

FEMINISTS THREATEN LARRY FLYNT: MY PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION

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Larry Flynt, publisher of *Hustler* and numerous other pornography magazines, has finally honored my decades of anti-pornography activism by naming me "Asshole of the Month" in *Hustler*, February 2005 (p. 13). Several other feminists have achieved this accolade, including Andrea Dworkin, Dorchen Liedholdt, Gloria Allred and, earlier this year, Catharine MacKinnon. Gloria Steinem appeared on a "Most Wanted" poster in *Hustler* accompanied by Flynt's accusation that she "should be considered armed with false propaganda and dangerous to the rights of all Americans" for her anti-pornography views.

In every issue of *Hustler*, Flynt names one of his enemies "Asshole of the Month." Along with a photograph of his adversary's face emerging from a donkey's rectum (see illustration), Flynt provides three quarters of a page of crude, mostly defamatory text. Flynt may have finally decided to target me in this way in response to two public statements I made: "I wish that Flynt's would-be murderer had been a better shot," and "I wish Larry Flynt had never survived his mother's womb," which seem to have particularly riled him. One or both of these pronouncements are referred to in three articles in the February issue of *Hustler*. Missing from two of them, however, is my rationale for making these inflammatory assertions. Flynt's many pornographic enterprises, which have made him perhaps the most notorious pornographer in the world today, have been responsible for an immeasurable amount of sexual violence against women and girls.¹ Had Flynt been aborted or miscarried by his mother, or murdered in the 1978 attempt, a great deal of suffering would have been prevented.

Following are a few examples of Flynt's slanderous statements about me in the "Asshole" article in which he describes me as "a bitter shrew."

"By the end of the turbulent decade [the 1960s], Russell was teaching at California's Mills College, helping build its women's-studies department -- an

accomplishment akin to Joseph Goebbels launching a communications department at Berlin University."

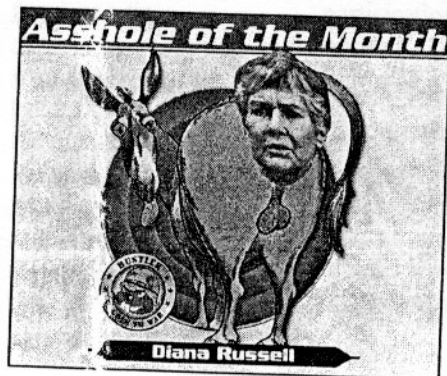
"Russell's personal history of relationships with men seems shrouded at best, although the educator has made passing references to a brief marriage that she bemoans as a 'crash course in sexism.' This is likely code for 'Hubby wanted a hummer when he got home from work,' which to Russell is the moral equivalent of Dachau's ovens."

"Diana Russell is a sick and dangerous woman, one who peddles her diseased philosophy of men-hating as a template for resistance to the Patriarchy." (Emphases added. *Hustler*, Feb. 2005, p. 13).

This hyperbolic vitriol reveals how threatened Flynt is feeling -- a sentiment he cops to in his editorial titled, "The Feminist Threat." This phrase also appears on the issue's cover, under a logo stating "HUSTLER GOES TO WAR." Implicit is the fact that Flynt's war is against anti-pornography feminists. He has singled out Aura Bogado, a producer and anchor of KPFK Radio News in Los Angeles, and me, as his targets in this particular month. Following are excerpts from Flynt's editorial:

"Recent events have caused me to once again focus attention on my lifelong opponents on the feminist fringe, those

who -- however they cloak their rhetoric -- are antisex, antiporn and antimale. For too long I have tended to dismiss them on the grounds that they do not represent the majority of the women in this country. However, I can now see that, while this is true, these women have been making inroads into positions of power, especially within those institutions



generally recognized as being on the Progressive Left.”

“... (M)ilitant feminists seem intent on instituting a new fascism based on their notions of what is right and what is wrong ... This is a particular shame because the fringe feminists' vicious attacks against healthy male sexuality tend to drive most men out of the Progressive tent.”

“It is our hope and intention that by putting the spotlight on these militant feminists -- who got away with their vile attacks only because the voices of reason are afraid to stand up to them -- we will reveal their bankrupt ideology.” (p. 7)

Similarly slanderous statements about me and Bogado are featured in Amy Alkon's article in the same issue of *Hustler*. Flynt drafted this foul-mouthed lackey, “a syndicated columnist who has appeared in more than 100 newspapers throughout North America” (p. 36), into his war against anti-pornography feminists. Alkon writes:

“As a free-expression absolutist, I even

defend the rights of hate-spewing, jack-booted Femi-Fascists like Aura Bogado and Diana Russell. In fact, I encourage them to speak openly and frequently, if only so their philosophy can be exposed as a fraud, as a lie, as a wrongheaded, nasty-ass steaming pile of Stalinist shit.”

(Emphasis added. p. 34).



Here Alkin portrays Bogado and/or me as a Femi-Fascist who rules over an army of docile, handcuffed men, armed only with a riding crop and lesbian armband.

Quoting my statement about wishing that Flynt's would-be murderer had been a better shot, Alkon accuses me of stopping just short “of putting out a feminist *fatwa* against Flynt” (p. 35). She then proceeds to quote my accusation that Flynt, through his publications, caused “thousands of rapes, thousands of cases of child sexual victimization, millions of cases of sexual harassment and, very likely, many cases of torturing women and some murders of women.” Alkon declares my estimates of the suffering perpetrated by Flynt to be “sick, unsubstantiated and unjustifiable allegations” (p. 35). In contrast, she quotes Catherine Salmon approvingly for saying that “Pornography is about sex, and not about violence or the degradation of women” (p. 35).

Despite Alkon's arrogance, I'll wager that she knows next to nothing about research on pornography, whereas I have studied this form of misogynist oppression of women for over 30 years and have written three books on the subject. Nevertheless, Alkon feels qualified to endorse the validity of Salmon's conclusion that pornography has nothing to do with violence and is not degrading, while dismissing as “Stalinist shit” my assertion that the women involved in its production are degraded, that the portrayals of women in pornography are degrading, and that pornography plays a significant role in causing sexual violence and abuse.² Perhaps this is not surprising, given that Alkon was hired to wage war against Bogado and me, not to seek the truth about the harmful effects of pornography.³

The picture illustrating Alkon's article shows a bald tough-looking woman dressed in what appears to be a Nazi uniform with a lesbian symbol on her armband. Standing upright on a rock with a riding crop in one hand, she looks like a giant who is dominating a large army of docile men, all of whom have their hands chained together and wear armbands displaying a male symbol. Presumably the intimidating-looking lesbian is supposed to represent Bogado and/or me.

Flynt may also have been enraged by my participation in a protest at the February 2002 opening of his new Hustler Club in the garish red-light district of San Francisco. Indeed, this is where I told reporters that I wished that Flynt's would-be murderer had been a better shot. It seems likely that Flynt was aware of my presence that evening because a photograph of me displaying a very large protest sign outside his club was included in *Hustler's* internet article about the club's opening (see http://www.spectator.net/1226/pages/1226_spot.html).

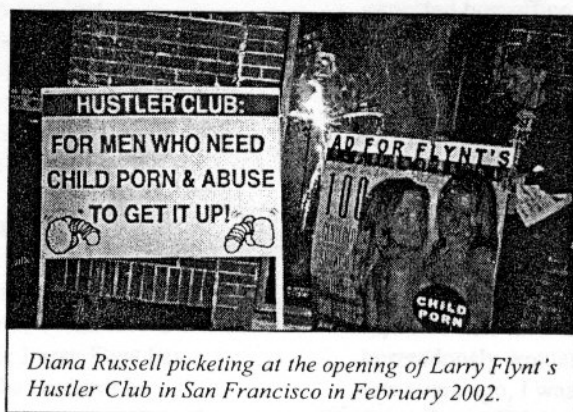
Not only did members of Women Against Pornography in Berkeley oppose the opening of Flynt's new topless dancing club, we also expressed our outrage over the blatant child pornography advertisement that was published in local newspapers to lure men to the opening of the Hustler Club (see photo). Although spokesmen for the club maintained that the young women - one of whom looked no older than 14 and the other about 16 - were of legal age, these performers were obviously chosen to appeal to men who are turned on by underage girls. We used a giant enlargement of this ad for our protest, along with an equally large sign, illustrated with flaccid penises that read "HUSTLER CLUB: FOR MEN WHO NEED CHILD PORN & ABUSE TO GET IT UP!"

The second sign so enraged a man hanging around the entrance to the Hustler Club that he assaulted me while attempting to destroy the sign I stood behind. He failed to destroy my sign, but succeeded in wrestling me to the ground. It took three male bystanders to break his ferocious grip. Although I could have orchestrated his arrest had I thought quickly enough before he hurried from the scene, I was appalled that none of the three journalists who quoted me in their coverage of this event saw fit to mention that I had been attacked. Apparently they consider violence against women too trivial to warrant mentioning (see Russell, 2002, for my editorial on our protest and the assault). Additionally, the fact that only members of Women Against Pornography protested the use of what appeared to be child pornography to advertise the Hustler Club's opening suggests that the use of increasingly young and/or young-looking girls is becoming more acceptable to the public. This epitomizes how images once confined to pornography become acceptable mainstream fare.

A month after our protest, a Flynt supporter sent me the following email:

"Regarding your comments concerning Mr. Flynt that were published in today's SF chronicle, how I wish that you would be kidnapped and repeatedly gang raped until every hole in your body was oozing cum from it." ("Hanan Sharon," March 11, 2002).

Another feminist protest in 1996 initiated by feminist anti-pornography researcher and activist Wendy Stock and me infuriated Flynt and



Diana Russell picketing at the opening of Larry Flynt's Hustler Club in San Francisco in February 2002.

undoubtedly put me on his shit list. Shockingly, film critics showered director Milos Forman's movie, "The People vs. Larry Flynt," with accolades (Oliver Stone was the producer). For example, it was a runner-up for The New York Film Critics Circle's "Best Film of 1996" award; it was nominated for several Golden Globe Awards;

and it was considered a serious contender for one or more Oscars. Flynt basked in the attention, and appeared to interpret the critics' praise of the movie as praise of him.

Outraged by the critics' enthusiasm, Wendy and I organized a protest at the entrance of the Kabuki Theater in San Francisco where the opening night of the movie was staged. A panel of well-known feminist activists, including Wendy, Ann Simonton, Norma Hotaling, Melissa Farley, Gary Brooks, Tonya Flynt-Vega and me, castigated Oliver Stone and Milos Forman for producing a movie that idolized Flynt as a First Amendment hero rather than depicting him as a contemptible pimp, pornographer and pornophile (a word I coined to pathologize individuals who consume a lot of pornography) who fought for what he perceived as his right to profit by publishing degrading anti-woman pictures and text. We also denounced Stone and Forman for ignoring the harm of pornography to women who are used to produce it, as well as to women who are degraded, raped and sometimes even murdered by the consumers of pornography (Ted Bundy, for example).

We also accused Forman of erasing the long-standing opposition of feminists to Hustler in "Larry Flynt vs. The People". The fleeting mention of us in the movie dismissed us as mere prudes. Finally, we protested that the film treated Flynt's boast that he had had sex with all his female employees as nothing more serious than adding notches to his belt rather than as an admission that he had repeatedly sexually harassed them (that is, that he'd repeatedly engaged in prosecutable crimes).⁴

Tonya Flynt-Vega, one of Flynt's daughters, also addressed the audience from the speakers' podium to denounce "The People vs. Larry Flynt."

"The reason that I'm so upset about this film is that it justifies my Dad as a pornographer. It supports his argument that there are no victims of pornography and that pornography does no harm. If you want to see a victim of pornography, just look at me. Since I was a very little girl, I was surrounded by the stuff. I had to go through so much pain and grief to survive."

Tonya then reported that her father

"began sexually abusing me before I was 10, and that went on until I was 18. Now this film will tell people Larry Flynt has suffered only because he couldn't be silenced. What a lie, what a perversion of the truth. And what have pictures of women being violated got to do with freedom of speech?"

After this protest, which was covered in the local media, we struck gold when we contacted Gloria Steinem about our action. She agreed to work with us to try to prevent "The People vs. Larry Flynt" from receiving an Oscar. Gloria proceeded to write an extraordinarily powerful and eloquent criticism of the movie that was published in The New York Times. She told me that her article seemed to have touched a nerve in women readers that evoked the biggest positive response to an op-ed article that she had ever before received. "(N)o Hollywood movie would glamorize a Klansman or a Nazi as a champion of free speech," Gloria wrote, "much less describe him in studio press releases as 'the era's last crusader,' which is how Columbia Pictures describes Mr. Flynt."

While Wendy and I organized a press conference in a downtown Los Angeles hotel the day before the Oscar awards were to be announced, Gloria had cleverly arranged for her New York Times op-ed article to appear in a Hollywood publication that she knew would be widely read by those attending the award ceremony, including the judges. It appears that Gloria's brilliant strategy was successful. "The People vs. Larry Flynt" failed to win a single Oscar. Flynt must have been bitterly disappointed by this

unexpected outcome. Milos Forman was furious, blaming feminists not only for the Oscar failure but also for the fact that his film did not achieve the expected box office success. Whether we deserve the credit for the lower than anticipated turnout is unclear, but I'm convinced that our campaign played a significant role in depriving Milos Forman and Oliver Stone of the Oscars they expected to receive. I'm equally convinced that the failure was a harsh blow to Larry Flynt.

I like to think that Flynt is also angry with me for my attacks on him and Hustler in my book, Against Pornography: The Evidence of Harm, and on my repeated demonstrations in public lectures of the horrendously woman-hating contents of Hustler. A few years ago, I was scheduled to appear on the Jenny Jones TV Show with Flynt and other guests. I had a T-shirt made for the occasion with the slogan "Hustler Promotes Rape and Incest" emblazoned on my chest. Unfortunately, the show was cancelled a few hours before starting time because the charge that Jenny Jones was liable in the death of one of her guests was reinstated on that very day.

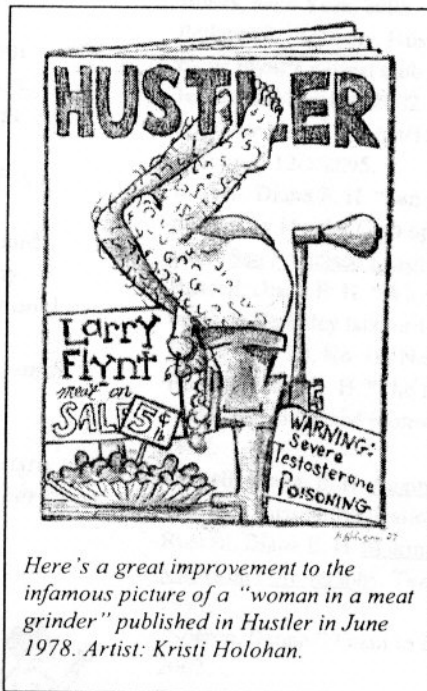
Conclusion

Being attacked by our enemies is a sign that we are making progress in our struggle against the pornography warmongers (remember, Flynt has

declared war on feminists) who want to silence us. We should all take pride in Flynt's admission that he feels threatened by feminists. I take pride in his inclusion of me among the feminists he feels especially threatened by. We need to mobilize increasing numbers of feminists to attack Larry Flynt and all the other pornographers as well as all manifestations of pornography.

It is vital that every anti-pornography feminist engage in actions against pornography, even if they are unable to find someone with whom to work. This article describes two actions that involved relatively few individuals. In neither case did we have a local anti-pornography organization, although I invented

one (Women Against Pornography) in one instance. I have been involved in several feminist actions in the last few years which were initiated by only one or



Here's a great improvement to the infamous picture of a "woman in a meat grinder" published in Hustler in June 1978. Artist: Kristi Holohan.

two of us and in which only two to five women participated most of the time. I was the lone picketer advocating a boycott for weeks on end, but had a considerable impact despite my solitude (Russell, 2000).⁵ Eventually, others joined me, and we believe we had a significant effect on the length of the sentence of the main sex offender as well as on public opinion about the case.

Journalist Pamela Paul's recently published book, *Pornified* (2005) (a one-person form of activism) is the first feminist anti-pornography book ever to become a real success in the popular market enabling her to get considerable exposure on the popular media for her criticisms of pornography and its negative effects on heterosexual relationships in the United States. This is positive evidence that there is a potential market for anti-pornography books that are written for the popular market.

However, it would obviously be more desirable if we had feminist anti-pornography action groups in every city and town. This is a feminist dream in a pornographied society in which increasing numbers of males have become pornophiles and pornography addicts, and in which growing numbers of women have been brainwashed into accepting or embracing this woman-hating material. Indeed, with the security afforded by the Internet, some women have even become pornographers.

Clearly, feminists and others concerned about pornography, have a lot of work to do. Action is imperative. The formation of a new organization tentatively called the National Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement in Boston in July 2005 is a promising sign. Check out their website (www.feministantipornographymovement.org) and get involved. Make a list of the anti-pornography actions you can do, and start doing them one by one!

I would like to thank Wendy Stock for reviewing and contributing to this article, Morgan for her assistance in the editing, and J. Robinson for her miscellaneous help. I'm also very grateful to Kristi Holohan for her patience as I repeatedly asked her to make changes in her Flynt-in-a-meat-grinder cartoon.



Endnotes

¹ The following publications address some of the harmful consequences of pornography on women and relationships: Russell, 1993; Russell, 1994; and Paul, 2005.

² For example, see Russell, 1993, and Russell, 1994. This does not mean that pornography is the only cause of sexual violence and abuse of women.

³ I have focused on Alkon's attack on me because Bogado has already responded to the attacks made on her in this *Hustler*, 2005 (see www.HustlingtheLeft.com).

⁴ For a more detailed feminist critique of "The People vs. Larry Flynt," see Russell, 1997.

⁵ For a more complete account of this sexual slavery case, see my account on dianarussell.com.

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Here's a great improvement to the infamous picture of a "woman in a meat-grinder" published in HUSTLER on June 1978.