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978-1-107-40039-9 - Battling Pornography: The American Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement, 1976-1986

Carolyn Bronstein

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Battling Pornography

Pornography catapulted to the forefront of the American women's movement in the 1980s, singled out by some leading feminists as an agent of female oppression and celebrated by others as an essential ingredient of sexual liberation. In *Battling Pornography*, Carolyn Bronstein locates the origins of anti-pornography sentiment in the turbulent social and cultural history of the late 1960s and 1970s, including women's mixed responses to the sexual revolution and the rise of radical feminism, and explains the gradual emergence of a controversial anti-pornography movement. Based on extensive original archival research, the book chronicles the history of three grassroots organizations and shows that activists first protested images of sexual violence against women in advertisements, Hollywood films, and other mainstream media. They emphasized public education and consumer action and demanded that corporations behave ethically toward women. Over time, feminist leaders made a strategic choice to reorient the movement to pornography to leverage the term's considerable rhetorical and symbolic power. In so doing, they unwittingly attracted right-wing supporters who opposed sexual freedom and ignited a forceful feminist countermovement in defense of sexuality and free speech. *Battling Pornography* presents a fascinating account of the rise and fall of this significant American social movement and documents the contributions of influential activists on both sides of the pornography debate, including some of the best-known American feminists.

Carolyn Bronstein is Associate Professor of Media Studies in the College of Communication at DePaul University. Her research investigates questions of media representation and social responsibility, with an emphasis on gender, and her work has been published in such journals as *Violence Against Women*, *Camera Obscura*, and *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*.

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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107400399

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First published 2011

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

Bronstein, Carolyn.

Battling pornography : the American feminist anti-pornography movement, 1976-1986 / Carolyn Bronstein.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-87992-7 (hardback) – ISBN 978-1-107-40039-9 (paperback)

1. Pornography – United States – History. 2. Feminism – United States – History.

3. Women – Crimes against – United States – History. I. Title.

HQ471.B727 2011

363.4'7097309047-dc22 2010043981

ISBN 978-0-521-87992-7 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-40039-9 Paperback

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For my parents

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank a number of individuals and institutions that have provided intellectual, financial, and emotional support for this book, and to whom I am deeply grateful. I have been researching and writing about feminist responses to media violence and pornography, and the development of both an anti-pornography movement and a countermovement, for ten years and have received help at every turn from inspiring scholars, dedicated colleagues, encouraging friends, and a patient and loving family. The sociologist Benita Roth has observed, altering a well-known African proverb, that it takes “several villages” to aid one in writing a book, and my own experience confirms the wisdom of her statement. Any flaws that a reader may find in this work rest solely with the author, but everything valuable and insightful in the pages that follow has been made better by the contributions of the people and organizations named here.

My intellectual debts are many and stretch across three institutions: the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Stanford University, and DePaul University.

My professors at the University of Wisconsin-Madison shared their passion for research and modeled the highest standards of academic excellence as I pursued my doctoral studies. I thank the historian James L. Baughman for teaching me how to conduct historical research and how to write a compelling narrative that reveals the significance of past events for contemporary social life. He has championed this book project since its first iteration, offered thoughtful feedback as the project evolved, and never wavered in his enthusiasm for the topic or my approach to it. I am a better scholar for having been his student. I thank the historian Linda Gordon, a mentor whose commitment to women’s history and devotion to students inspires me every day, as does her phenomenal and ever-expanding body of work. Linda urged me to write a seminar paper on pornography many years ago, seeing the topic as a perfect fusion of my dual interests in media studies and the history of sexuality. Her intellectual guidance has been critical to my understanding of the role that the pornography debates played within second wave feminism, and she generously read and commented on my work as it evolved from that initial paper.

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I also wish to thank the political scientist Donald A. Downs, who offered intellectual and moral support and shared his own experiences writing about the challenging subject of pornography. Robert McChesney, Jo Ellen Fair, and Douglas McLeod read and commented on earlier drafts and provided helpful critiques. Suzanne Pingree published seminal communication research on sexism in 1970s advertising; studying with her enabled me to understand the social context that motivated feminist organizing against violence and gender stereotyping in mass media content. Jim Danky read my work, suggested a host of resources – including the newsletters of many feminist anti-pornography groups at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin – and shared his deep knowledge of women’s activism in the 1970s and 1980s.

At Stanford University, my undergraduate mentor, Marion Lewenstein, fostered my interest in media history through her *Literature of the Press* seminar, urged me to consider an academic career, and set the path in motion with a teaching assistantship. Ted Glasser, my Master’s advisor, opened up the world of critical thinking through his journalism ethics classes and helped me develop the spirit of inquiry that guided this book from start to finish.

At DePaul University, I thank Dean Jacqueline Taylor of the College of Communication for her leadership, her deep engagement with research, and a steadfast commitment to gender studies evident in her own scholarship. I appreciate many wonderful colleagues who have talked with me about this research and have provided insight and comic relief, including Lexa Murphy, Daniel Makagon, Margaret Storey, Barb Willard, Julie Artis, and Teresa Mastin.

For financial support of the project, I am grateful to the DePaul University Research Council, Dean Jacqueline Taylor, and the College of Communication for providing grants to support the publication of the extraordinary photographs that appear in this book. I also received significant grant funding from the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University that supported two extended visits to read the Women Against Pornography manuscript collection.

I thank the women who organized and populated the major groups under study in this book: Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW); Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media (WAVPM); and Women Against Pornography (WAP). I have tremendous respect for activists’ efforts to raise consciousness about the psychological and behavioral effects of sexually violent images of women in advertising, entertainment and news media, and pornography. For sharing their perspectives on the media reform campaigns that WAVAW led, and the subsequent anti-pornography efforts of WAVPM and WAP, I am grateful to activists Julia London (WAVAW), Bridget Wynne (WAVPM), and Dolores Alexander (WAP), and the performance artists Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz-Starus. The women’s movement photographer Bettye Lane generously permitted me to reproduce many of her photographs. I thank her for this, and for capturing significant moments in the history of anti-pornography organizing, allowing us to see many of the people and events described in these pages. In the years that have elapsed between the time that I started researching the topic and this book’s publication, some

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leading anti-pornography activists have died, as have some of the women who challenged the movement's basic premises. I note the passing of Ellen Willis, Andrea Dworkin, Frances Patai, Florence Rush, and Dolores Alexander, each of whom played a central role in the life of the movement that this book chronicles.

To conduct my research, I traveled around the United States to numerous libraries and historical archives. Joan Krizack, University Archivist and the head of Special Collections at the Northeastern University Libraries, assisted me with the papers of the Boston chapter of WAVAW. Ann Giagni and Jeri Dietrich, volunteers at the June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives in West Hollywood, California, arranged special off-hours access to the national (Los Angeles) WAVAW files to make sure that I had sufficient time to read the entire collection. Rebekah Kim, Managing Archivist of the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco, supported my research on WAVPM and somehow made time to scan all of the photographs that I requested. At the Schlesinger Library, archivists Eva Moseley and Susan von Salis offered guidance as I read the WAP manuscript collection. Toward the end of this project, librarian Diana Carey provided assistance with photographs from the WAP records.

At Cambridge University Press, I am grateful to Lewis Bateman for recognizing the project's potential to make a meaningful contribution. Eric Crahan supervised the (lengthy, lengthy) writing and revising process with skill, wit, humor, and a vast knowledge of American history and politics. I thank Eric for his supreme patience as I discovered yet one more manuscript collection that simply had to be included and one more revision that I felt compelled to complete. Eric, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for giving me the time and space that I needed to bring this project to fruition. Jason Przybylski provided superb editorial assistance.

Through my association with Cambridge, I had the great fortune to meet the historian Jane Gerhard, to whom I am indebted for detailed, thoughtful critiques of two different versions of the manuscript. Jane enriched my thinking, pushed me to clarify my arguments, and made recommendations for revisions based on her extensive knowledge of second wave feminist sexual thought that radically improved the quality of the final product. Jane recognized the potential merit of the project after reading the first draft, and her assurance that it would help fill a significant gap in second wave history gave me the confidence to complete the book.

Many other colleagues and friends deserve thanks. Kathy Fitzpatrick has offered constant encouragement and advice on the academic side of life, and an enduring friendship that I count on daily. Linda Steiner shares my passion for the study of media and gender, and her insights, as well as her buoyant spirit, infuse these pages. I thank Ruth Conniff, Shayla Stern, Brooke Liu, Sheila Webb, and Tracy Poe. I thank Carol and Howard Wayne for opening their home to me for two extended stays while I worked at the Schlesinger Library.

This book would not have been possible without the love and support of my wonderful family. I thank my sister, Diane Bronstein Wayne, for lifelong

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friendship. My three young children have accompanied me on this journey, providing an endless supply of affection, laughter, and fun. Thank you David, Lauren, and Adam. Thank you Janie and Richard Tapper, for taking your grandchildren on vacations and for week-long visits, showering them with love and attention while creating much-needed time for me to finish the manuscript.

My husband, John Tapper, makes everything possible. I thank him for his kind spirit, humor, encouragement, and devotion. I thank him for understanding the many days and nights that I spent away from our family to complete this book, and I love him for being right there waiting for me when I finally emerged.

My parents, Enid and Eugene Bronstein, were my first – and are still my best – teachers. My father, a veteran of World War II and a member of the Greatest Generation, taught me feminist principles as a child. He had no direct experience with the women's movement, only what he read in the newspaper or viewed on television, but he saw women rising and urged my sister and me to develop our talents, pursue meaningful work, and insist on our rights to enjoy both family life and productive, advancing careers. My mother taught me to read at age three and has been helping me accomplish my goals every day since. Her reassuring counsel that I would find a way to finish this book, teach my classes, parent my children, and manage whatever else life sent my way made me believe it was possible. My gratitude to my parents is boundless, as is my love for them. Mom and Dad, thank you for everything. I dedicate this book to you.