

Rhesus Pieces

From JAMA (The Journal of the American Medical Association)

January 12, 2005

By Gene Weingarten

Even though they are its primary consumers, men believe that pornography is a terrible, awful, sad, sick problem facing America. This is the official position the enlightened male must take if he ever wants to have actual sex (with an actual woman) again.

And I am right on that bandwagon. There are many things wrong and vile about pornography, particularly the disgraceful way it objectifies really hot women.

Women are always reminding us how rotten and pathetic we men are for peeking even maybe once or twice at naughty Web sites. And they are right. We enlightened males know that these urges of ours are not biological imperatives hard-wired into our brains, but symptoms of our weakness and the skewed values of a sexist society. This is why, on behalf of enlightened males nationwide, I was enormously distressed to hear about a new study by scientists at Duke University that shows that male rhesus monkeys will actually forgo nourishment to look at photographs of naked female monkey bottoms.

Gina: You were not distressed at all. You were smug. You were practically simpering with delight.

Gene: Let me introduce Gina Barreca, an expert in feminist theory and a regular contributor to this column.

Gina: You love this study. Men love any pseudoscientific justification for their simian behavior. This is no different from the bogus theory that excuses men's marital infidelity by suggesting that it is natural, a Darwinian adaptation to spread their seed and propagate the species.

Gene: But this one is a scientific study, by actual science people, conducted in an actual science place! Fact: Male monkeys paid a price to see monkey porn.

Gina: It's ridiculous on its face.

Gene: Why?

Gina: Why on Earth would male monkeys pay to see up-close pictures of naked female monkey butts when, any time they wanted, they could just walk up to a female monkey and inspect her naked butt? Female monkeys do not generally wear Prada jeans.

Gene: Maybe, just maybe, the male monkey would rather look at the pictures than go through the whole rigmarole necessary to be permitted to inspect the female monkey butt. Maybe he doesn't want to have to first bring the female monkey a nut, which she will reject, so he then has to bring her another, better nut. Maybe he doesn't want to have to chatter in an engaging fashion, while she sits on that butt and judges his chatter against the chatter of other male monkeys. Maybe he doesn't want to have to first carefully groom himself of all his lice, except the really nice, fat

ones, which he will leave for her. Maybe he is just tired of the whole complicated rhumba and will happily pay the price of giving up an apple juice in order to avoid the dance and take his jollies elsewhere. What I am saying is that maybe this exhausting ritual helps foster pornography (which, as an enlightened male, I of course continue to find disgraceful).

Gina: You're probably misinterpreting this experiment, anyway. It may not even have implications about pornography.

Gene: I have on the line here Duke University neurobiology professor Michael Platt, who conducted the study. Professor, do you see this as possibly explaining male interest in pornography?

Prof. Platt: It raises that issue, yes -- that there might be a biological reason, a good adaptive reason, in support of a male's interest in looking at photographs of the sexual areas of females.

Gene: I rest my case.

Gina: Professor, did you find that the male monkeys preferred skinny, nearly emaciated monkey butts, or, in fact, as I suspect, did they prefer fully rounded, healthy, substantial monkey butts of the sort that might belong to a female monkey with a full life and responsibilities, who has better things to do than starve herself to conform to some artificial, wildly oppressive, highly irrational and uniquely male-human ideal of beauty?

Prof. Platt: Well, we didn't find evidence that they discriminated amongst the different rear ends, but we didn't go out to test that.

Gina: I'll bet you didn't. Did you test to see whether female monkeys wanted to see male monkey butts?

Prof. Platt: No.

Gina: Were any woman scientists involved in the experiment?

Prof. Platt: No.

Gina: I rest my case.

Gene: You haven't refuted anything. We can't end the column here.

Gina: I think it's the perfect end. In fact, I'd pay to see it.

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