

Deep throat, porn chic, the old-in-and-out and a few angry feminists

by [Sari Kouvo](#)

Earlier this year Linda Boreman died. Linda Boreman is best known under the alias Linda Lovelace, an alias that she used when she starred in the film *Deep Throat* (1972). *Deep Throat* tells the story of a woman who cannot get sexual satisfaction, until a doctor (after thorough examination) discovers that she has her clitoris in her throat, and suggests that Linda should get into oral sex. Linda develops a preference for oral sex, and this theme is put on view in the rest of the film. *Deep Throat* was one of the first pornographic movies to be shown to a broader audience at cinemas in the US, it challenged American obscenity laws, and 'liberated' Americans and soon enough the rest of the Western world with its pro-sex message and its explicit sexual content.

Deep Throat was one of the films that during the 1970's made pornography into an acceptable societal phenomenon - contested as it seemed only by conservatives, religious groups, and prudish women. A decade after the film was made Linda published the self-biographic novel *Ordeal* (1981). In the novel Linda tells her story about her relationship to her former husband and pimp Jack Traynor, and about the making of *Deep Throat*. Linda's story is not a story about flower power, free sex and porn chic, but one about humiliation, slavery and sexual abuse. Jack Traynor had forced Linda into first prostitution and then pornography and pornographic stardom. In an interview after the publishing of *Ordeal* Linda tells us that when we see the movie *Deep Throat* we see her being raped. She had literally a gun to her head during most of the filming.



Linda's experiences of the pornographic industry are not unique. During the Pornography and Civil Rights hearings organised by the American radical feminists Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin in the late 1980s many similar stories were put forth, as well as many stories about how pornography has been used to convince girlfriends and wives to do things they do not feel like doing, as a step into prostitution, and to trick children into sex. The abusive realities are also explored as a pornographic theme in for example the pornographic film *Shocking Truth* (see

also the documentary *Shocking Truth* by Alexa Wolf, 2000), in which pornographic scenes are mixed with interviews with the starring girls who mostly tell stories about incest and abusive sexual histories. The fact that the pornographic industry abuses some women, and that it is used to abuse some children does of course not mean that it abuses all women or all children, and in most debates about pornography a number of porn users, producers, actors and actresses argue for sexual liberation through porn, and testify about the accepting attitudes and openness of the pornographic world. These positive experiences are certainly as true as the experiences of Linda and her peers.

However, parallel to the individual experiences and stories from the pornographic world, there is the structural developments of the smalltime, underground porn film enterprises turning into web-based trans-national enterprises that exploit any themes that can be made to look like sex. The sex liberal trends of the 1970s led to the abolishment of obscenity laws in most Western countries, which besides having many positive effects freed the evergrowing pornographic industry from most societal constraints. The liberalisation led for example to the growth of legal and commercial child pornography during the 1970s. Child pornography did upset people, and national and international action was soon taken to restrain the development of legal and commercial child porn. The criminalisation of child porn did however not affect the developments of other abusive pornographic themes. Most contemporary pornographic shops and web sites contain for example heterosexual sex, homosexual sex, so-called lesbian sex, gang bangs, rape, fist fucking, S/M, Japanese bondage, humiliation, wet sex, diaper sex, sex with animals, sex with pregnant women, sex with handicapped women, and sex with women who look like children. The themes favoured by the pornographic industry tend to exploit hetero-sexist and racist images of innocent schoolgirls, frustrated housewives, whorish secretaries, prudish business women, exotic African women, submissive Asian women, trashy eastern European women and black slaves being sexually disciplined and/or sexually liberated by teachers, gynecologists, doctors, fathers, husbands, bosses, workers, white men, black men and slave masters.

In the film *A Clockwork Orange* the bored and violent anti-hero Alex speaks about doing the “old in and out” meaning having sex with or raping women. In Alex’s world the line between having sex and raping is insignificant, as he does whatever comes easier. *A Clockwork Orange* is a very striking satire of contemporary, urban culture, and Alex’s approach to women and sex is an even more striking satire over contemporary pornographic industry. In the pornographic industry the old in and out (whether consensual or forced) seems outdated. The contemporary pornographic industry sells anything that can be made to look like sex and that can serve as masturbatory aids for men.

The dividing line in the early 1990s feminist pornographic debates was drawn between radical feminists that viewed all pornography as exploitation of women, liberal feminism that viewed women’s participation in pornography as an expression of free will and pornography as an expression of freedom of speech, and cultural feminists that viewed pornography as at least potentially liberating (if women would be allowed to do their own pornography). In my quest for answers regarding pornography I came

across the work of radical feminists, such as Catharine MacKinnon's *Only Words* and her and Andrea Dworkin's other work on pornography. The radical feminist analysis of pornography and the pornographic industry pleased me much more than any of the individualistic liberal and fluffy cultural feminist analysis. In accordance with radical feminism sex is one of the foremost strongholds of patriarchy, and pornography one of the strongholds of patriarchal sexuality. Pornography makes women into masturbatory aids for men, and pornography is a masturbatory aid (one of the only ones given constitutional protection through freedom of speech).

Radical feminism is today as an academic discipline (although not as political activism !) dead. 1990s poststructural feminists, as well as gender and queer studies scholars criticised radical feminists for seeing no shades of grey, for excluding difference(s) and (different) men, and for allowing women no agency. However, although many post-structural feminists do not go beyond critique and especially beyond critique of other feminisms, some do, and they promote a new forms of solidarity and ethics, where relationality, and individual and group responsibility are important.

My interest in pornography has been fading for a couple of years till a few months ago I came across some images on a Swedish free pornographic web site that deeply disturb me. One of today's fashion in pornography seems to lean towards the 'post-human'. Women are preferably locked into immobilising positions by complicated plaster- and metallic constructions, leaving only 'the three holes' available. Some had ropes tied tightly around their breasts and sexual organs so that these organs were getting blood filled and turning blue, and one woman was hanged, she had a rope around her neck. The text attached to the image of the hanged woman read something like 'This is what happens when you don't please your co-actors'. Many women might not visit porn web sites or keep up to date with the developments in porn industry, but it is one of the web's most successful businesses, so men are obviously great consumers of pornography. After having seen these images I am again convinced that we (as feminists) need to have an informed opinion on pornography and on the pornographic industry. Feminists cannot allow themselves not to engage in debates about pornography and the pornographic industry just because the 'death' of radical feminism and the postfeminist wave has made sex, sexuality and pornography such complicated issues to debate. In my view each of us has a responsibility for ourselves and for others to know what the pornographic industry contains ; what we are turned on by ; what repulses us ; what the good and bad realities are behind the smiles, screams, facial ejaculations and faked orgasms ; and each of us has to be able to hold her opinions in any discussion. This, as pornography and the pornographic industry is more than ever part of our everyday reality, and as the solution is not to make pornography into a no longer issue for feminism. Pornography forms are part of the ideological and social constructions in the field of sexual politics – and sexual politics matters to feminism even if it might be complex issues at times !