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Focusing on the Phallus

Socializing Society's Obsession with Male Anatomy

Today's mainstream pornography, and perhaps the majority of pornography throughout history as well, portrays the phallus as a godly object. Women are supposedly lost without it, and they certainly cannot reach orgasm without the help of a penis in popular straight porn. This has been the mainstream narrative regarding women and sex for a very long time, but in reality, only twenty to thirty-five percent of women in the United States report experiencing orgasms from penetration alone (Tuana). So why does mainstream pornography continue to tell us that the male genitals are so important whenever it comes to sex, and how does this mindset influence our daily lives? Society and pornography arguably influence each other and perpetuate a misogynist obsession with the penis, seeping into our daily life and influencing the way we act with one another in both sexual and platonic relationships. The prevalence of and obsession with male genitalia in mainstream pornography influences culture in various ways: in terms of media, science, medicine, and language, among others.

Before the nineteenth century, scientists, who were overwhelmingly males at the time, were trying to decipher the human body. In doing so, they concluded that the anatomy of the female body was simply an inferior version of the male body. A common belief was that a woman's genitalia was similar to a man's penis but inside out (Laqueur; Tuana). (I actually remember my peers tell me this in elementary school, and I believed them since we did not have a good sex education). According to Nancy Tuana, a feminist American philosopher, "men's bodies were believed to be the true form of human biology and the standard against which female structures—bones, brains, and genitalia alike—were to be compared" (Tuana), thus implying that women were (are) nothing more than a lesser version of man and that the female body is a biological mistake. Furthermore, a woman's body potentially does not fully exist without the penis since without man, there would be no woman. According to a one-sex model for understanding sexed distinctions, there are no other sexes, just male and those (women) whose differences mark them as "inferior" embodiments of an ideal (male) model. This view reinforced misogynistic values by stating that women are nothing without men, and that the male body was the "true form" of human anatomy (Tuana).

According to Laqueur, this one-sex model was replaced by a two-sex model between the 17th and 19th centuries, where women's and men's bodies came to be understood as incommensurately different, with women's bodies remaining the subordinate model. As part of this, the value and importance of the clitoris is radically revised. Its erasure, and the negation by extension of women's orgasms, during the aforementioned time period has had a ripple effect on today's views of female sexuality, including a continued silence about our sexuality. Not teaching young girls about their own bodies can be detrimental to a woman's sexual development. Before being sexually active with others, a girl will most likely start her sexual journey by

herself through clitoral stimulation. As she ages, though, at least in American culture, she is taught through peers, television, music, and many other forms of socialization that vaginal penetration is the ultimate sexual experience – this despite the reality, as noted previously, that the majority of women do not experience orgasm through vaginal penetration (Tuana). Therefore, one could say that American women are taught by their social constructs to be non-orgasmic. This could then potentially be harmful to a woman's psyche; sex is classified as one of the basic human needs, and having healthy sexual experiences can be therapeutic, empowering, and intimate. More generally, this reinforces a social valuation of men, the man's penis, and his sexual stimulation while denigrating women emotionally by inhibiting their ability to fully understand their own sexuality.

It is challenging to tell women to embrace their sexuality when men's their sexuality and orgasm have been reified throughout history while women are barely recognized. For example, in ancient Pompeii, brothels are perceived to have had an important role in their culture. Phallic symbols are seen in the street corners pointing in the direction to the nearest brothel (Dhwty). Also, throughout most of ancient Rome, the phallic symbol was used for good luck, and "young boys were given amulets known as bulla, which included a fascinum—a phallus amulet meant to grant protection" (Pilny). Putting these two facts together, one can assume that the arrows pointing to the brothels were penises because the men who followed them would "get lucky," a phrase that is used today in the same manner. Therefore, the penis here functioned almost identically with today's cultural reference to the penis as a sign of pleasure, luck and power.

Traditionally, the man's ejaculation has been linked to virility and a way to create life whereas a woman's orgasm was, and still can be, typically seen as sinful or simply unimportant. Since sperm is ejaculated to create a fetus (at least in in the societally-approved and heteronormative narrative) it is not necessary for a woman to orgasm in order to procreate. For this reason, among others, the male climax is typically viewed as not only strong and virile but necessary for sex to have occurred at all. In Emily Martin's essay, "The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles," she discusses the adjectives used by scientists to describe the egg, which are typically associated with negative connotations. Specifically, referencing medical and biology textbooks, she cites instances where the egg is "'is `transported,' `is swept,' or even `drifts' along the fallopian tube." On the other hand, sperm are described with powerful adjectives. Martin gives a few specific examples of what she has found in scientific literature:

...sperm are small, 'streamlined, and invariably active.' They 'deliver' their genes to the egg, 'activate the developmental program of the egg,' and have a 'velocity' that is often remarked upon. Their tails are 'strong' and efficiently powered. Together with the forces of ejaculation, they can "propel the semen into the deepest recesses of the vagina (Martin).

The connotation of the words "strong" and "propel" imply that the sperms' ability to complete these actions are good whereas the egg is "passive," implying that eggs are weak (Martin). In pornography, men are usually perceived to be the more dominant sex partner, especially if there are multiple men and only one woman. The men can be seen using their strength against the women by hitting, slapping, and pushing during sex and in the money shot, where a man ejaculates on a woman's face or chest, their semen marks the scene as being done and the woman as his. In this way, the language used in science reinforces the sexist gender roles that society claims as fact, and pornography emphasizes the same gender stereotypes. Both science and pornography are deeply rooted in misogynistic norms and values in a society dominated by heterosexual masculinity.

In today's mainstream pornography, the viewer can witness other phallogentric actions portrayed in a way that normalizes the centrality of the penis. Almost always, as noted, the man will finish on a woman's chest, face, or back, emphasizing the importance of the man's climax and ending the scene. It is rare to find a clip of mainstream, heterosexual pornography that ends with a woman's orgasm because pornography directors and producers tell the men that they must orgasm. This is another way that women are taught to be non-orgasmic through pornography and its increased use as an educator. In pornography, there is a demand for evidence that the male porn actor has finished for said actor to be paid properly -- hence the term "money shot." If the women's pleasure (her actual and not fake-pornography pleasure) received the same amount of attention, it would show that the women's sexuality and pleasure are important enough to end the scene; it might send the message that women are able to be just as sexual as men.

There is clearly a focus on male pleasure and preference for men in heterosexual pornography, and one can argue that the penis could be considered more important than the actual woman, which perpetuates the suppression of female pleasure. This also can diminish the value of the women, both in porn and on a societal scale. Do straight men watch pornography for the supposedly "hot babes" or do they watch it to see the final scene of a man ejaculating within the standard narrative of the money shot onto a woman's chest? The focus on a (usually anonymously) penis in heterosexual pornography is striking. The camera will focus on it in a longing manner, emphasizing the size and shape of the penis that is penetrating the woman, creating a consumer base that believes that they need a penis like that to get this type of pleasure that the actors seem to be having. The focus in mainstream pornography is not the sex that the two or more actors are having together, but it is about the sex that the viewers could be having if they were having sex with someone if they had a penis like the male porn actor on the screen. The obsession with the penis in pornography is dominated by society's view of masculinity and the sexual norms determining how men and women should perform, creating social norms for the size, shape, and ability of the penis that men should seek to emulate.

Even more intriguing is the focus on a male penis in lesbian porn, especially on mainstream pornography sites like PornHub, Brazzers, and RedTube. It is most likely because much of lesbian pornography is made for male viewers and consequently, for men's penises. Simply click on the lesbian porn tab and look at the pictures; one scroll of the mouse and the viewer will see an array of strap-on penises, captions regarding male genitals, and threesomes with two women and one man. I am certainly not trying to dismiss the fact that many lesbians use a strap-on during sex; however, the role of the phallus is still worth analyzing. One theory, as I've mentioned, is that the "lesbian porn" tab on porn sites are actually for men who fetishize lesbians. For example, one video on RedTube had two women in a taxi, and one of the women "was missing something," and she "couldn't get off without it." Then the driver of the taxi, another woman, took a strap-on penis out of the glove box. Other discourse referring to the penis was used, too; one woman said something similar to, "this will do the trick." The emphasis on how important the penis is, even in lesbian pornography, is quite curious. It is almost as if the writers of the scripts (who are likely male) are saying, "Well, these women can't possibly be sexually complete without a penis, so we're going to have to include a strap-on, vibrator, or dildo to finish them off." It is quite demeaning to women, especially women having sex with other women, to negate their agency and ability in sex and assume that they will always be missing something if they are not having sex with men or with a prosthetic male penis.

The importance of the phallus so prominently displayed in pornography seeps into our society in many ways. Perhaps the most obvious overlap is in the medical field. As stated previously, the very language is used in science and biology can be considered phallogocentric. Also, pills like Viagra have helped men for years to maintain erect penises like the ones they see in pornography. This impossible standard for men to be able to achieve rock hard erections and be able to have sex for an hour or more has pushed many men to taking drugs to perform up to what they now believe is standard. Even on pornography sites, the overlap from pornography to society is evident when ads populate the screen for drugs like Viagra and other erectile drugs. Another example of how pornography has shaped society's view on medication occurred on a news website about all things involving the United States military in an article that noted, "according to data from the Defense Health Agency, DoD actually spent \$41.6 million on Viagra — and \$84.24 million total on erectile dysfunction prescriptions — last year" (Kime). Unfortunately, the numbers only go up from there; according to personalliberty.com, "data collected by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) indicates that Medicare has spent more than \$240 million of taxpayer money on penis pumps for elderly men over the past decade." It is fascinating that the United States spends so much money on Viagra, and drugs similar to it, but there is still no Viagra-like drug for women. Why is it that taxpayers are more comfortable spending more to fund erectile dysfunction than a Viagra for women, abortion, or even birth control? It is possible to argue that the reason the system is set up like this is because there is an unnecessary obsession with the penis, and the U.S. culture quite literally worships it.

Another way phallocentrism permeates society is in the language that is used daily. In the United States, well-known sayings that rely on phallic words or meanings are used by people of all ages. For instance, a person who is bragging about how good they are at something would be considered "cocky." Considering the idea that society thinks of penises as superior, cocky could possibly be the word of choice because to have a penis would be worth bragging about. Also, if a person is not doing what they are supposed to be doing, they are "dicking around," and while the meaning of this could be interpreted several ways, I perceive it as relying on the tired social stereotype that the penis does not always do as it is supposed to; people will say that a man is "thinking with his penis" (or thinking with his "little head") and therefore not listening to reason. Another popular saying today is "suck my dick." This is used as either the ultimate argument ender or as a joke. There is certainly a power dynamic at play in this saying; the definitive nature of it is demanding and controlling. For example, if one person insults another, the one insulting might say, "suck my dick," demanding that the insulter bows down to the other's command. When women use this saying, they are reinforcing the idea that the phallus is the ultimate weapon and succumbing to gender roles that reinforce cultural valuations of the penis as superior. When "suck my dick" is said in pornography, the woman has no other choice than to do what he says, and will eventually perform fellatio and obey the man's command. Therefore, there is a strong link with the saying "suck my dick" in pornography and a culture that reinforces the gender norms of men as aggressors and women being passive in return. Also, when a person says that they have "big balls," they are saying that they are brave. As problematic as this saying is, it is also used by both men and women. The bigger the metaphorical balls a person has, the braver they are. Therefore, the opposite, having no balls (a.k.a. a vagina), would insinuate that person could not possibly be brave at all. Overall, sayings that are not outwardly talking about the penis are still engulfed with hidden, phallic meanings that privilege the phallus and the penis as powerful.

Another way a focus on the phallus reinforces sexist gender norms is reflected in the way society references everyday objects when describing a penis. For example, a banana, drill, hot dog, meat stick, sausage, tool, or train can be used synonymously with the word "penis" in north American culture, and more often than not, people will know what the "drill" refers to. There is a long list of phallic euphemisms in the cleverly titled article "Dicktionary - Penis Euphemisms," where hundreds of words or phrases that are used to replace the word "penis" are listed in alphabetical order. Because of this overlap in words, when discussing an actual drill or actual banana, the person listening then has to decipher what their conversation is really about. For instance, when a person states, "this is a long banana," the person they are talking to will have to think twice about what the other person has just said; are they referencing a penis or an actual banana? This then causes people to think about penises far too often. The relation between the homonyms is menacing and has an everlasting effect on people, compelling us to think about the phallus in myriad ways that come to be normalized. Pornography perpetuates this by using some of the words listed above to replace the word penis. For instance, a common phrase on pornography video titles

is to say that a woman gets "drilled." This is both violent and degrading, likening male genitals to tools and females to be something that need fixing. Pornography also will use some of the phallic-shaped objects and phallic euphemisms as props in videos. Therefore, if someone watched a woman practically giving a blowjob to a banana or popsicle, that image will be encrypted into said person's brain, and the next time they see a person eating a banana, they might interpret it sexually. Overall, the way American culture uses objects to reference penises creates a complex overlap in a person's mind where the phallus is inescapable.

The penis is also prominent in American culture through humor and insults about penises. Much of popular American humor is focused on the phallus. All a person would have to do is watch one episode of Family Guy to see how many jokes are centered around penises. Even the main character, Peter, has a scrotum-like chin. Our society worships these kinds of jokes, whereas vagina jokes tend to be a bit awkward. Arguably the most common types of penis jokes are the ones referring to size. Males place so much emphasis on their own and others' penis sizes like it is a competition, and as much as it is used as a joke, it can also be used as an insult. Men often attempt to belittle other men by jokes that make small size the ultimate offense. I once read the comment section of a post about women's natural bodies and the prevalence of the "camel toe." One man commented that it is a natural thing, equal to a man's penis outline being seen in pants. Then another man started arguing with him about how it is not equal and that camel toes are disgusting. After, the men started arguing in the comment section about each other's penis sizes. 5be9h wrote, "lmfao funny af... how do u know if it's small?? Have u ever seen it or took a picture with it??? Trust me u don't wish to try it *laughing emojis. *" The banter back and forth continues exactly how it started.

Pornography perpetuates this idea of inferiority based on penis size by giving roles to men with abnormally large penises or shooting from various camera angles that make it look larger than it really is. The perpetuation of this narrative leads many porn consumers (especially men) to understand this as the norm and to believe that there might be something wrong with them, their penis size, shape and power, and their ejaculate. The common tradition of bachelorette parties in American culture also reinforces the idea that the penis is godly and powerful. Traditionally, women were supposed to avoid all sexual relations prior to marriage. Then, when it is time for her to get married, the emphasis on sex and on the penis is enormous since abstention from sex is no longer necessary. Bachelorette parties today often feature penis shaped cakes, hats, glasses, cards, foods, balloons, and other various gifts emphasizing the penis as something worth celebrating. For example, my cousin had her bachelorette party recently and her gifts included glow in the dark penis straws, a headband with two penises pointing upwards to look like ears, and penis shaped lollipops. In contrast, bachelor parties do not focus on the vagina itself but on sex as a whole. It is typically more socially acceptable for a man not to remain a virgin until he gets married; therefore the vagina would not be as much of a mystery, ensuring that it is not the main focus. Usually, the focus of the bachelor party is one last night of freedom until

they are "tied down" for life. This is especially seen in movies and television shows where men will gather together for their friend's final night of being single. Take *The Hangover* for an example. The plot of all of *The Hangover* movies is that one of the friends is getting married, so they go out to celebrate with him. Often times they talk about having sex with other women and make sure the friend is accepting of the fact that they will not be able to sleep with anyone else (Phillips). The pornography script emphasizes the penis as the point of pleasure during sex, supporting the bachelorette party idea that the penis is what all of these women have been waiting for. This is also in relation to what I wrote above about lesbian porn and how pornography is usually written for male consumption. Overall, the American culture of bachelorette parties not only reinforces but also can create the idea that women strive to finally be able to have sex, not with their love, but with the phallus.

Throughout western history, the penis has dominated our cultural imagination, and the medical and scientific erasure of female genitals has been integrated into the mainstream porn narrative and, by extension, into society's perception of female sexuality in the present. In pornography, the emphasis on the penis contributes to the emphasis on the penis outside of pornography as well. However, the inverse can also be true; the importance of the penis in the daily lives of people can contribute to the importance of the penis in pornography. This overlap can be seen in science, medicine, tradition, language, and other aspects of American culture. Overall, the misogynist history of the phallic in culture in general is likely to contribute to society's fixation with it today. This obsession is seen in and effects people's daily lives inside and outside of pornography and sex, and shapes the way that we, as a society perceive ourselves and those around us.

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