for the first time a female ejaculation, which I did *not* expect to see, and it was just enormously beyond my boundaries because, I just hadn't, I didn't have any conditions for that. And it has really shaken my foundation and just, I was simply awake all night".

Charlotte: "Whaaat?"

(Everybody laughs)

Anja: "I just couldn't sleep at all because it was just so, okay".

(Transcripts, p. 2)

Even though female ejaculation might be an obvious sign of authenticity (or very *explicit* at least), with a quote like the above it might seem even too boundary-breaking or simply too *inauthentic* an orgasm in relation to our own sexual experiences? I find it paradox that our group conversation is on one hand primarily about searching for and negotiating what could be authentic pleasure in women, and then, when one of us actually *has* seen something that explicitly authentic on film, it was simply too upsetting? It makes me wonder if we are really ready to experience *authentic*. Or is it that we do not find authenticity in the 'too' explicit – are we simply that grossed out by or tired of men's ejaculation in pornographic films that it does not make a difference when it is suddenly a woman ejaculating? Is it too equivalent (and explicit) an option?

Rikke: "Well, the reason why I have actually never gone further with it is because some of the first I watched of it, it was actually the same in the way that it was just sex-like. And it doesn't really do anything for me. You know? Then you sit there a bit and: 'Oh well why do they want that? That might be... That's nice.' And such. Right"?

(We laugh)

Rikke: "And instead of... Well, so you miss... I think that I miss some kind of story and such. Well actually... Eh... If you should find good porn then it's in ordinary plays and"...

Mia: "Mmm".

Rikke: "... In ordinary films with sex scenes where they have weighted the whole--ehh the whole, eh--all the feelings there are between the two that are together and where it is weighted to get eye contact and such".

(Several says yes)

Rikke: "So in that way it works much more for me to watch, eh, one of the juicy episodes of *L Word* or, ehh, eh, some other lesbian film with, ehh, with some good sex scenes rather than watching a porn film".

(Transcripts, p. 9f)

Feelings and narrative are here weighed as more important features in comparison with an atmosphere being “too sex-like”. Rikke refers to ordinary films with sex scenes where it is more about the story than the actual sex. She wants the epic to be there in order to make us believe there is some kind of bond between “the two” having sex and thus it is rather the feelings between the two of them that ‘get us in the mood’ than them actually having sex. Rikke thus writes herself into the image of women needing something more than ‘just’ sex to sexually arouse them (in opposition to men?).

Louise: “Well, I completely agree with, or agree... Well, I feel like you, Rikke. That this thing about, that I also think... That there are some, eh, some films or some series or something which I have watched where there have been some scenes which I have found way more intense and where you got all warm all over and thought, well, was enormously exciting. Ehm... xxx and it’s not even because I’ve watched particularly much, but the traditional porn I’ve watched, which might seem sexually arousing in some way, but in a eh, a eh, a feeling of deflation”.

Christine: “Mm”.

Louise: “Well, well because of course it is sexually arousing. You know? People who are not wearing any clothes and there is some sexual interaction... Well there’s some reptile xxx in my brain that gets affected by it and it’s not... And it’s not like because I’m ashamed of it, it leaves a bad taste in my mouth. It’s more because it’s in such a, eh... It’s a bit... You know”?

Christine: “Yes”.

Claudia: “I feel exactly the same way and... I think you feel, I feel alienated towards it because”...

Louise: “Yes”.

Anja: “Yes”.

Claudia: “... It’s like yes, I see it”.

Louise: “It affects me but”....

Claudia: “Yes, but only a certain percentage. And exactly, something is missing. And it, it actually doesn’t really work. And then, oh that was a bit... It just doesn’t work”.

Louise: “... No”.

(Transcripts, p. 11)

Here it is reflected why one gets sexually turned on by something that she “in reality” does not want to see. It is as if imagining that, as a woman (and with a “civilized” sexuality?), one is not supposed to be turned on by people simply being naked and having sexual interaction: something else and *more* was supposed to happen in order to be sexually aroused than sexual explicit images.



Claudia: "Well, I also think that, that, eh... Anyway, for my own behalf, some of the most erotic I find is somehow literature".

Christine: "Yes".

Claudia: "Because you, you can create some pictures yourself, which firstly makes it more personal but just as much the thing about you get a story and a context, and you can read your way to the feelings and you can fill some gaps yourself. And I think, well what is missing in porn, that's just *one* angle and straight on and hard. And you miss the whole presentation and the frames and the play and the feelings and the thoughts. And... And I know that it is extremely difficult to get into a film, but it can be done in other contexts. You know? So if you could get such a much more broad spectrum of it... Because, I understand Mia when she says that she doesn't have a need for it. I have a nice sex life myself too--you know?--without porn films. But I, I think I would find it exciting if I was introduced to something, a proper product".

(Transcripts, p. 10)

Notice how the vocabulary starts at 'erotic', as some kind of indicating distance to *pornography*, which we do not want. From erotic literature she quickly shifts to talk about pornographic films again though, thus indicating that she does miss some kind of sexually explicit pictures, just not the kind to be found from conventional pornography. The insinuation here is, that as long as there is not anything else accessible than the conventional kind of pornographic films, then rather stick to erotic literature or films.

Claudia: "I had a friend in high school who wore out the *Dirty Dancing* videotape".

(Anja and Christine laugh)

Claudia: "And there's a reason for that. You know"?

(Anja and Christine laugh even louder)

Claudia: "And the same with *Ghost* and the clay scene, which all women know with good background music and some feeling and some love over... You know? Eh, you know it's such things that work. And eh... Well, it's not because she was wildly interested in dance that she watched it that many times".

(Anja and Christine laugh again)

(Transcripts, p. 11)

Here it is indicated that Claudia's friend from high school found sexual amusement from a romantic film. She refers further to another romantic film with one of the late-'80s film 'darlings', Patrick Swayze in the leading part, *Ghost*. She refers specifically to "the clay scene which all women know": a scene where Demi Moore in the female leading part and Patrick Swayze share a passionate moment

wrapped around each other while molding the same clay sculpture and their hands are filtered into each other and the clay. Claudia explains it is the background music, the feeling and atmosphere of love that 'works'; yet another subscription to the image of wanting love in – or rather than – sex. However, the fact that we laugh a bit in the example might be an indicator of the awareness that it is in fact a cliché Claudia is sketching. The laughter also insinuates that we all know what her friend was doing while watching the almost worn-out videotape. This is perhaps the closest insinuation we get of women and masturbation throughout the conversation.

From emphasizing that 'there needs to be a story' in order to be turned on, the conversation now turns to surround whether to feel represented in the film or not in order to become sexually aroused.

Louise: "Well, I also remember I thought... Ehh... I watched that, *Brokeback Mountain*. There I also think there were some really, really strong scenes. It has really affected me, despite the fact that there were no women in the, ehh, sexual game. Ehh... And I just remember that I reflected quite a lot on that because it actually was interesting that it affected me despite the fact that *I* wasn't present, in quotation marks *I* wasn't present"

[...]

Anja: "I felt like--when Louise said that about *Bro*--that she thought *Brokeback Mountain* was, was sexy even though there wasn't any woman so she couldn't be there herself or something. Then I thought hey, I have... I just don't feel like that at all. You know? I, I don't want to be represented at all. Then I simply can't deal with it. Well it's just... It's funny. You know? That it again shows how different you read it or something. You know what turns you on or something. Yeah".

(Transcripts p. 12f)

Louise is surprised that she is turned on by something which from her own sexual experience is normally *not* authentic, as in "non-heterosexual practice". Anja, on the contrary seems to hold on to the idea of feeling sexually aroused by something which she is not identifying herself with, and returns to the topic again a bit later in the conversation:

"It's *so* different what people are turned on by. Personally, I consider myself heterosexual but I could never imagine myself being turned on by *looking* at heterosexual sex. I only find homosexual and transsexual sex sexy." (Anja, transcripts p. 45)

It thus seems they are turned on by 'the Brokeback Mountain guys' for different reasons. From a heterosexual desire's perspective, it is perhaps not surprising that actors Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal are considered attractive, but can we talk of a *normal* heterosexual desire when there is no woman represented in the sexual constellation? Anja exclaims she desires something where "she" is not represented. This is perhaps the most explicit distance position towards 'conventional

pornography' simply to reject what consists of 'man' and 'woman' (al)together. However, she still navigates from a heterosexual position when desiring what she is not. She on one hand subscribes to an image of female sexuality as something complex and insolvable. However she disrupts the image of desire in *heterosexual women* when desiring sexual acts "normally" considered obscene.

That women's sexual repertoire entails a broad specter of differing desires, Erika Lust has sketched in one of her other short films in *Five hot stories for her* (Lust 2007). *Breakup Sex* is a short film about a male couple having "breakup-sex" and does not have any women co-starring the scene. These examples show that the heterosexual repertoire entails more than straight sexual acts and thus that heterosexual desires are inconsistent.

#### **4.6 Why all this sex and (feminist) pornography anyway?**

In general the atmosphere during the group conversation was sharing, reflective and with a sense of humor. As with other occasions where we have talked about something *new* and got to learn something new about each other and ourselves, this conversation was no exception. Where most of us seemed to enjoy the conversation topic and with even more laughter during the conversation compared to our usual meetings to understate this, the attitudes towards feminist pornography as phenomenon was not solely optimistic. Especially Mia was skeptical about it. We learned she was not optimistic about feminist pornography at all and she wondered what the use of it was:

"But I just sit and wonder who wants to look at it? Well, at first hand I don't think it sounds very...Well I simply don't have a need to like, watch a (porn), not if it was feminist either and if it had focus on the woman's pleasure and such. I feel a bit... I don't have any problems in that area. You know? And I have no need at all to sit and watch *other* people having sex, really. So I just... I'm just doubting if there really is a... Well, what you actually can use it for, really" (Mia, transcripts p. 7)

Explicit sex is found strange, whether calling it feminist or conventional. Focusing on women's pleasure would not change the fact that pornography is about explicit sex and Mia simply does not find it appealing to *look at* sex. Pornography is perceived as mainly for people "having problems" in relation to sex so why bother if one *is* satisfied sexually.

"Now I don't necessarily think that you *need* to have some feminist pornography to be able to *recognize* that you *have* a sexuality." (Mia, transcripts, p. 74)

Feminist pornography is not found necessary in order to recognize that one *has* sexuality. The attitude is that sexuality is there no matter what so why add explicit sex moving-images to it.

"I can already feel *that* I completely don't want to watch. Then I almost rather watch a regular porn film. I just really don't want to watch something where the primary focus is sex. I would like to watch a

film and there can also be sex in it but I can just feel, ahh, I just don't want it. There are too many annoying things and bodies and dick and cunt. I just get so annoyed to have it thrown in my face all the time. I don't want it. It doesn't interest me one bit. And I think it's gross too" (giggles).

(Mia, transcripts, p. 81)

She refuses the idea that feminists should make pornographic films when stating that she would rather watch a conventional pornographic film than a feminist one if she had to choose. She insinuates to step into 'enemy lines' when dealing with pornography. She is not troubled by films where they occasionally have sex but when the primary goal of a film *is* sex she cannot see the point and even gets annoyed. She finds she has to deal with sex all the time illustrating it is thrown in her face all the time. Pornographic films, feminist as well as conventional ones, are thus just another pornoficated feature, only now intruding her private life besides from the public space it has already intruded.

As member of *Pornofrit Miljø* (who were the ones fighting against pornofication in public spaces and in public television) Mia shares the opinion that sex is private. She thus considers any kind of *pornography* to stay *obscene* and not to become on/scene.

When rejecting pornography as an on/scene phenomenon it further becomes difficult to change the image that 'men' are the ones with *the gaze*. Sabo outlines pornographer Anna Span's vision that *the gaze* is *human* rather than solely *manly*. So when not wanting to and simply rejecting to *gaze* – to look at explicit sex – it is to confirm that *the gaze* does belong to men and then it is up to "them" to decide the terms of 'the gaze'.

"I like that thought too [...] about conquering back the sexuality because... Or else we turn *nonsexual* if we just point fingers of everything that has to do with porn, and we are not. And I like that thing about creating room inside that world where we can define things. [...] And it would be quite awesome if you could create a bit different frames."(Claudia, transcripts p. 5)

Claudia expresses another problem with rejecting pornography; that we as feminists would then turn non-sexual. She insinuates that conventional pornography should not have monopoly on what is considered sexual and thus refers to conquering *sexuality* back as feminist. Creating room and different frames for sexuality is emphasized as primer positive sides to feminist pornography as phenomenon.

Anja: "I think that it *is* important. I was happy and relieved that it's become okay for feminists to talk about porn and to step *into* it because *I* feel that I have been limited to not being able to engage in it because it was a bit no-no, shame on you. [...] I remember when I (laughs) actually had a time period where I almost felt that, you know, could [not] have it doggy-style without thinking 'Noo, I'm being abused', or.

(We laugh)

Anja: “*That* it also does and that’s bummer. It shouldn’t be like that, right?”

Christine: “Nooo, no”.

Anja: [...] “It’s important as feminist to *take* these discussions. *Everything* is *not* necessarily power relations”.

[...]

Claudia: “I also like that feminists are allowed to talk about pornography as a positive thing, or at least nudity and sexuality. It depends on how we define porn. And *that* can be *part* of the debate and that we are allowed to have a sexuality, even though we’re feminists”

(Transcripts, p. 72f)

Referring to the feminists who have been fighting against pornography Anja brings up an example of how it has affected her own sexual experiences. Feminists arguing for every sexual position between ‘man’ and ‘woman’ as an expression of patriarchal power insinuate all heterosexual sex acts are violating women. It does not give room to discuss any given sex positions as joyful when the agents are (one) ‘man’ and (one) ‘woman’ but simply reject them altogether. Those feminists have paradoxically then influenced to lack of sexual agency in women as they have not been “allowed” to enjoy sexual acts with a male partner. So to answer Mia’s question what the use of feminist pornography is and why it is also a field for feminists to enter instead of rejecting it, is to reclaim sexuality and reframe it on different terms than the conventional pornography has set up.

Anja’s claim that *everything* is not necessarily power relations both confirms and confronts Foucault’s perceptions of power. Explicitly it is to say the exact opposite of Foucault when stating everything is *not* power relations. It is then to insinuate that there is some kind of aesthetics *beyond* power that potentially would allow us to say “as long as it feels good, it is alright” (as in not wrong!) This potentially encourages not to take stands, not to consider *why* one feels attracted to and sexually aroused by something but simply just ‘do it’. Rejecting that some of us find ourselves attracted to men because we are simply taught so would be to reject the powerful position heterosexuality does possess. However, both acknowledging that one is in a privileged position by the heterosexual label *and* aiming to broaden the specter of what *heterosexuality* might entail, opens the possibility to rather be *sexual* than any categorizing label to go with that. Understanding power in a Foucaultian context expands sexual agency to not only be about who (dis)empowers who in sexual relations. Disempowering oneself sexually is thus *also* an expression of power. However, if empowering and

disempowering expressions are not exchangeable and always embodied in the same, heterosexuality is simply too straight to just be sexual.

## 5 Conclusion

40 years have passed since Denmark as the first country in the world, legislated pornography. However, Denmark has not been standing in front to evolve the genre.

Sickened with conventional pornography feminists from around the world are now increasingly entering the pornographic industry to emphasize other pleasures and fantasies, often from the view of a woman. Offering alternatives to a pornographic genre that has entered popular culture and bedrooms, these pornographers are creating room for other versions of sex. Versions to be added to what we can perceive as sexually arousing.

Feminist pornography will then further work as a reminder that women too are sexual agents. Therefore feminist pornography becomes a two-sided function. On one hand it seems necessary that women's sexuality and sex drive become more commonly legitimate in order to make women aware of feminist pornography as a genre of interest for them. And on the other hand it depends on feminist pornographers to show new and other sex ways to keep destabilizing the idea of a fixed sexuality in women, and in men.

Queer theory and pornographic studies frame a tension of opportunity and barrier, notions that are also mirrored in the group conversation I had for this thesis. Queer theory outlines that the heterosexual norm restrains and influences our possible ways of living. However, since the heterosexual norm is upheld by an endless number of discourses which are constantly challenged and negotiated, focusing on the challenges opens the opportunity for disrupting the heterosexual norm.

My point of departure for this thesis work was the curiosity to explore if feminist pornography has potential for increasing sexual agency in women. Discussing this with the board members of *Selskab for Ligestilling*, had me realize that the question of agency was much more complex than first expected. We did express some kind of sexual agency, only it was articulated in our constructions of women's sexuality as unique for each woman and so complex that it was not really possible to sketch. A common search for *authenticity* seems to be a key to understand what is needed and expected from feminist pornography. The issue of authenticity perhaps gives the clearest illustration of the tension and meaning of this concept. For what is considered authentic differs from explicit sex to epic films and the erotic to something beyond how our own everyday ("real") sexual acts are outlived. This complexity on one hand confirms a normative picture of "female mystery". However this complexity in itself holds potential for disruption, to take heterosexual desire beyond straight.

Feminist pornography is thus not something to be left as unimportant or indifferent. Feminists entering the pornographic scene behind the cameras and gazing rather than only posing, are to be perceived as empowering disruptors of what women (are supposed to) desire. When putting on/scene women's sexual experiences it not only make those women aware or remind them they are sexual beings. It legitimizes it. Emphasizing the inconsistency of women's sexual desires is thus a disruptor key to unlock the heterosexual matrix.

I hope with this thesis to have shown that feminist pornography does have the potential of disrupting, 'queering' without necessarily being straightly queer all the way. Queering heterosexuality has in this case shown queerness in "the heterosexual" and that it does not simply entail heteronormative sexual desires. Focusing on the disjunctions of the heterosexual sex acts repertoire takes us to an understanding that the obscene *is* part of the on/scene. Not only increasingly, it has been all the time.



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## ***Annex***

Following attachments were published for examination:

- Letter to *Selskab for Ligestilling*
- Danish transcripts
- English translation of transcripts

Please contact thesis author for access to the attachments.