AG AboutGender
International journal of gender studies

http://www.aboutgender.unige.it

Vol. 4 N° 7 anno 2015
pp. 190-208

The Game of Shame and its Rules: an Analysis of the "Infamy Toll" in the Narratives and Schemes Governing Women's Sexuality and Appearance

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the elements common to the three crucial practices where women's sexuality becomes public, namely, prostitution, pornography, and daily female grooming. These are conceptualized as three sides of a "tricky triangle" in what I call the "game of shame." The article will thus explore and examine various cultural and social phenomena tied to that game — ranging from ancient prostitution to digital-age "revenge porn"— showing how the social and moral evaluation of those three practices can be ambivalent, even contradictory, and how it constantly fluctuates between two opposite readings or narratives. It is precisely the pervasive coexistence of such starkly opposite social evaluations of the behaviours associated with those three phenomena that defines the "game of shame," a recurrent pattern (more like a "trap," really) that women are subjected to, being routinely encouraged to display their sexuality in public,

and sometimes even coerced into that behaviour, only to be punished by being shamed and disgraced for that very display.

Keywords: social rules, prostitution, pornography, female grooming, shame culture.

1. The "Tricky Triangle"*

> Perella: Cura? La chiama cura, questa, lei? S'è mascherata! S'è... *(accennando al seno scoperto)* s'è scodellata tutta! Ah! ah! ah! ah!
> Signora Perella: Ma Francesco... Dio mio... scusa...
> Perella: Ti sei forse mascherata così, per me? No, no, no, no, no! Ah, grazie! No, no, no, no, no! *(Accennando al seno di lei):* Puoi pure chiudere bottega! Non ne còmpero!
>
> (Luigi Pirandello, *L'uomo, la bestia e la virtù*, scena VI)

There is a common element to the social practices of prostitution, pornography, and the "norms" requiring women to take daily care of the many details of their external appearance in public[1].

At first glance, the three practices—all expressions of female culturally codified *extimité* (Lacan 2006)—seem to be positioned at different, even opposite ends of an ideal sociocultural "continuum" ranging from vice to virtue. Indeed, prostitution is commonly considered quite reproachable, and sometimes even criminal. Pornography, because of its more "virtual" aspect, is considered a bit less objectionable than prostitution, so much so that it is sometimes even perceived as a harmless, enjoyable

* The author wishes to thank Shulamit Almog for stimulating discussions on the issues addressed in this paper.

[1] To be sure, there are also male, homosexual and transsexual prostitution and pornography: These are to be understood in their specific cultural context, and there is also a trend afoot that is pushing *males* (not just females) to reach high aesthetic standards. My concern here, however, well only be with "mainstream" *female* prostitution and pornography, and with the female myth of beauty, looking at the specific gender dynamics they involve. That is because, even though it's important to recognize that the social stigma of "infamy" also applies to men who sexually sell themselves to other men as "females," the underlying dynamics of that phenomenon seem to be in line with those discussed in this article.

"adult entertainment," which it would be overly moralistic to condemn. And, lastly, far from being regarded as contemptible, the practice of routinely constructing a "female" appearance — a discipline that in turn ranges from makeup and high-heel shoes (often explicitly required as dress code in many workplaces, for example) to much more intrusive makeovers—is commonly approved and even called for as an undisputed female virtue.

But on closer inspection the three practices will reveal several features in common. In the first place, they represent the three main possible, and typical, codified ways through which women emerge, and become publicly visible, as sexual beings (and in particular as sexually available). In the case of the prostitute, she directly offers her sexual services to (paying) customers in transactions that usually take place in private. In the case of pornography, it is the image that through its very existence substantiates the reality of the message of sexual availability the image itself conveys. In the case of sexualized grooming and aesthetic work, recourse to red lipstick, high heels, low necklines, coloured nails, see-through fabrics, and skirts with deep slits demonstrates, by virtue of the very concern and effort needed in the background, that the woman is communicating a precise message: that, as far as her public image is concerned, she wants or otherwise agrees to be viewed in the first instance as a sexualized being willing to spend time, money, and effort to please men by replicating this image.

So a first unifying element common to the three practices is that (even in the variety and diversity of their social, cultural, and economic motivations) they constitute the three main ways through which woman's sexuality becomes public, or publicly expressed. And in this sense they can be conceived as the three sides of a coherent triangle.

But there is another feature they have in common, in that all are the object of a social and moral evaluation that is quite ambivalent, tricky, even paradoxical, for it constantly fluctuates between two opposite and contradictory readings and narratives. Let us explore and analyze this second feature by taking up prostitution, pornography, and grooming in turn.

2. Prostitution

Let us start with prostitution. In March 12, 2014, a newspaper in Italy reported two news stories conveying opposite views about a similar phenomenon. The first story told the tragedy of a woman of Albanian origin, a mother who'd been abandoned by her husband and was destitute: She killed her three daughters and remarked in passing that she had «saved them from a future of misery and prostitution[2]». The other story reported on the scandal involving two fifteen-year-old escorts engaged by the husband of a well-know Italian politician. Because the girls were underage, their clients were facing criminal charges. But the two teenagers explained that they opted for this very well-paying line of "work" (300 euros per "meeting") in order to afford *la bella vita*. With the money they could make in just a couple of hours with their clients, they could buy luxury items, and the only "hardship" involved was to mentally "dissociate" themselves for a while from what they were doing and to avoid young clients of about their age, since that carried the risk of being recognized and so of losing their anonymity. One of them said to the inquiring magistrate: «What I'm saying may seem strange, but that I was working as a call girl doesn't seem so serious to me» [3].

As we can see, even a newspaper picked up on a random day illustrates the existence of two dramatically opposite social views on the phenomenon—and that seems to count for something if «by measuring one toe you can estimate the height of the giant» (Hugo 1917, 78). On the one hand, prostitution epitomizes the utmost social misfortune; on the other, it is understood as an easy, even unfairly advantageous fast track to a lavish life of consumeristic bliss and social status. From one perspective, prostitution defines a status that represents the *nadir* of a woman's condition, tarnishing the woman's reputation forever. From the other perspective (one usually espoused by prostitutes themselves, as in this case), prostitution is just an occupation, and if those

[2] Both of the examples here discussed involve freely chosen prostitution engaged in for money, and in this respect they are comparable and relevant for this paper, which is concerned with the social appreciation of the choices underlying these phenomena. The killed girls were of Albanian origins, but there was no forced prostitution trade in the backdrop (a phenomenon which reflects other dynamics, and should be analysed as a dramatically different problem); the perspective dreaded by their mother, instead, was prostitution as a means of gaining one's sustenance, as they were facing poverty after being abandoned by the family breadwinner.

[3] http://mediaset.vitv.it/notizie.virgilio.it/VVMS_445799?ref=notizie.virgilio.it

who engage in it are smart enough to work so as to protect their identity (with some «dissociation,» as the young prostitute said), it even becomes quickly profitable, since it pays well, especially considering that it takes up little time and requires no education or training. As can easily be gathered, however, this opportunity for "easy money" invites a view of the prostitute not as an exploited victim but, on the contrary, as a person who is not playing by the rules, someone who is exploiting an "unfair" path to enrichment, a "free-riding" subject drawing a higher value for her sexual availability thanks to the ordinary, "modest woman"'s unwilingness to put her intimacy on the market.

So we are looking at two extreme judgments of the prostitute as being on the one hand a pariah — an outcast made vulnerable by virtue of her lying beyond the border of respectability (Walkowitz 1980) — and at the same time an artful exploiter who can turn to advantage the status she adopts as someone acting out of the norm. And this oxymoron seems to have very ancient roots. In ancient Ionian Greece, a woman was conceived as an *oikourema*, a mere household appliance,[4] and the only chance she had to escape that condition of slavery and domestic segregation, thus acquiring a personal public identity, was to practice "the trade,"[5] thus descending to the level of *hetairai*, women who were cultured but "public" and hence family-less.[6] And indeed, in Friedrich Engels's well-known work on the family, the rationale for prostitution is tied to the modern family's "unnatural" monogamy, and so like a negative the prostitute embodies all the characteristics that make her an alternative to a wife: She is public; she is free to go with any man and to gain an advantage from that contact; and she can study, educate herself, and have opinions; but at the same time she lacks the moral respectability which "normative" wives enjoy, and with which they are compensated precisely for not overstepping those boundaries.

The same oxymoron is reflected as well in the different official, institutional statuses with which criminal codes deal with prostitution: These range from protecting the

[4] See the words spoken by Iolao in Euripides, *Eraclidi*. This definition is reported by Friedrich Engels (2010, chap. 4).
[5] Engels 2010, chap. II, par. 4: «It was precisely through this system of prostitution that the only Greek women of personality were able to develop, and to acquire that intellectual and artistic culture by which they stand out as high above the general level of classical womanhood as the Spartan women by their qualities of character. But that a woman had to be a *hetaira* before she could be a woman is the worst condemnation of the Athenian family.»
[6] See Lucian of Samosata's *Dialogues of the Courtesans*.

prostitute (which is thus seen as the victim), with a correlative criminalization of the client, as in the Swedish-Norwegian-Icelandic model (see Danna 2013), to the opposite rule under which it is the prostitute (not her client) who is criminalized, as in most East-European countries. It's an all-black or all-white view that is supported, as criminal codes usually do not adopt more refined, complex, and internally differentiated evaluations of this phenomenon.

Views are quite polarized even when it comes to forming a moral appraisal and definition of the nature of the phenomenon. At one extreme we find the view that defines prostitution as an out-of-the-norm situation akin to slavery (Barry 1979), where a woman gives up her power to sexual privacy, with the consequent two corollaries of stigma, on the one hand, and a kind of "compensatory" payment, on the other. At the other extreme we find the opposite view of prostitution as a trade like any other[7] (though often ironically defined as *the* trade par excellence), a trade through which women provide a service and are even empowered (Weitzer 2009) — a view implicitly suggesting that either no stigma attaches to the trade or, if it does, it can and should be explained away and overcome as the carryover of a bygone bigotry.

But, putting aside the (different) question of whether such stigma "should" be overcome, it seems quite naive, in the current cultural landscape, to pretend not to see the evidence of the "mark of infamy" which this kind of "trade" casts on its workers (even if we momentarily agree, for the sake of argument, that a service consisting in giving access to one's intimacy and endorsing the resulting stigma could be considered a trade, an occupation: on this, see, at least, Bernstein 2007, Hardy and Sanders 2010, Chancer 1993 and Kesler 2002). The organization TAMPEP, an observatory that offers a broad view on the phenomenon in Europe (TAMPEP 2009a, 34–49), expressly points

[7] This is the "morally neutral" definition of prostitution adopted, for example, by the international association TAMPEP, with a membership of twenty-five European countries, and which acts as an observatory on the dynamics of migrant prostitution across Europe. As they write (TAMPEP 2009b), «sex workers must be seen as an occupational group.» And «in order to empower sex workers, public campaigns and imagery [...] should be non-judgemental and respect them and their choice of work in the sex industry.» In line with this definition of "sexual work" as a morally neutral occupation is the controversial institution, originating in Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands, of the "sexual assistant" for disabled people who couldn't otherwise be sexually active on their own.

out stigma as one of the major problems widely experienced by prostitutes,[8] and even a sociologist like Weitzer, who is particularly devoted to expressing a positive, empowering view of prostitution,[9] writes that «workers throughout the sex industry experience stigma and condemnation from the wider society, amply demonstrated by public opinion data on prostitution, pornography and stripping» (Weitzer 2009, 221; see also Weitzer 2000, 1–2, 163–35). Moreover, where prostitution is widely accepted as a morally unproblematic practice, the threat of this stigma is likely to rebound on all women, since all of them could in principle be made "public" (Almog 2010, 31).

3. Pornography

From the 1970s onward, pornography has become a mass phenomenon, often acquiring the "light" status of sheer entertainment, to the point of being considered "trendy," something hinted at by media stars in fitness programs that mimic lap dancing and by adolescents (as through sexting: see Ringrose et al. 2012). Yet, even in its realm we can find the same dichotomy, producing opposite views about its meaning and implications, with even more amplified effects. Pornography is often seen as an oppressive and exploitative phenomenon (see Dworkin and MacKinnon 1988; MacKinnon 1993; Dworkin and MacKinnon 1997) that harms women both individually and as a group; yet it has been claimed since the late 1960s that pornography is nothing but an expression of desire and sexuality, and that it actually frees women's sexuality and desire from the taboos of the past (see, for example, Vance 1992; Tisdale 1994; Strossen 2000). Indeed, since the 1980s the star system has seen the rise of some porno-actresses or porno-actors (drops in the ocean relative to the phenomenon) who have shown an ability to at the same time ride the wave of this early 1960s left-wing dogma and blink at one of the most cherished conservative male privileges (namely, easy access to women's sexuality), and that has supplied this idea with an easy "front-cover" validation,

[8] This is especially true of national prostitutes, while migrant ones, finding themselves in a situation that weakens their social ties, are less bothered by this stigma.

[9] Weitzer, incidentally, has been harshly criticised by the codirector of the international association CATW, Janice G. Raymond (2013, xi), for not conducting any empirical research to back up his views of prostitution as carrying positive connotations.

corroborating it even further. In this light, it would seem highly reactionary to condemn such an instrument of civilization.

So views diverge in this realm, too, but they do so even when it comes to defining its subject, namely, the woman being depicted. Is pornography merely providing "information" about the "peculiar" professional activity of the porno-models being depicted," and is it therefore merely descriptive and morally neutral, as the second view claims? Or does it instead carry a broader implication: that what is being displayed—once the mask is taken off—is what any ordinary woman secretly is, namely, a *pornè*, someone who is not only open to sexual encounters but who even draws pleasure from her own depravation? Is the term *whore*, so often used to describe these women, conceived as merely describing a lifestyle or career choice, or is it rather meant to demean women as sexual beings, taking the depicted woman as a symbol for all other women? Are we to see pornography (its etymology meaning "depiction of *pornai*") as a "representation of prostitutes" or as a "representation of women as whores"? Even the lower gradient of intensional meaning of *prostitute*, as compared to *whore*, shows that the latter reflects a part of social meaning (stigma) projected onto the phenomenon that the first word (and associated view) wishes to ignore.

How can we come at the "real meaning" of pornography between these conflicting views? No litmus test can be done on the image itself. After all, a picture of a naked human body is just a picture of a human body. What makes the difference is rather the lens through which the image is filtered, with all the expectations, projections, and cultural schemes through which the image is viewed, as well as the context and the narrative in which the image is immersed. So, if we are to understand whether pornography is really so "politically correct" toward women (not only the ones being portrayed but also, by extension, all other women) we need to step back and sociologically investigate what the main culturally widespread decoding schemes are through which this kind of visual material is interpreted. And what we find (see Weitzer 2000) is far from being politically correct.

The male eye typically projects a suspiciously blameful look onto the way women would behave if unsupervised. This can be appreciated even as we go back to antiquity, as is poignantly expressed on Euripides' tragedy *Bacchae*, where the fantasy of what

their "real" behavior would be, if unchecked, is a malicious one, irremediably keen on "punishing" them by casting on them a light of sexual turpitude and obscenity[10]. It is that fantasy that elicits those feelings of strong blame coupled with excitement that prompts King Pentheus to climb a mountain in order to see the bacchants' naughty behaviour (and, like in the myth of Diana and Acteon, it is the gods' revenge for his dirty and impure look that will cause his "*sparagmòs*").

What this kind of attitude reveals, from Greek tragedy to the consumer's reaction to the pornography now widely available, is that the exceptional capacity of pornography to stoke the sexual imagination of the viewer (typically male) is connected to the fact that what it displays or expresses is not only sex but also a clear power dynamic based on stigma (Verza 2006). In pornography, the woman is twice stigmatized: first within the fictional, narrative pact—where she is often treated with contempt and called a "whore", rather than a prostitute—and then, and even more so, in the reality of the free public circulation of her shame through pornography, where the image of her degradation becomes permanent, no longer retractable, irremediable.

It is pornography itself that, through the inner "revelation" it consists in, *ipso facto creates* the *pornè* — the sexually public woman — by making possible the very indiscriminate and no longer negotiable accessibility of women's sexuality that it likes to blame.[11] And even in this case the stigma resulting from making a woman into a *porné* can hardly be undone by the apparently "light" nature of this kind of material. Just consider how digital technologies have recently enabled the explosion of "revenge porn" (Citron 2013, Franks 2012; Franks 2013, Verza forthcoming), a phenomenon where a woman's "pornification"— sending out sexual images of her which she might have previously sexted herself to a partner or would-be partner — has proven to be a

[10] In Euripides' *Bacchae* the male fear of women who, following Dionysus, leave the sphere of domestic reclusion remaining out-of-control, brings men to mischievous projections, at the same time disquieting and exciting, leading them to interpret even innocent behaviour, like breastfeeding and dancing, like pornography, turpitude and obscenity. As it is well known, this naughty kind of interpretation makes king Pentheus an intrigued voyeur, making filth out of sacredness: an irreverence which, in turn, leads him to his death.

[11] Since pornography, which makes women's sexuality indiscriminately accessible, is such because of the cultural lens it is decoded through, that outcome cannot be contrasted even by the recent "post-porn" movement expressed by so-called "pro-sex feminism" (a definition incidentally based on a false asymmetry, as if being against pornography also meant being against sex!).

very effective and popular means by which to socially destroy her, once she no longer complies with the male's desires.

4. Aesthetic and Sexualized Everyday Grooming

Let us finally turn to the myriad aesthetic obligations imposed on the woman, a "third work shift"[12] requirement that makes women feel compelled to project a sexualized image in public, despite the time commitment, the discomfort, and even the possible dangers that activity poses to her health (think of intrusive practices such as severe dieting, liposuction, and addictive mastectomy). Of course, we are not concerned here with simple requirements of clean, circumstance dressing: dressing codes exist for men, too, but make-up or high-heel shoes incorporate, as standard elements of feminine grooming, a sexual hint that requirements for males do not (for example, there is no such hint in the requirement to wear white shirts). And even if in recent decades the *dictamina* of fashion and beauty have come to assume an increasing importance for males as well, the phenomenon remains incomparably feminine. Yet, even this third element of our triangle is amenable to two contrary readings, for on the one hand it can be seen as empowering,[13] while on the other it could be read as a form of "aesthetic slavery."

For example, what meaning are we to attach to the requirement that a woman wear red lipstick while working at a supermarket that sells cheap personal care products? According to the most widespread view, the care a woman devotes to her looks is simply driven by her own pleasure: She does it only, or mainly, for herself. In doing her makeup and choosing items of clothing from the selection offered by the fashion market, she is enjoying her freedom to express her preferences and identity. But on a different view, this effort to look attractive has the function of magnifying, in the background, the importance of the male gaze to which the woman is subjected, and it expresses and puts on stage her acceptance of the rule that imposes her subjection to an

[12] The expression alludes to a first shift (a woman's day job), a second shift (the household work she is expected to do), and then a third shift that consists in the culturally imposed aesthetic "work" she is required to commit to (see Verza 2014).
[13] See the much-discussed Hakim 2011.

aesthetic approval based on male standards.[14] So, from this point of view, even the standardized "transgressions" periodically "imposed" by fashion (such as low-waist trousers or deep slits) are actually not transgressions at all but are rather codified, anodyne, controlled from the "top." By eliciting a background deference and conformity to trends, they give an illusion of freedom, but it is merely a "safe," "tamed" freedom shielded from any responsibility and from any possible criticism and stigma: It is actually not freedom at all.

This paradigm is perfectly encapsulated by the icon of the *velina*, a young, beautiful, and of course half-naked girl dressed as required, and having no role other than to be smiling all the time and acting as a stage prop on various TV programs: To many girls and women, this image (honed to precision in Italy from the 1980s to the mid-1990s) paradoxically represents the utmost aspiration (see, on this, Ghigi 2013 and Giomi 2012), a real "identity model."

Yet this model of woman is at the same time aspired to and ridiculed: The beauty of a *velina* girl does not secure any respect at all, as is eloquently testified to by some popular kinds of Italian soubrettes of the 1980s and 1990s like the *coccodè girls* or the *cin cin girls*, who would appear on TV game shows where they would dress up as chickens or lose their bras and underpants depending on the way the TV game show would unfold.[15] Despite all that, many women would be willing to do almost anything to gain that kind of ephemeral admiration (Ghigi 2008).

The pursuit of beauty thus suffers from a clear "double standard" of appraisal: The labour of beauty is an endless and exhausting undertaking that gives little credit to those who can measure up to the standard (they will usually be considered frivolous, "just pretty," or props or décor like the *veline*), all the while pressuring women to conform to the model, prompting a wounding discomfort to the identity of those who can't, and encouraging a bias against those who choose not to (see Tolmach Lakoff Scherr 1984, 154; Freedman 1986, 54–55; Cohen 1994, 149-182, 158). In fact, on the one hand, conformity to the common rules requiring women to be happily willing to emphasize

[14] See, for example, Wolf 2002; Rhode 2010; Berger 1972; Verza 2014.
[15] See Lorella Zanardo's video *Il corpo delle donne (Women's bodies)*: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBcLjf4tD4E (accessed 17 Nov. 2014). See also Zanardo 2010.

their sexual allure opens the doors, again, to the circular backlash of the contempt and reproach they are exposed to for revealing their sexual dimension in public: the possibility, at once blinkingly poked at and contextually stigmatized, that they might draw material, social, or career advantages from that (as has even been asserted in a recent defence of an "erotic capital theory": Hakim 2011)[16]—a view that actually parallels the previously analysed "free-rider" view of prostitution and pornography—regularly boomerangs back, as if, in the social appreciation, a sexy appearance would work as a "trump", overwhelming any other woman's genuine merit and giving a pretext for demeaning her and her personal or professional worth. On the other side, however, to be dowdy, unkempt, or shabby (which incidentally means revealing the real colour of one's hair, the real complexion of one's skin, and one's real age) is, again, to expose oneself to bias, criticism, and exclusion, so much so that "candid" pictures showing a woman's blemishes, like adipose bellies or buttocks, double chins or wrinkles, are often by extension and broadly speaking criticized as "pornographic," because they show what it is "shameful" to show, thus making their subject utterly vulnerable. In this light, it would seem that the "pleasure" of looking beautiful and well groomed is better analyzed as momentary relief, than as pleasure[17].

What, in this frame, can explain the fact that most women not only show a lack of resistance to this inescapable shame system, but even actively accept that dynamic?

According to the views expressed by the interactionist approaches to the social construction of identity,[18] when we follow commonly accepted conventions—as by

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[16] The British sociologist's exhortation to women to use their "erotic advantage" on males (actually, quite an old-fashioned return to pre-feminist views) presents itself as a "new" feminist theory; yet, among other things, it points to sex as a shortcut to success, implicitly taking for granted that the (really) powerful subjects to be seduced are inevitably males; second, it underscores the fact that not every woman trying to conform as much as possible to the common aesthetic standards will actually be rewarded for that, since the commonness of the effort will only make the competition harder, pushing the bar higher; third, and most important, it seems to forget that women should have no need to use sex as a barter item (and that, incidentally, has been one of the core messages of feminism since its origins).

[17] This dynamic takes place also outside the Western world: see Wen 2012, 104: «In China today, cosmetic surgery is widely regarded as an investment to gain beauty capital for one's future life in a rapidly changing and fiercely competitive society. To some extent, we should acknowledge women's agency in their body alterations through cosmetic surgery: they themselves are deciding to do this, after all. However, these women's choices to surgically modify their bodies are clearly very much constrained. These women "freely" make decisions under circumstance that they cannot choose, to fit standards they cannot choose».

[18] See Garfinkel 1967; Goffman 1977; Brines 1993.

wearing skirts, makeup, high heels, and the like — we are actually putting on display a gendered identity in order to satisfy our basic need to reassure themselves about who we are.

The interactionist model actually looks quite plausible as an explanation of why women do not rebel against these requirements: As oppressive and even humiliating as these rules may be, conformity to them protects against a threat to identity perceived as much more terrible and oppressive than the rules themselves[19].

Another widespread way of coping with this problem has been analyzed by Deborah Rhode, who argued that what appears to be an unchallenged "acceptance" and endorsement of these rules can be explained by the "no-problem" strategy.[20] This is a tendency of men and women alike to minimize or even deny these forms of gender unbalance: Men would do so because they feel uncomfortable viewing themselves as oppressors; women because they resist the idea of seeing themselves as victims. Denying the problem not only protects everybody's self-esteem to a certain extent but also proves to be an effective short-term strategy for keeping the peace within the family, keeping one's job, and avoiding the frustration of fighting a problem whose roots are so widespread that we realistically despair of finding any solution in the short term.

So there are many reasons that push women towards conformity to the rules. Yet, the dark side of acceptance of the rule of exposure is clear: even in this case, the penalty for complying (as well as for *not* complying) is — once again — shame. Again, when looking for woman's sexual expression, we inevitably run into the threat of stigma, the inevitable "whip"[21] of shame and humiliation that plays an essential role in the whole game.

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[19] Of course, there are also other ways to interpret this lack of resistance to the social and cultural imposition of an aesthetic model (or, similarly, of women's lack of resistance to the unequal division of work within the household). See, for example, Verza 2014, developing the idea of introiection of the dominant model; see also Bourdieu 1989.

[20] Rhode 1991. The "no problem problem" conceptualized by Rhode seems to be an instance of what Martha Nussbaum (1999) later called "adaptive preference."

[21] As Pheterson (1996, 89) wrote, «until that *whip* loses its sting, the *liberation* of women will be in check.»

5. The Game of Shame

The common element to the three sides of the “tricky triangle,” then, is a peculiar circular relation to shame. Shame is the element that makes prostitution and pornography what they are: sexual expressions, unprotected by the shield of privacy, that are dangerous and even lethal to the female’s reputation. The shame cast on the “naked” woman sets in motion a power dynamic that associates its pressure gradient with the tension given by sex, and in this way the two elements produce in combination a new and different molecule which is precisely what makes pornography and prostitution so exciting and so different from sex between a couple. But shame is also the element that presides over and motivates the whole beautification process: the woman who takes care to emphasize her sexual worth implicitly accepts to be defined in those very terms.

Yet, shame is the omnipresent backdrop against which at the same time the *opposite* of these models is realized: the woman who would never act as a prostitute or a porno-model is a prudish, modest, reserved woman, that is, a woman who feels ashamed of her sexual potential and is pressured into keeping it hidden. In this light, all the traditional virtues, like modesty, chastity, reserve, and shyness reveal themselves to be different shades of this very idea of shame that defines woman’s sexuality and desire, while effectively limiting both from within.

And this circular culture perpetuates itself through generations: also in the jouvenile practice of “sexting”, for example, we can find this very dynamic at work: as we can draw from a recent sociological study on the theme (Lippman and Campbell 2014), «Girls in the study were no more likely than boys to sext; however, they were more likely to experience pressure to do so, particularly from boys. Girls were commonly judged harshly whether they sexted (e.g., “slut”) or not (e.g., “prude”), whereas boys were virtually immune from criticism regardless».

In both the realization and the violation of the prescribed model, then, shame acts as the reagent imposing this kind of sexual constraint on women: a culturally imposed, necessary wound to her naturalness and self-esteem.

And so, in the confusing "game of shame," the rules are such that both the violation and the realization of the solicited model are punishable by shame, and the main stigma, whose "whip" curbs any sexually free expression, is the stigma of the "whore."

Shame thus falls on the woman who does take care to use makeup—she is always liable to be defined as "painted like a whore" and to have her public image swallowed up in this sexual dimension. But likewise, at the same time, shame falls on the woman who, on the opposite side of the spectrum, doesn't make any effort at self-grooming, guilty of neglecting to link her image to elements that, in the various situations of her everyday life, would always allude to her sexual function (like wearing red lipstick while working at a supermarket), practically compelling her to stick to that dimension and to never forget it. The woman who wears sexy clothing is subject to the stigmatizing definition: She is "dressed like a whore." But shame falls also on the woman who is clumsily dressed. Shame falls on the woman who honours her "duty to consider" the male gaze, putting herself and her desire on display, showing how much importance she attaches to her seductive potential, how much she cares to invest in her ongoing symbolic subjugation to men: She can be defined as "hot like a whore." But shame also falls on the woman who does nothing to look feminine, thus neglecting this very duty to stay in her place.

And in all these hyperboles, as one can appreciate, the conceptual link that joins the three models—the three sides of the tricky triangle—is quite tangible: the game of shame.

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