

The following is a transcript of the third F-Word podcast, available in .mp3 format from [iTunes](#) or from [the f-word](#). Transcript lovingly prepared by Lynne Miles and Laura Woodhouse.

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Jess: Hi and welcome to episode three of The F-Word's podcast. This time we're going to be talking about porn, but before we get into that, we're going to be played in with 'Pull You Down' by She Makes War.

<short musical intro>

We've got some great contributors this time, and so I'll let them introduce themselves.

Holly: Hello, I'm Holly Combe

Lynne: Hi, I'm Lynne Miles

Finn: Hello, I'm Finn Mackay

Polly: Hi I'm Polly Cassidy

Jess: Okay. So, today we're going to talk about porn. On the last episode of the podcast we had a discussion about how feminists fall out over controversial issues, and porn is exactly that kind of issue so we're going to have a bit of a debate about what we think about it. So we're going to kick off by everyone just sort of giving a little bit of an insight into where they're come from on this issue.

Lynne: Okay so we're gonna talk about porn which is not one of my specialist subjects, but I think my starting position on porn (and you'll probably all change my mind) is that I don't like most of the porn that I've seen; I don't like most mainstream porn; it makes me uncomfortable and I think it affects badly the way that men and women interact with each other. I think the large proportion is greatly unpleasant. All that being said, it does sometimes turn me on and that makes me cross, so I have this kind of ambivalent relationship with all of that. But I don't ... dislike porn as a thing in itself. I think porn's all good; people wanna look at naked people, people want to see people getting off. But what I don't like is the mainstream ... horribleness of it, and I think it's possible to have good porn, I just think there's very, very little of it about and I wouldn't want to see pornography banned, cause I sort of fall on the [anti]censorship side of this argument where I just think that - I just worry about letting the government decide who does and doesn't get to have state-sanctioned jollies. So that's sort of my starting point, but I change my mind quite a lot on these things.

Polly: I find it quite a difficult kind of subject to talk about and think about. I agree with Lynne that I do find it kind of objectionable, and I agree that it's exploitative, and I don't even think that there is such a thing as good porn. I think that all porn is kind of exploitative on some level, but I do sometimes just find that kind of a difficult argument to put out there, and I wish that there was a way of arguing that in a positive way, rather than a way that suggests that you're saying 'you mustn't do that, you mustn't do this, you must do this'. I wish there was a way of saying 'this is a better way to go about things than that', if that makes sense?

Jess: So ... not censorship, you don't think? Is that what you're talking about, not banning it?

Polly: Well ... sort of censorship without censorship. Spontaneous censorship.

Holly: Voluntary censorship! You're talking voluntary censorship?

<laughter>

Jesss: Self censorship! [to Finn] do you wanna...?

Finn: Right, what do I think about porn? Well I'm a radical feminist, so my understanding and my approach to pornography is a radical feminist understanding of that, so I actually wouldn't have a problem with banning a lot, well actually all, of the mainstream pornography titles. I don't think they contribute anything to society. I think – I agree with what people have said earlier; I think most pornography is degrading to women; I think it is objectifying and debasing. The pornography industry is a multi-billion dollar industry largely built, I would say, on the sexual objectification of women, and so I would have no problem banning a lot of those mainstream titles... overnight? I don't think that we'd notice anything terrible happening to our civil liberties if we woke up tomorrow and couldn't go to the garage and buy *Penthouse* or *Hustler* or any of those other titles. I know that there are people out there trying to make pornography in a more egalitarian way. I know there are women's groups and collectives of men and women and there are lesbian and gay groups that are trying to make pornography in a different way, and I say good luck to them. Me personally, I don't think it's a priority. I think that when, you know, we are living in a society where two women are being murdered every week by a male partner, where there are 80,000 rapes every year, I personally don't think it's my priority to go out there and work to make good, better, pornography for people. I think there are... there are higher priorities. But I have nothing against those people who are trying to do that and, as I said, good luck to them.

Holly: Okay this probably doesn't sum up my whole position on it; hopefully I'll be able to cover it all gradually, but something that really strikes me within the pornography debate for me is that I feel that, as a woman, I'm being told what to think about pornography from all sides. On the one hand you've got the kind of very laddish 'soft porn' sort of culture that's around at the moment saying that, as a woman, you should be cool with it, you should be groovy with it, you should think that this is all fine. But on the other hand I also feel that there's a lot of other people, some conservative, some radical politically saying that, as a woman, I ought to be offended by things that, quite often, I'm not offended by and that I don't actually think cause harm. I might look at them and think that they're sexist and one-sided, and feel very resentful that there is a culture, undoubtedly, that caters to heterosexual men much more than any other group, and I do feel resentful of that freedom that that group has, and I feel that, obviously, women need more of.

Jess: I don't know, I think that my view on this has changed quite a lot really. I used to be very much of the opinion that censorship was a bad idea, and that once you start making judgements about porn, and sort of separating some out from others, then you fall into this dangerous area of judging people's sexual expression. But I've changed my mind a bit [since] then. I dunno, I've had a bit of a rethink. I mean, I think that ... I find the range of views people have on this seem to polarise between two opinions [and] I can't really agree with either of them. Which is, on the one hand, it's this completely 'anything goes' kind of anti-censorship idea that, to me, doesn't really allow for a proper critique of what the porn's actually like which is often deeply misogynist. And, on the other hand, just a complete anti-porn position which often seems to suggest that it's impossible to make any kind of porn which isn't objectionable, and I'm not completely convinced of that one either. But ... yeah, like I said, I'm sort of undecided really.

Holly: I agree with a lot of what Jess says about the two dichotomous positions; I do think that there is a bit of a tendency amongst the pro-sex or pro-porn or whatever you – I mean they're all very reductive terms anyway,

which is indicative of the very debate itself, I think – you do get this feeling that if you're anti-censorship there's some expectation that you have to say, 'well you don't critique it' and the moment you start to critique anything you get accused of being censorious, and that's not the same thing. It is possible to take things, unpick them, to say 'this is how... you know, I believe this reflects this' and have a debate about it without actually resorting to censorship. 'Cause I actually think that that's a really bad thing for feminists. You know, I'm a member of Feminists Against Censorship so this is something I'm quite passionate about, but I just think that the powers from above – and this is something that Lynne touched on – they don't have our best interests as women at heart; they will be only too glad to censor us the moment that we say something that's considered explicit, or want to do something that goes against the status quo; they'll be only too happy to censor progressive ideas, and I just think by pandering to censorship, or going to them... it's all very paternal the way that it works, and I think that it will backfire very badly on us if we allow censorship to... well if we pander to it, basically.

Finn: I always find it interesting that people have such a problem with the notion of censorship when we actually censor things all the time. We say some people's 'sexual expression', [what]ever you want to call it, involves getting off on children behaving sexually or adults doing sexual things with children. That, for some people, they would consider their sexual expression, but we as a society have said, 'well, tough. You're not allowed to look at pictures of child pornography; you're not allowed to look at pictures of people doing sexual activity with animals when you might not think that's what turns you on, fine, we'll censor that'...you're not allowed to look at, for example, racist imagery in some cases. Of course, now we have... there's a law going to be coming out about possession of extreme violent pornography so people won't be allowed to look at images that show people who look as if they are dying or dead, or have a life-threatening injury. But actually – so we do, so we censor things all the time in society and I think it's very important that we do, as a society draw our lines; draw our lines in the sand and say 'actually, that's not acceptable; that is a harmful image, it's a degrading image, it's a violent image, and we don't want that kind of imagery in our society or representing our society and what we consider tolerant'.

Jess: I think there's definitely a difference; I don't think it's possible to bundle together something like child pornography with pornography which involves consenting adults, even if it's problematic. Okay, it's a bit more complicated than that in terms of whether or not anyone's being exploited making it, but if you have a situation where there's not exploitation in the production of pornography and... I don't know... I just think that it's very complicated. It just seems difficult, to me, to come up with a definition of what should be banned and what shouldn't be banned that doesn't go too far in the direction of letting people... either letting people just have anything and have any kind of – well, Holly's going to disagree with this – but just have anything go and have the most repulsive, violent and horrible stuff out there or, on the other hand, making it restrictive to the point where it's sort of... its sort of being a bit heavy handed and banning stuff that's not made in an exploitative way and may involve ... I guess, some things that could be considered viable kinks that are not... I don't know, it's difficult. Maybe I'm over-thinking it, but there you go.

Holly: I think that my main fear is that – perhaps it's rather pessimistic – but it's that going down the censorship route that conservative ideas will always take over that if you – I do appreciate some of the points that Finn was making because, using the example of child pornography, to me that's very separate from representations of – because, I mean this violent porn ban, it's going to affect a lot of sado-masochists and, okay, the thorny

issue of consent, a lot of people will say 'well where do these ideas come from? Where do your kinks come from, where do your turn ons – is this all connected to your own oppression?' but I think that even if that's the case, if a grown adult says 'this turns me on, I want to do this', we've got to respect that; we can't patronise that person and say 'I'm sorry, your turn-ons aren't valid. I'm sorry, you're oppressed, you need help, we need to get you out of this'. I find that quite patronising, and I think that the problem is if we do go down the censorship route, before we know it we'll have this really heterosexist, horrible, reductive... you know, the only kind of sex that's seen as valid is this very vanilla expression between men and women and I find that quite frightening, I want something that's much more expansive than that. I do appreciate that there are some problems attached to it because, of course, you look at any one given piece of pornography and you think 'well, what happened between these people?' you think about issues of consent, and I just think that if things are above board then you can have more of an ethical sort of consumerism surrounding it, because people can actually go on a porn site and actually click on something that actually gives them some sort of reassurance that these are trained actors who are there willingly, who are being paid decent rates, who are unionised, all this sort of thing. It does sound a little idealistic, and I think at the moment we're a long way away from it, but that's a route that, that's a direction that I'd like to go in.

Lynne: I think that one of the things that troubles me primarily about issues of censorship and deciding who gets to do what is – picking up on what Holly said – the idea of sort of conservative agendas jumping on board, and I really worry about this whole adage about the enemy of your enemy being your friend and I don't think that's necessarily the case, and I'm really conscious that I don't ... I think that when you start campaigning against things like this you all too often get caught up with a bunch of people you don't want to be caught up with; you get caught up with right-wing moralisers - who I absolutely don't want to be, and I don't want to be aligned with. Even if we happen to have the same opinion on a single issue of pornography, I nevertheless don't want to work with them to achieve that goal, and that's possibly a stubborn thing to do, but I don't think the reasons for us being against this particular thing are the same and I don't want to be all wrapped up in their loud voice about morals and sex and all of that stuff I find really repugnant. So it's not really <obscured by cough>, just the sheer bloody-mindedness of not wanting to let right-wing Christians have their way, maybe that's it?

Finn: As far as I know, most feminists and certainly most radical feminist movements that I'm aware of have never aligned themselves with the Christian right ...

Lynne: It's more the danger of perception, I think actually ...

Finn: Yeah, I completely agree, I'm just saying thank goodness they haven't, but they've been accused of having done so by almost every side and group going. If you look at Dworkin and MacKinnon's work in Minneapolis, for example, where they try to define what pornography actually is, and all the work that they did with the legal system in Minneapolis they never – and they were very clear not to align themselves with the Christian right in America at that time. In terms of the law being discussed at the moment, let's go back and see where that came from with regard extreme violent pornography: it was a trust called the Jane Longhurst Trust, set up after a young woman called Jane Longhurst, who was a teacher, was strangled to death by a man who was obsessed with strangulation porn. Now, I don't have a problem with saying to people, 'okay, it's your sexual desire, it's your sexual wish to get off on seeing women being strangled to the point of near-death. Well tough, I'm afraid. You're not allowed to see that.' We make laws as a society all the time about what is and is not

acceptable. We do not live in some sort of rose-tinted, post-revolution society where everything's egalitarian and everything's equal. There are loads of power-relationships flying around between people all of the time, and they get in the way of anything being fluffy and equal and nice, a lot of the time. And I think it's right that we say what is and is not acceptable. I don't think we can just say 'yeah, go for it; if it's your sexual desire then you have a right to do that'. No you don't. Some people would get off on seeing black people hanging dead from trees. Some people wanna see pictures of young gay men stripped and being hung up from fence posts or dragged around behind cars. So what? It doesn't matter if they want to see that and if that turns them on. We as a society say what is and isn't acceptable. There's been loads of debate going on around this bill. What it says is quite clear. In fact, it defines what extreme violent porn is; it has to. In fact it's purporting to be discussed and come out as a law, so actually does define what it means: showing people who are with life-threatening injuries, look as if they're dead, or look as if they're near dead. Necrophilia is not allowed in this society, you can't... that's another law we've made, some people may disagree with that. I just think to myself: 'Who on earth does want to see pictures of people having sex or doing sexual activity with someone who is near death? And what is that all about?' And I don't think that we should have that kind of imagery out there. I do think it's wrong. There's been a whole lot of debate on the lesbian and gay sites and S&M sites about this and I want to say to these people now – get over yourselves. You are not that important. Nobody cares if you go to an S&M club and whip your boyfriend while he wears a corset. And the Metropolitan Police are certainly not going to be coming round to your house and taking those pictures off your computer and sending you to prison. The police don't even have enough staff to deal with the millions of images of genuine child pornography and child abuse that are on the internet at the moment, and the idea that they're going to start hot-footing it down to bloomin' Torture Garden is a laugh, and I don't know what... these people have got delusions of grandeur, I tell you. <laughs> They need to get over themselves and get a bloody conscience and start getting real.

Lynne: Having said what I just did say about censorship... I think that the bill that's passing at the moment has actually managed to draw a fairly sensible definition of extreme violence and I'm not particularly uncomfortable with the law that's going through at the moment. I think my worry about censorship would be if we tried to ban all pornography - I'd definitely be totally against that.

Holly: I would definitely dispute the idea that there... I mean, that would be all fine, I think, if it were true, but if you look at the Spanner case years ago, these were men piercing each other in the privacy of their own home and someone happened to take a video and some of those men's lives were ruined – they ended up in prison, couldn't get jobs afterwards. You know, these things do happen, and I think if we go down this route it's... I do appreciate the point Finn's making and if that was really the case I can appreciate that, but I just think that these things are actually very real, and these things could actually happen to people, you know, people will be prosecuted for looking at images. And the way I see it, there's a very strong line between a depiction – somebody looking at somebody role playing and something that actually does denote that a crime has been committed. If a crime's been committed, or even seems like it might be, well that can be investigated, and if someone's turned on by someone being killed, I mean there hasn't actually been a documented case of a snuff movie: if you look on Snopes you'll see it is actually a myth. But I mean if a crime has actually been committed I see that as a very different thing from people actually role playing and acting things out, and even if I

look at that, and say 'I think that's problematic and I would seek to deconstruct it' I don't think why I should dictate that person's sexuality. However, I do see a reason to dictate if people are actually being, against their will, injured, or even if people are being killed – that's a criminal issue. In terms of going back to the point Finn was making about the whole right-wing thing, I think it's true that Dworkin and MacKinnon and all that lot, there is a really awful twisting of their words by people who don't like radical feminists, I think there [are] real... horrible comments made about them about the way that they look, about what they say being twisted, I think that happens and I think that's a real issue, but I do think at the same time that there have been examples. I mean I've been in groups before where – there's a right-wing anti-pornography researcher called Zillman who couldn't give a damn about the rights of women – he is Christian far-right, and yet there have been feminists who've used his research to back up what they're saying. I've known people who've done that, and it's caused problems within groups because of it, and I just think we don't want – we shouldn't be associating ourselves with these people because they don't care about women's rights. They just want to forward their own conservative agenda and, unfortunately, the way I see it, there is evidence that there has been a little bit of merging. Less than people would imply. There are people who will all too happily lump radical feminist arguments that have nothing to do with that, and are completely different, and the nuances are completely different, and have lumped them together, but even so I do think that there is a certain amount of rather catastrophic merging in some circumstances, and that really troubles me.

Finn: How anyone can say that snuff movies are a myth... I don't understand that. I wish that that were the case. I wish to God it was. I wish I could live in this lovely fluffy liberal world that some people seem to think we live in. Go and talk to the Metropolitan Police Child Protection Unit alone about the snuff movies that they'd find on the internet of children being strangled, raped with objects, bugged with objects, knives, etc. I wish I didn't have some of the things in my head that I have about some of the things I've read about what's happened and gone on to children, women, young women, boys and men. It's true, whether you like it or not, I just think it's a nonsense to say that snuff movies don't exist when they do. The police are removing a fraction of what's on even the internet alone that we know of. They've seized material that... go and talk to them! If you don't think these things exist... as I say, I have spoken to the Child Protection teams in the Metropolitan Police and other areas, I have spoken to and worked with people in CEOP, the Child Exploitation Online Protection Agency, and I know for a fact from talking to those people alone that there exists imagery of children being killed, violated, injured, tortured. I know that there are films in existence of women being sexually tortured and killed. At the time Dworkin and MacKinnon were working on the ordinance over there in America, a tiny clip from a snuff film was actually shown on... was it 60 minutes it used to be called over there? Some primetime show that used to be on anyway. My friend was actually over there in America at that time when they were doing that, so she happened to see that on the television, which was a young woman being strangled to death in the bath.

Jess: So the point was ... when was it? ... oh here we go ... so it was in the early '80s – 1983 – in Minneapolis Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon came up with this definition of – was it a definition of pornography or just extreme violent pornography?

Finn: It was porn...

Jess: Yeah, they were defining pornography, and this is really interesting to me because it's ... so they came up with this. I'm just going to read some of it. <reading> Pornography means the graphic, sexually explicit

subordination of women through pictures and/or words that includes one or more of the following: a) women are presented dehumanised as sexual objects, things or commodities, or b) women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy humiliation or pain, or c) women are presented as sexual objects experiencing sexual pleasure in rape, incest or other sexual assaults, or d) women are presented as sexual objects tied up, cut up, mutilated or bruised, and it kind of carries on in a similar scenario ... it's just listing a lot of things which basically ... well ...

Lynne: So is that saying that just straight, non power-disparity sex is not porn, then?

Jess: Well, not in this definition, which I find difficult because, yeah I agree all those things are really bad and it shouldn't... well, I don't know, I'm not really sure if I think censorship and banning is the way to deal with it, but it's not acceptable to have that. But at the same time I don't think that that really encompasses how most people think of porn. I think most people think of porn as just sexually explicit material that turns you on, and that goes way beyond this list, and I think a lot of the time this is where I come up against a bit of a brick wall and I just... it's partly because mainstream pornography, as Finn says, it's an industry, and it's totally dominated by that kind of thing, so it's actually, it's almost like anything else is a bit of an exception, and maybe we shouldn't be formulating our approach based completely on exceptions. From my perspective, I just wonder whether or not censorship and banning things - in some cases, yes, in the kind of cases Finn was talking about and in the kinds of cases that are covered by the proposed legislation at the moment, yeah, I can see there's a case for using censorship, but there are a lot of more grey area things. I don't think the average porn that people are looking at is as extreme as the cases Finn was talking about but it's still... quite a lot of it is going to be pretty problematic and I think we need another strategy to deal with that. In many ways, although in practical terms, it's not that easy it's just banning it and you get rid of it, we need some other tactic to deal with things which are a bit more grey area, but ..

Polly: I think it depends on your... not quite definition, but the way you apply the word objectification, which is almost like fashionable in mainstream society for a while I think in the '80s, and then sort of began to sound a bit happening, didn't it? And then if you say... I think once upon a time it was much easier to say 'I object to that because it's objectifying' than it would be now, cause that doesn't carry much weight socially any more, which I think is a sad thing. I think the other thing about it is the kind of ambivalence that the fluffy liberal side of feminism holds towards porn is at odds with the mass pressure towards commercialisation of porn, and porn reaching into different spheres of life, so that while we're sitting debating 'wouldn't censorship be dreadful' or whatever, the other side of the fence is this massive industry that's pushing porn into more and more newsagents and the massive growth of porn on the internet means that the kind of porn that people find acceptable is easier to get hold of and then it becomes more extreme the thing that people get used to. I think that the definition of soft porn and mainstream porn and extreme porn is constantly being kind of enlarged in each of those sections as there's easier access to it. Like, the garage near my house you just go in and at toddler level there's lots and lots of porn, which I'm sure there wouldn't have been once upon a time but... the buggers won't do anything about it, so... <laughs>

Holly: Yeah the kind of... what you're talking about pornification in mainstream society I find that that relates to a very bland, very restrictive, mainstream sort of porn, sort of women with their tits out. It's very boring, it's meant to cater just for heterosexual men, it shows how one group completely dominates all others and, you know, on a personal level - I mean I

wouldn't go down a censorship route – but on a personal level I find that much more offensive than what would be considered hardcore porn, ie stuff that shows erections, and sort-of hardcore sex. That, to me, from what I've seen of it, there's more of a variety of body types and people and tastes encompassed than there is in this sort of soft mainstream porn which is of course really reductive. And it's very fashionable at the moment and you turn on the TV and everywhere you go there is this real... it's all, there's this WAG thing, and it's very tied up with everything, and it is completely tedious, you know, I would like to see that challenged; I would like to see, just something different, and I'm hoping that this fashion will pass, and obviously we've got to do everything we can to challenge that particular fashion but as I say, I don't see censorship as the way of doing that.

Lynne: I read a really interesting article by Marina Hyde last week which was in relation to the Manchester United footballers Christmas party issue and as well as the alleged rape that took place on that night, basically they had this very big, debauched party where they didn't invite the wives and girlfriends, but harvested a hundred of the prettiest girls from Manchester's best shops to come and entertain them. And Marina Hyde wrote this article, which I almost entirely agreed with, which basically said that, as well as all the violent and extreme stuff that we've been talking about, porn on an everyday level is ruining most people's sex lives because it just invades popular culture in this way that just <loud clang> ooops, that was the Victoria Sponge knife ...<laughter> the way that porn just invades popular culture and the way that men and women, especially young men and women who are just growing up and becoming sexually active, just see sex and perceive sex, and it affects their expectations and it affects their notions of etiquette. And she was saying 'why would six footballers' – sorry I should have said there was also this alleged "roasting" of this girl who doesn't claim to have been raped but in fact enjoyed it – and she was saying why would six footballers who could in fact get six women each and have them, why would they actually share one together, and the answer is: that's what they see in porn, and that's what they expect to do. And she goes on to say that she was reading a discussion on Jezebel, which I didn't pick up but which was about women who'd been on first dates and had sex with people and found men coming on their face without even asking. And I think it's sort of shocking if that becomes... the comments on this website went on to sort of conclude that some people liked it and some people didn't but that it was the sort of thing you ought to check if you could do before you did it, you know? The fact that acts like those are coming into the mainstream and that's what people want to do – those are all really, just, horrible insidious aspects of sex and porn that are going round and that's... that makes me really uncomfortable, that it changes the way people perceive their own sex lives, and I think it's really limiting the way people perceive sex.

Finn: Yeah, I just want to agree with what people have said about the mainstreaming of pornography, and how it's creeping more and more into the everyday, really. Members of the London Feminist Network started up a group to campaign against the new Playboy store on Oxford Street, and they did some quite interesting research and came up with a quiz which women give out whilst they're standing outside the Playboy store and this quiz is about Playboy. And it's quite interesting what they found out; they looked into some of the cable channels that – Playboy owns quite a lot of television channels; I think it might even have it's own channel - and some of the programmes that they have on there... We put some of the titles of those programmes they show in the quiz just to show people what Playboy actually is, cause what we found on those demonstrations is that a lot of people don't even know that Playboy is a porn company ...

Lynne: They think it's kitsch and cute

Finn: Yeah, they think it's a fashion company; it just makes clothes and accessories, they don't even know it's got anything to do with the porn industry, and I can't remember them all, but some of the titles that they made were 'Barely Legal Anal Virgins', 'Lesbian Sluts Who Like Men's Piss'. So this is the sort of programmes that this company's making which also, on the other hand, making clothes for young girls. Primary age girls and young secondary age girls. And people in society are dressing their daughters in those clothes, which is the brand of a company which makes that kind of material. I think that's unacceptable, I think it is the porn companies trying to force themselves more and more into the mainstream and, at the end of the day, it is an industry, they are there to make money, so if they can change their brand so that it comes across as a desirable lifestyle fashion brand then that's a good thing for them; then they can still be raking in money from the other side, which is of course the porn that they make. I do think that with a lot of this debate we have to make a choice and you have to weigh up things - and we also shouldn't forget the crossover between prostitution and the sex industry and the porn industry and that there are places, many times, where women in those films are themselves being exploited, and are themselves being forced, and are themselves victims of the sex industry in some way. So we can't forget that, so in that case, those images are actual images of abuse which is of course what Dworkin and MacKinnon highlighted to us when they did the work in Minneapolis. But also, you can't just give people free reign. And at the end of the day you do have to decide what is more important. It still shocks me that people have a problem, to be honest, with this bill going through on extreme violent pornography. It saddens me that people have a problem with that. At the end of the day, you have to weigh it up. Is - okay - I doubt that anyone will, I doubt that anyone will be raiding gay S&M clubs or whatever. I doubt any of these scare-mongering things are going to happen, 'cause I really don't think the police have the resources. The Spanner case - correct me if I'm wrong - was it late '80s?

Holly: Something like that

Finn: It was a very, very different time, where we had a lot of overt homophobia in the state, you had different laws around homosexuality than you do now. It was a very different time. I really doubt the police would do anything like that now. Maybe 'cause they'd be plastered all over the papers, and they're everyday trying to improve their relationships with all sections of the community, not decimate them in one fell swoop, which is what would happen if they did something like that. So I don't think that that's gonna happen anyway, but... you have to weigh up what's more important. Women and children are being abused in the sex industry. Women and children are being raped and sexually assaulted and abused. Let's take it back to where the bill came from with the Jane Longhurst Trust. You have a guy who gets off on seeing women being strangled to near death. He goes out and strangles a young woman. That's where the bill has come from. Is it more important... for people to be able to sexually express themselves in that way and whatever other way, or is it more important that we as a society stand up and say that's not acceptable? You just need to weigh these things up. To me personally, to be brutally honest about it, if one or two people do end up getting arrested at some sort of S&M club, and then it goes to court, and it's laughed out of court and they're not prosecuted which is probably what would happen. I don't think that is a bad price to pay for having a law which stops people from making and sharing imagery of people being hurt and killed. And you make your choices, don't you?

Polly: I'd agree that that's a good bill, I'm not objecting to that. I think the other thing is that what we have at the moment is almost the opposite of

...and quite likely they'll spunk in your face ... <laughter>
Lynne: ...and quite likely they'll spunk in your face ... <laughter>
Polly: Not on your nelly! <laughter> I was trying to think of a comeback for that and I couldn't... oh, that was one I suppose... <laughter> yeah, so... I think there's an answer... the argument has always been 'should we censor these things' when actually it's a far more fundamental... the first battle is the far more fundamental 'should we be completely saturated by these things everywhere we go, and should we have a choice in these things'. Never mind whether it exists, [the question is] whether it should just be an unavoidable part of life and the social fabric?

Jess: I agree with that, and I also think that, although Finn was saying it's not a big priority to have alternatives out there, in some ways I think it is, just because we are so saturated in porn and it is such a part of mainstream culture and I think it's really damaging that, basically, 99% of what's out there is really offensive. And in some ways, given that it's unlikely that the entire population is just going to stop using any porn overnight, in a way it is quite important that people are making alternatives. Although, as I was saying earlier [off the podcast], whether or not the alternatives are any good is another question. Because it has a real effect, as people have been saying, on how people have sex, and how people interact with each other. What's happened, I think, is that, as Polly was saying, the boundaries of what's considered mainstream have been shifting and now you do have this situation where people are watching stuff which is playing around with control and... things which it's possible to do it, I suppose, in a self-aware way, which isn't as problematic, but it's just become just this mainstream thing that people aren't really thinking about. People aren't processing it as this thing which is separate from their lives. They're not thinking about it in the way that they need to if they're going to be engaging in that kind of fantasy, I suppose.

Lynne: Does anyone know any good porn? Can we do some links to some, like, really-not-horrible porn? <laughter>

Holly: I think ...

Jess: Go on...

Holly: Lynne was just asking for some links to some good porn. I think the problem with that particular task is what any of us might pick, somebody – quite legitimately – might be able to say 'oh, but hang on, what about this, it could be interpreted this way' and that's, like 'yeah that is problematic', and I think the risk is that one ends up with this culture where everything that is explicit – almost everything – is deemed as too dangerous, too problematic, to show or to even entertain the idea [of]. For women, particularly for – actually, not particularly for heterosexual women, for all women, actually – but particularly with that because of patriarchal culture and, you know, machismo and all this sort of thing, there's this idea that, going back to what Lynne was saying about the 'roasting'. It's like, okay, how can one woman – let's say one woman, let's look at her – she was turned on by the idea, she wants to have sex with lots of guys in one go – how can she do that in a way that she's empowered? Is it impossible? Is it just inevitable that those men will just completely dominate her, they'll gang-bang her, it'll all be for their pleasure and she's not going to get anything out of it. Is it inevitable? Or is it possible that she can set up a scene where she's getting as much or perhaps more out of it than they are? Is it possible? And I'd like to say the answer is yes, but maybe some people would disagree, I don't know ..

Jess: Can I just say? I read this quote from that girl who was involved in this that I found really problematic, where she said, apparently, after this had

happened someone had asked her if she was okay or whatever, and she'd said something like 'yeah, they said I was a great fuck' or something...

Holly: ... what about them, were they a good fuck? That's the question ...

Jess: But that's it .. is she going into that in an empowered way? And without wanting to put all this on this one particular girl... it's not really empowered just to be thinking about the sexual encounter you've just had purely in terms of whether the other people involved enjoyed it, and not put any emphasis on...

Polly: Yeah, I don't usually use the word empowerment, but if something was... even if you did have a fantasy of that happening, I'd imagine going to a big party with lots of paparazzi outside and picking up three strangers who were well paid footballers to do it in a slightly awkward situation in a hotel room is probably not...

Lynne: six

Polly: ...six, bloody hell... is probably not a particularly empowering situation in which to do that. I think it sounds like it's just for... that's just creating a spectacle. It's not 'this is a way I'll get sexual gratification', it's about 'this is a way of making a sexual spectacle' which is directly relating to porn, and that's what it looks like, rather than what it feels like to your body.

Lynne: Yeah, see that for me is the real issue. That isn't empowered, but that's what we're selling to teenage girls as empowerment. We are telling young girls that it is empowering to go out and get what you want and have sex, but we don't mean that; what we mean is to have sex like they do in a porn film, and it's, like you say, it's nothing to do with how women and men experience sex, and how they feel, and it's heterosexist and it's phallocentric, and it's... it's boring, shit, mainstream, heteronormative sex, and that's what we're teaching young girls to have. And sure as hell, that isn't setting them up for a lifetime of happiness and freedom from oppression.

Finn: I just completely agree with what you said, that is the problem, and I just do wonder how any of us, especially in today's society, really know what human sexuality is all about when we're so... so poisoned – that's a bit of an extreme word, but you know what I mean...

Lynne: No, I think it's right on

Finn: ...we're so polluted with what we see from the mainstream porn imagery. None of us live in a vacuum, so we all see it, we all grow up with it from whatever level it may be, whether it's soft porn in movies that you might see all the time, or what you might see on the front covers of magazines, whatever it is. We all grow up with that, and it shapes what we think sex is, and what we think sexuality is. And as you were saying earlier, the problem is that the boundaries have been pushed more and more and more and more, and things are getting more extreme, just in the every day. So it's a very different time now, and I do think it's a difficult time for young people growing up with all those mixed messages. Less and less, especially for women, is about their own sexuality, their own enjoyment, their own pleasure. Less and less is about that, and more and more is it about: 'How does that man rate you?'

Lynne: The worst thing is they're told that that is what's good to them. It's sold to them as empowerment.

Finn: Yes, and if some man says that they're good in bed, or they think that they look like a porn star whilst they're having sex then all to the good. And it affects men and women – I do a lot of training for professionals in Children's Services on domestic violence and child protection, and I was having a very interesting conversation – you talk about the most amazing things in these trainings, but a man that was in the – you don't get many men come to the training on domestic violence, unfortunately, because they work as professionals in housing the same as women do, but just not many of them come – but anyway – there was this one man there, and he

was talking about his relationship with his last girlfriend and how he found it difficult because she obviously didn't want to be oppressed and used to say he was a bit domineering or whatever, but on the other hand, she wanted to come home and have him throw her about the bedroom and do whatever to her. And he – I mean, sometimes he wanted to do that to her, but sometimes he didn't - and he actually felt that he was quite a softie, and so he was sort of talking to the group about what was he supposed to make of that. And he was actually blaming the woman, and he was saying – not in a horrible way, but he was saying – 'well all you women are talking about porn and equality and how men and women need to be equal so we can have safe relationships, but some women want this...'

Lynne: 'And then you ask for a good hard fucking'

Finn: Yeah, what does that mean? What's he supposed to make of that? And I said to him, that's what women are taught. We don't live in a vacuum, we're taught that's what sex is, this is sexy, that's what we should want, and women are vulnerable to that just the same as he is. Cause what I put back onto him was 'well why did you believe her when she said you're not a man if you don't want to do this, or you're not masculine if you don't want to do that. He knows he's a man, doesn't he? Why does he believe that?' So he's been polluted by all that imagery just much as she has. So men and women – I agree with what everyone's said – are both being affected. All of us are, by this.

Lynne: And, equally, if he didn't want to be doing all of this 'yee-ha' swinging round the bedroom kind of sex, he wanted to be doing something a little more romantic and maybe soulful, why wasn't he asking for it? It's probably that he felt that he wasn't supposed to ask for something like that, and in fact he probably should want to be spit-roasting her with the next door neighbour, or whatever it is.

Holly: Yeah, I agree with a lot of what's been said, but the question that's burning in my mind is [this]: there's a lot of talk about boundaries and things being stretched out and more and more being expected of women and this being seen as the norm, but on the other hand, to turn that on its head, what's the alternative? What is the safest space for women to express their sexuality? Where can we actually figure out what we really want? I would just tend to argue that although everything that's just been said is true – there is this very narrow stereotype that both women and men are expected to adhere to – what is the alternative? How do we find our own individual truth? I would argue that in a society that has censorship and in a society that continually narrows what's acceptable – for all the right reasons, for very noble reasons about wanting to be egalitarian and trying to, I don't know, restrict the amount of danger people put themselves in, I just ask: if we do that, where will that leave us? How will we find that space? And that's not about buying into all the bullshit – because a lot of people make the mistake, when I talk about masochist rights and this sort of thing, they'll make the mistake of saying 'oh just 'cos that turns you on', but actually that's not my preferences. You know, if you came into the bedroom with me and my boyfriend and watched, I think even a radical feminist would probably approve quite a lot <laughter> It's actually quite egalitarian, that's what turns me on. I'm not turned on by the idea of being beaten or a man dominating me, I find the idea completely revolting. But then I know other women who are just as strong as me, who I wouldn't patronise, who I wouldn't say 'oh well, you're more oppressed than me, you're not as liberated as me' who I know do get off on that, and it doesn't mean that they're not strong women. And I just think, well, 'who am I to tell them about their preferences, who am I to tell them what they should be turned on by?' It is very complicated, I'm not really sure what the solution is, how can we move forward in this, I'm not sure.

Jess: But again I think it comes down to the fact that... we're constantly being told... I don't know that you can really separate it out like that because...if we restrain ourselves out of fear of telling people off for what they like then... that's OK, but the porn industry isn't doing that, the porn industry has got a very specific agenda...

Polly: Yeah

Jess: Well, maybe not agenda, but, well, it's a money making agenda which has played itself out in a particular way which, given the society we live in, is really problematic, and I wonder whether or not through quite rightly not wanting to tell people 'you're not allowed to be turned on by that'...

Holly: Just really quickly I wanted to say that it's almost as if the choice being presented to us either kill the debate and go 'oh well, that's it, if you dare to critique it then you're a killjoy' or kind of go down this other route where everything's really restrictive, and I don't really want either of those things. I want to continue having the discussion, I want to continue having the debate, but I don't want censorship to be part of that.

Polly: I think there's a distinction between being turned on by something and doing something just in bed... and having a whole commercial mechanism showing that. In the end it's just going back to that whole spectacle thing, 'cos you can, like with rape fantasies and stuff, the more you make that taboo the more attractive it seems, and obviously you wouldn't want a lot of porn showing rape. So there's a difference between censoring something saying you're not allowed to be turned on by that and censoring something saying that you shouldn't show that as a wonderful thing by making porn about it... does that sound hypocritical?

Finn: I think in terms of where women can look to to figure out where our sexuality might be, what shape it might take, what sex might mean to us, one place we certainly can't look is to the mainstream porn industry, because that has already told us what our sexuality should look like and what our sex should look like, and it tells us that every time we switch on the telly, or every time we go into the newsagents. And most women don't actually find that that actually reflects what they wanna do, or what they find pleasurable, or the sort of relationships that they wanna have. I would say that the majority of pornography is built on the sexualisation and eroticisation of power relationships, and that's a problem in a society also built on power relationships, where real groups of real people are structurally oppressed... which is of course the situation we have here. So we have porn that eroticises power relationships between men and women, where obviously men are in power and women are not, and we have a society where men are in power and women are not. So what we have is porn eroticising that, and I think that is dangerous, I think that is a real problem. In a society where we do see the levels of male sexual violence against women that we do see, wouldn't we wanna err on the side of caution and say actually, where one in five, at a conservative estimate, children are being sexually abused, I've said it before – two women a week are being killed, thousands of women are being raped, isn't it a bit sick that we want to watch films and pictures in graphic technicolour of women and young women being sexually tortured, being raped, having their – whatever – being done to them in a sexual way as if we should be getting off on that... what does that say about our society? I just... it is a big problem, and yes we do need to have the debate. The mainstream porn industry as far as I'm concerned is not contributing anything of artistic value, or anything to women, it's not bothered about boosting women's empowerment in the bedroom department or their sexuality. I would have no problem, if I was Prime Minister, yep, I would ban all of it...I don't think it would be any great loss for us, I really don't.

end of part one

- Jess: Hello and welcome to the second part of this F-Word podcast. This time we're talking about porn, and if you want to comment on anything you've heard so far in Part One, or anything you hear in Part Two, then the way to do that is to go to www.thefword.org.uk and use our feedback form. Now, you can also subscribe to our podcast on iTunes and if you go to the website then it should be easy to find out how to do that as well, or you could search for us on iTunes. Right, so let's get straight to Part Two.
- Holly: There's a porn movie that I like in some ways and not so much in others, and one of the things that really struck me about it was that the men – whereas you think that in a group situation with lots of men outnumbering the woman that 'oh God it's gonna be really traditional and boring, they're just banging her, it's not about her pleasure'. But actually the guys can't wait to get to each other, so a lot of it is her watching and masturbating while they're getting off with each other. And it's all very... I mean it's incredibly cheesy, the music is bad, there's a lot of things to laugh at about it, but I don't see anything – and that is one example – that is violating anybody. Yes, you can argue the whole commodification thing, I think some of the points that Polly made were really valid, about this sort of spectacle and that sort of thing, there is an argument to be had about that, but I think that if everybody has gone into it willingly and to all intents and purposes it doesn't seem to me that these people are being abused or that anyone's being hurt, I think 'well, how can that be wrong?'
- Jess: Just a little anecdote: there's a porn site I've seen which has really long interviews with all the people in it beforehand so you've got a... anyway, it's not very sexy actually <laughter> But, what I was going to say was that one of the areas where I sort of get a bit tied up in knots about this is the distinction between... I mean what we've talked about really has been video porn and maybe images, but there's a lot of stuff which falls outside of that which is text and stuff, but from what I've seen it doesn't... it's also not exempt from some of the problems that you have in other types of pornography I suppose. And I think that gets into a bit more of a grey area because it's not... it's words, but it's still doing what Finn says which is just eroticising the power relationships in our society and, yeah, I don't know if anyone has any thoughts about this because I just get, ya know, there's no person involved other than the person that's writing it...
- Polly: And the person reading it
- Jess: Yeah and the person reading it obviously, and it's still doing the same thing.
- Finn: I just want to say quickly, one thing women did at the height of the women's liberation movement to think about and explore their sexuality was to get together in groups known as CR, or consciousness raising groups, and talk about their own sexuality and talk about sex and their own fantasies and what that meant and where they came from, and how to deconstruct that, and how they felt about that, if they liked certain things but thought they were really dodgy and what did they think about that. I think it's a bad thing that those sort of things don't happen any more, and we have come a long way backwards since the '70s and '80s of the women's liberation movement. There is a lot of stuff now that doesn't happen and should, and a lot of stuff that happens now – like you say you go into your garage and the porn titles that you see... it's the same everywhere, I go into corner shops that I see... where I used to live in Leeds there's this corner shop had loads of porn in there, including stuff like, there was one called 'schoolgirls on tour' and stuff like this and you just think 'that would not have happened in the 1970s' <laughter> it just wouldn't.
- Polly: The newsagents near me you used to go in and they'd be reading porn and kind of look up from it and like <laughter obscures speech> how can you do that all day behind a till...
- Jess: Oh God yeah

Holly: Yeah, a reflection of that I've found a couple of times when I've gone into a sex shop and you find that the person working there is really wry and a bit kind of 'ooh it's a woman coming in, she's going to be really shocked and a bit fluffy, I'm gonna really patronise her now' and when you're not shocked and they ask you a question and you say 'well, what I'm really looking for is this' and say something quite explicit about what you want, usually it'll turn out that it's not even there, it's not even catered to, so that's it. But they're quite surprised because they expect that they're going to sort of be able to have this kind of game of - well I suppose to be fair this has only happened to me a couple of times - this sort of game of dominance where you're the little lady that doesn't really belong here and that is a sign of, you know, women are really excluded from these places, it's not for you. You're there to serve if you're in that sort of space: you can be a woman starring in something and you can get spunked on, but you're not actually there as a consumer. And I do appreciate proper anti-capitalist arguments about how we're not here to be bought and sold any more, people are giving up their time and themselves in order to make money and there is something wrong with that. If someone takes an absolute anti-capitalist stance, I think I can accept a complete blanket anti-sex work, anti-pornography stance, but I think anything less than that, if we are accepting that capitalism exists in the society we live in - and as I say, I can't stress enough that I'm all for an alternative argument, I really want a really good Marxist economist to come along and make everything right for us - but I think, in the absence of that particular argument being brought forward, I think that sex and pornography and all these areas are areas just as much as any others where sexism is reflected and we should be tackling those incidences of sexism without actually saying 'oh well, there's no hope in that context because it's all designed for men, it's not designed for women, so just shut it down'. I think, well... I say, that's incredibly pessimistic, does it have to be like that?

Polly: I have a friend who was telling me a story about - I don't know if it was in the '70s or '80s - but there was a really seedy sex shop that opened near her, and her and her friend used to arrange to go in there with their shopping bags and their headscarves and stand in the middle of the shop going 'Oh 'ello Doreen, how's your son coming on, what've you got for your tea, I thought it might rain again later' <laughter> They did this on a daily basis for months and the shop owner kept calling the police... <laughter>

Finn: Really? No way!

Jess: How dare they!
<laughter obscures speech>

Finn: Yeah there's this guy on the internet who has a lot of feminist stuff on there, he considers himself a second wave feminist, and he put something on his website suggesting that men should take the campaign against sex shops and porn shops by peeing in them <laughter> and so he was saying that these places are... he was also talking about community problems around sex shops and porn shops and how people do hang out there and drop litter and men piss up against the walls and there's a lot of residents who get annoyed about that kind of thing. He was saying a lot of what they've got in there is rubbish, and is horrible stuff anyway, so men should take up the fight and when they next pass one just walk in and piss on the floor <laughter> And I was thinking, yeah great idea, but you'd have to be quite brave to be doing that

Lynne: It would be funnier if the women pissed in it <laughter>

Holly: Yeah, yeah, I was thinking that

Finn: Yes but you see would it, because I think it would be much... because he was saying... he made the point that it's safer and quicker for a guy to go in and do that. I mean...

Lynne: Practically speaking

Finn: Yeah I can just imagine going into a sex shop as a woman and pissing on the floor, yeah you may get sexually assaulted I mean that would be quite dangerous.

Polly: You could pee out of one of those cute lady tubes <laughter>

Lynne: Who would have thought this discussion would involve lady tubes?! <laughter>

Finn: <to Holly> But you know what you were saying about... it doesn't have to be one or the other. I'm not saying, ya know, as I said, I know collectives of people, men and women, I know lesbians who are making porn: good luck to them. Fine, try and do something different, of course human sexuality is important to us, of course sex is important, fine, go and do that, but... what on earth are we getting from the mainstream porn industry? Apart from a load of negative stereotypes? What on earth is it giving us? This censorship thing it's like, 'ooh censorship has suddenly become a bad thing!' We censor things all the time in society, we have laws about all sorts of things, it's not necessarily a bad thing. Yeah, ya know, get rid of the offensive, narrow mainstream porn industry, it'd make more room for all this other stuff people keep going on and on about.

Lynne: Ah, but you can't legislate that.

Finn: You can legislate it <laughter>

Jess: Any volunteers to create the feminist version of the BBFC for porn? <laughter>

Polly: The radical feminist parliamentary party <laughter>

Jess: I was gonna say actually that I work just round the corner from [the sex shop] Sh?

Lynne: a Shh!

Jess: Which is... it's a completely... I think men are only allowed in there if they're...
 Finn: accompanied by a woman

Jess: Yeah and they totally, it's like totally not this really horrendous sex shop and, actually, it's perfectly possible to do that, and there's a really good example of an alternative...

Lynne: They don't sell any porn

Jess: Don't they?

Finn: They do, they sell <speech distorted>

Holly: You see, again, maybe this is my own brand of pessimism here, but I just have this vision that much as I would like to believe that this big space will be created for alternative pornography, I actually think that it would just create a restrictive environment where everyone would go 'ah you hypocrites, we censored things for you, no we're gonna censor you, ha ha! nothing'. Because there's this, I don't know, I just think this sexual conservatism is just so dominant within society, and a lot of this soft mainstream porn stuff, that is deeply conservative, you know it's all part of the same thing. You see people that get their tits out and it's like 'ah well, it's classy, it's not porn' and all this but it's like, well what's wrong with being, ya know, if a woman's in pornography it's very loaded with that 'oh well they're slags', and it's like 'oh my god, this is just so depressing'.

Polly: I'm just imagining future generations trying to campaign against the use of the sea in alternative porn, 'you may not have any shots of the sea, it's objectifying the sea!' <laughter> 'look at the waves lapping upon the sand, it's so clichéd!' <laughter>

Finn: What, so in the future we'll have people who are very tasteful and campaign for good taste in porn, bring it on!

Jess: Yeah I'm all for that actually. One of the worst things about porn that I've seen is just that it's really, really...it's just so cheesy, it's cringe worthy, I dunno <to Holly> go on.

Holly: What you were saying about cringe worthy porn and clichés, my theory is that the reason that's the case is because yeah on the surface we've got

this very superficial 'oh porn's cool, porn's OK', but it's paper thin and when you actually unpick it it's actually got these really conservative values. One of which is that a proper actor wouldn't dream of doing porn, it's simulated sex at the most, and they wouldn't be seen to be doing that because it's a bit lower and a bit dirtier. And the reason we've got that is that people with real acting ability would obviously not – this isn't always the case, by any means, I mean you read about actors that have done a porn movie - but there is this real sort of separation. And I think if you had a society where it is absolutely fine and there are things in place to make sure things are consensual and people can actually check things properly to make sure that everything is all above board, I think if you really had that society you'd actually find a lot better porn being made because people with very real acting skills, proper acting skills, would be able to do these things. Of course I do realise that something that we would have to bear in mind with that is that we wouldn't want a culture that suddenly, as an actor, you're suddenly expected to do pornographic scenes, you have to actually have sex for real, that shouldn't happen. It's always got to be something that people are absolutely able to say 'I don't want to do that', but their reason for saying I don't want to do that is that there is a culture that says it is OK to do it, you're not a dirty slapper if you do it, it's not...there's nothing slutty about it, but it's not expected either. And again, I realise that's very idealistic but that's the vision that I have in mind.

Jess: But I think that the shame that's heaped on women who are in porn is a good indication of the message it really sends out and, you know, the fact that the interpretations that society puts on women in porn, if you think about the fact that...I just think that says a lot about...when people are saying...well the pressure you were talking about at the beginning, the pressure to accept it and be cool with it and yet engage in it...it's this whole slut thing.

Holly: It's this superficial 'it's cool' but actually you will be judged harshly if you are involved in it by the very same people who say 'oh ha ha it's all cool'

Jess: Yeah.

Polly: The main criteria for appearing in porn are being able to act, well, being orgasmic, and having a good body, isn't it, and you're never going to have a situation where people say yeah, your body's not that good but you've got really great <laughter> you know, you'll be really good at reciting...

Finn: Two lines an episode

Polly: Yeah, I mean people don't watch porn for the acting, they watch it for the... sex.

Jess: It's like I was saying about the boring interviews...

Polly: Yeah. It's kind of like one needs to blend it with other genres and that would make it more respectable, it wouldn't be stigmatised.

Finn: Well I for one am certainly not saying that women in porn or women who work in the sex industry are slags or slappers or anything like that. And that's one of the feminist arguments against these industries, it's not coming from some sort of moralising, Christian, or any sort of other religious place where we think those women are dirty. In fact, that is society's prerogative, it is the masculine double standard. Men want, supposedly, or are taught to want, women that look like porn stars, and yet they think they're slags, so that's something masculinity and male sexuality has to grapple with. And it plays itself out in our movies, and newsagents, magazine stores all the time.

...
Jess: But I think there's more to be done in establishing the distinction between why feminists object to, or may have problems with porn, or some porn, and why right wing fascists...

Polly: Yeah.

Jess Yeah, and I think there was a protest last year some time against lads' mags and I just saw the video of it and, I dunno, obviously it was just a little snippet [of] video, it was just sort of...they just seemed to have plastered all these porn pictures basically from lads' mags and said that's what's objectionable, and I think that doesn't articulate for me that it's not just the fact that it's a naked woman that's a problem. And if you don't make that distinction in some way – maybe it's difficult to sum it up in a catchy way – but I think there's a big risk that people in general who are not conversant with it do confuse the two.

Holly: Yeah, and I think there is a very...no matter which way you look at it there is a very real risk that women working in those industries will be judged. I can't stress enough, I think Finn's actually right, I don't think that radical feminists are there saying – I mean obviously there's grey areas, you do meet people who at first it seems like a radical feminist argument and then it seems very conservative – there is definitely a separation that you've got this very conservative group with this double standard and slags and all this sort of stuff. But the problematic way of looking at things that I see in some strands of feminism is that women are almost left with this choice that if they are working in those industries it's either as a victim or a traitor. And that is oversimplifying it, but it just feels like that is the only choice they have. You know, I wonder about some feminist groups: if a sex worker joined with the view that she's not looking to exit, she wants to do this, but she is a feminist and she wants to campaign alongside other feminists, how would she fit into some groups where there's a strong anti-porn presence, how would she fit in, would she survive it? Would people – and I have no doubt that people would try to include her, they would try to... but I just think there would be some bones of contention that would just mean that if she was outnumbered she almost would end up being forced out. And I'd like to think that's not true, but it just seems... I dunno, I just can't help but thinking that that is what would happen.

Jess: I'm sure Finn's got something interesting to say about this...

Finn: I just think that's a total red herring, I just think that's a total red herring of an argument, I think, ya know, we can sit round and talk about let's bash radical feminists...

Holly: Oh no...

Finn: Well, to be fair, that's what a lot of your comments have been doing. Alright, you have a problem with radical feminism, fine, fine, so do most people...

Holly: Noooo

Finn: In the world, so that's fine. But it's just, that argument is just a total red herring, I don't know wha...

Holly: Why?

Finn: Why? I mean, people who work in all sorts...anyone can be a feminist...

Holly: Mmm

Finn: People who work in all sorts of industries are feminist, I mean, it's a red herring because a) we don't even have a large, mass feminist movement in Britain today. The idea that people from...anywhere! are just popping down to their local feminist group... <laughter>

Holly: No, this is my experience...

Finn: It's a dream...

Holly: It's not a dream...

Finn: This is not happening...

Holly: It is...

Finn: I work alongside women who... I have actually campaigned... to be honest, I have worked alongside women who've been working as prostitutes, and in the porn industry, but women who are feminists and who are campaigning on lots of different issues and that happens to be what they're doing for their job or to make money. What I've found in every... in

those cases, is that both those people left the industry, and then identified themselves as having survived working in that industry. If they did it for whatever reasons at the time, largely because they needed to make money, to pay themselves through their MA, or pay themselves through whatever it was they were doing at the time. Fine. I have also worked alongside a lot of women who have worked as prostitutes but who do no longer, so... I dunno, yeah, I answer that a lot of feminists I know...

Lynne: So are they either victims or traitors? Could you work alongside someone who was an active sex worker...

Finn: Well, I have...

Lynne: Who had no intention of leaving...

Finn: Well, I have, because for a while, for a period of time, that is what those women said. They had no intention of leaving, as far as they were concerned they were exploiting the men who were willing to pay them for doing something that they weren't that bothered about doing, so they were the ones getting the better end of that deal...

Lynne: And they subsequently changed their minds.

Finn: But, after a while, of doing it, two years in one case and more in the other, they then actually decided that wasn't the case. So... I don't actually think that a lot of... I'm a radical feminist, I'm a radical lesbian feminist, I like to think that I'm not an incredibly judgmental person, I certainly am not about blaming women. I will go out of my way never to blame women. I don't blame women, to be honest, for any of these things. You play the game: we didn't write the rules of the game, and women will play the game to get by, to survive, to make the best, to do what they wanna do, in a...by rules that they didn't create. Good luck to them.

Polly: It would be kinda nice to think that the only form of discrimination that sex workers might face would be from radical feminist <laughter>

Holly: Oh God no...I'm not suggesting that...

Polly: I don't think that'd be the most serious group that, the most serious problem as...

Finn: We have that much power...

Polly: I mean, 'I was enjoying working as a sex worker until the radical feminists got onto me' <laughter> 'they hired private detectives and they came to find me with their radical ways!'

Holly: I do kind of feel that my comments have kind of been misunderstood a bit, I mean, to say that I have a problem with radical feminists is just not true, I find them very... I mean these are very restrictive terms anyway...

Finn: Well, they're your friends!

Holly: Well yeah, they are! Yeah, as Finn just said, some of them are my friends and that is true <laughter> that is true, you know I have friends of all sorts of different feminist persuasions, and I would even say that some of my views... I mean, like anybody within any political movement, there are some issues where people would consider my views less radical, but the there's others where I'm completely and utterly hardline and I would share that particular platform with radical feminists, so to say that... I dunno, the whole term of radical feminists is problematic for me because it means that there's some idea that if you're not a radical feminist, or not seen to be a radical feminist by definition, then you kind of think a little bit of oppression is OK, you kind of think a little bit of patriarchy <laughter> 'I'm alright with that, I'm cool with that And it's like, no, actually, I'm not fucking alright at all, it's just that there's different perceptions on how best to go about things. So I do want to stress really really fervently that, you know, I don't have a problem with radical feminism. I owe a lot of my thoughts and my beliefs to that strand [of feminism], you know, I wouldn't reject it at all.

Lynne: Can I open a new feature which is going to be called Lynne's stupid question corner? <laughter> I'm pretty sure I've got the definitions down, but I never done feminist politics, so for all those people out there right now

who'd like to ask this question but haven't: so far as I understand it, radical feminism is all about saying 'we didn't create the system, we can never create a fair situation within this system, therefore the only viable option to us is overturning the system and creating a new one'. Whereas other strands of feminism are more geared towards working within the system that exists. Is that a fair...? 'Cos I'm not actually sure, so I'm handing over to Finn.

Finn: Well, it gets kind of complicated because then of course you have revolutionary radical feminists...

Lynne: I missed that...

Finn: Then you have radical feminists, then you have revolutionary radical feminists. So obviously revolutionary feminists were, yes, very focused on, on... having a revolution, yeah, turning it over, we don't want a place at the table, we wanna knock the table over and start again. And I think, yeah, radical feminism is really about that as well, I s'pose, ultimately, to me, yes, it's saying ultimately we do need a revolution in society, we need to reshape society, and that women must be at the forefront of that revolution, because women understand most what it is to be oppressed within a patriarchal society. But for me, what defines radical feminism is that I believe the keystone, the foundation of women's oppression, is male violence against women. Whereas you would find some other schools of feminism that would say it was the family or it was the economy. So socialist feminists obviously will say it's the economy, and the family, and it's women's role within the family, women are oppressed financially, if we had equal financial power it would be totally different...

Lynne: I think that's probably me <laughter> I think that's my label <loud laughter>

Polly: At last!

Holly: Can I just say that I think mine would be all of the above, basically.

Jess: Yeah, probably me as well. Yeah, I think maybe that could be possibly a subject for a future podcast, going over exactly what all the different...

Polly: What kind of feminist are you?

Jess: Yeah. Maybe we could have some sort of tickbox quiz on The F-Word <laughter> But, Finn, I had a question for you too, which is that, I was interested that your perspective doesn't seem to be that it's impossible to create any kind of pornography that isn't patriarchal and oppressive, but... I don't know, when I've spoken to other radical feminists about this it's not the impression that I've got from a lot of people, and what you really think about the fact that some people just don't seem to think that's possible. Which is a real issue for me because I feel like it's just... I don't see how it could be impossible to do it.

Finn: I mean, yeah, you will find some people who are just very, very radical and who will say porn is always gonna debase somebody, it's always gonna... you know, if it's male porn then it's debasing to men, that anyone should be objectified is debasing to a human being and is degrading to a human being and so you just cannot ever have that. I do think that porn can be done differently in a way that isn't objectifying, that doesn't take people's power away, that doesn't take people's dignity away, that doesn't harm them, that doesn't glorify violence or anything like that. I think that can be done, and as I said, yeah, I don't think that's incompatible with a radical feminist analysis. In fact, most people that I know, you know, would think the same. So, yeah, as I said, it's not my battle, I wouldn't make it my priority, I'm much more concerned about the fact that men rape and kill women and children every single day and get away with it. I am much more concerned about fighting against that, than I am about fighting for porn for women made by women, or whatever it might be. And I do still don't think it's that much of a high priority, I really do think, when you sit down and think about the figures and the sort of violence that we're living with... why on earth aren't we giving over our town halls and our school gyms to

women fleeing violence. I was actually just this morning reading the map of gaps that the EAW coalition did. One in three local authorities in this country don't even have a refuge for women fleeing domestic violence. I mean, that shocked me. That's just...it's ridiculous. So we're living in this terrible, terrible society where male violence against women is at epidemic levels. I am gonna spend my time and energy trying to do something about that, before I would go out and make it my life's work to create egalitarian woman friendly porn. But, some people are, and we can't all do everything.

Holly: Mm, yeah, that's what I was gonna say

Finn: And good luck to them.

Polly: I think part of the problem with porn is that... or with kind of picking your fights in general, is that... well, the thing that gives me a headache, is that everything kind of feeds into each other. So you can see porn influencing domestic violence and rape, and then you can see that influencing women not going out, and you can see women not going out as leading to other problems, and everything sort of rolls into one. And I think that porn is one of those things where it's like, does that reflect the way that women are viewed in society, or does that create that view of women in society? or rarara... and that's the sort of thing where I just sort of go: 'Oh, God, let's just sort of, you know, write a letter to the *Radio Times*...' <laughter>

Holly: I mean, whichever way you look at it, I would suspect that something that we can all agree on is that whatever your feminist perspective, there are people everywhere telling people what to think, what to do, how to be, it's all about, you know, other people... This is a problem that we have, whichever way you look at it, and of course different feminists will have different ideas on where that is most severely manifested. And I don't know what the solution is, I mean this was all part of the debate last time, about sort of how we can bridge the gaps with contentious issues, because obviously, as we are all self-identifying as feminists, there are things which we are united on, undoubtedly. I mean, during this conversation we've had moments where we've all laughed together, where things have really resonated for everyone, and I think that's something that we have to always really hold on to as a movement to stay strong as a movement. Even if there's things that different factions are very much disagreeing with each other about, we're all agreed about one thing: that basically there is this reality – and to me this is the definition of being a feminist – called patriarchy, that someone who's not a feminist might argue that it doesn't exist and it's all a myth. But, I don't know, someone might write in and argue that actually I'm a feminist and I don't think this, but so far that's the thing that I think we've all been united on, that there is a power relation that says that men should be in charge. And yes there's all this chivalry that complicates it and women sort of subverting that and all this sort of thing, and men's money and men as wage slaves and women as domestic slaves: it is more complex than that argument can sometimes give it credit for, but basically the underlying problem, well, is patriarchy, is the fact that it's considered right and proper for men to be at the top and at the head and for women to be in a private sphere and sort of controlled by that. Obviously we all want to do something about that, but we've all got very different ideas on what. <applause>

Jess: Well, I think we're pretty much there, I think we've pretty much done this

Polly: I think we've pretty much sorted it out <laughter>

Lynne: With nothing but a few chocolatey mini bites! <laughter>

Finn: We've solved the problem!

Lynne: Good work, job done! <laughter>

<music plays out>

