



City Research Online

City, University of London Institutional Repository

Citation: García-Favaro, L. (2015). 'Porn Trouble': On the Sexual Regime and Travels of Postfeminist Biologism. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 30(86), pp. 366-376. doi: 10.1080/08164649.2016.1150937

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version.

Permanent repository link: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/23944/>

Link to published version: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2016.1150937>

Copyright: City Research Online aims to make research outputs of City, University of London available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. URLs from City Research Online may be freely distributed and linked to.

Reuse: Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

City Research Online:

<http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/>

publications@city.ac.uk

Favaro, G.L (2015) 'Porn trouble': On the sexual regime and travels of postfeminist biologism. *Australian Feminist Studies* 30: 366–376.

ABSTRACT

In this article, I explore the emergent relationship between feminist media studies/cultural studies and the field of Evolutionary Psychology (EP). EP scholars increasingly conduct research on media and popular culture. At the same time, media/ed texts are increasingly marked by EP discourses. I take as my focus commercial women's online magazines produced in the UK and in Spain and accessed globally. Specifically, I explore a recurrent thread in their discussion forums: women expressing confusion, concern, disappointment, hurt and/or self-doubt, and asking for advice on discovering that their male partners consume various pornographies. A feminist poststructuralist discursive analysis is developed to explore both peer-to-peer and editorial advice on such 'porn trouble'. I show how pseudo-scientific discourses give support to a narrative of male immutability and female adaptation in heterosexual relationships, and examine how these constructions are informed by EP accounts of sexual difference. The article offers empirical insights into the penetration of EP logics and narratives into popular culture transnationally. Advancing the notion of 'postfeminist biologism', my analysis contributes to feminist interrogations of EP's ongoing popularity in the face of sound, longstanding and widespread criticism of it as scientifically flawed and culturally pernicious.

Introduction

In this article, I explore my encounter as a feminist media and cultural studies scholar with Evolutionary Psychology (hereafter EP), examining both how EP discourses mark particular popular cultural advice texts about gender and pornography from Spain and the UK, and how these discourses are given support by EP scholars who are themselves increasingly conducting research on media and popular culture, including on pornography. In mapping these travels, I also advance 'postfeminist biologism' as a pervasive, transnationally travelling ideological formation. My use of the term 'biologism' here refers to the practice of mobilising reductive and essentialist biology-centred accounts to explain human ways of being and acting in the world.

The first section of the article brings together the literature on postfeminism as a cultural sensibility with EP scholarship on sexual difference. The second and main section offers an empirical investigation of editorial features and user discussions about men's pornography use in commercial women's online magazines accessed by Spanish and English speakers worldwide. I conclude by arguing how these demonstrate an invigorated and distinctively postfeminist mode of biologism, heavily informed by—and informing—EP.

The Sexual Regime of Postfeminism

The concept of postfeminism designates a sociocultural climate wherein gender equality is assumed to have been achieved, and where, as McRobbie (2009) has argued, a selectively defined feminism is simultaneously asserted as common sense and fiercely repudiated. Building on these ideas, Gill (2007) has proposed an understanding of postfeminism as a contradictory sensibility intimately linked to neoliberalism. Elements of the postfeminist *sensibility* include the 'sexualisation' of culture, where aesthetics, scripts and values borrowed from pornography not only suffuse the media but have entered the everyday, together with a reassertion—and revalorisation—of ideas about 'natural' sexual difference grounded in a heteronormative framing of gender complementarity. Closely informing these notions

is the popular self-help literature on gender relations and heterosex that soared from the 1990s, a phenomenon spearheaded by John Gray's Mars–Venus texts, which have become central to postfeminist media culture and have strongly influenced other popular genres, notably women's magazines (Gill 2007). This literature represents women and men as 'internally undifferentiated categories' (Cameron 2007, 55) that are complementary though 'fundamentally and *properly* different' (Potts 1998, 154). It promotes the idea that such difference needs to be acknowledged and accepted rather than denied or problematised, as well as advancing a 'different but equal' (Cameron 2007) 'no-blame' approach to conflict (Gill 2007). The reanimation of discourses of sexual difference and aggressive 'gender profiling' (Ruti 2015) in postfeminist culture is commonly connected to developments in the life sciences, including genetics and neuroscience. Especially influential has been the rapidly expanding field of EP.

EP grew exponentially during the 1990s, in the context of a reactionary backlash against recent feminist gains (Kelly 2014) and a related budding neoliberal postfeminist sensibility (Gill 2007). As Fisher and Salmon (2012, 105) explain, 'the focus of evolutionary psychology is on how evolution, via natural and sexual selection, has shaped human bodies, minds, and behavior, and how culture has emerged out of our evolved nature'. A foundational tenet is that the human mind 'comes factory-equipped' (Buss 2005, xxiv) and 'is sexually dimorphic' (Ellis and Symons 1990, 532). EP's gender meta-theory emphasises the contrasting opportunities/benefits and constraints/costs encountered by ancestral females and males around (maximising) reproductive success/genetic proliferation (Ellis and Symons 1990). A dramatic asymmetry in the minimum possible parental investment required to produce viable offspring is argued to have led to profound differences in their evolved sexual strategies (Trivers 1972), and particularly 'their underlying algorithms' to short-term mating (Malamuth 1996, 14). Current conflicts between women and men are seen as inevitably resulting from interfering sex-specific strategies—a concept which connotes 'the goal-directed and problem-solving nature of human mating behavior and carries no implication that the strategies are consciously planned or articulated' (Buss and Schmitt 1993, 205). Encapsulating the postfeminist Mars–Venus model of gender difference, Malamuth (1996, 15) underlines that: 'One cannot consider either gender's mechanisms superior or inferior to the other', as together they form a 'co-evolved strategy' whose elements 'either complement or compete'.

Scholars across disciplines have challenged EP for leaving assumptions unexamined, anthropomorphising animal behaviour, offering 'just-so' stories and engaging in circular reasoning. They have also highlighted flaws in research design, misinterpreted findings, considerable contrary evidence, and the implausibility of some central claims (e.g. McKinnon 2005; Cameron 2007; Ruti 2015; see also edited collections by Rose and Rose 2000; Grossi et al. 2014). Nonetheless, the paradigm continues to acquire mainstream legitimacy and penetrate new arenas. Enjoying special appeal are EP accounts of gender and sexuality. These saturate popular culture, having had a particularly profound impact on sex and relationships advice media, notably in Anglo-American contexts. But what about newer sites of mediated intimacy where the 'sexperts' are members of the public? Furthermore, are the logics and narratives of EP crossing conventional boundaries of language and cultural context?

Exploring EP Discourse

Taking up these questions, in what follows I focus on four popular and globally accessed women's websites/online magazines: the Spain-based *elle.es* and *enfemenino.com*, along with *cosmopolitan.co.uk* and *femalefirst.co.uk*, produced in the UK. I explore responses to a recurrent thread in the user forums (F) or boards: (self-identified) women expressing feelings such as hurt, disappointment, confusion and self-doubt—and asking for advice—upon discovering their male partners consume various pornographies. This latter encompasses 'soft' and primarily 'hard-core' mainstream material targeting heterosexual men, but also sometimes online live chats and shows. Typical thread titles include: 'Men and porn', 'Porn trouble' and 'My boyfriend keeps watching porn it is hurting my feelings.' My analysis draws on 102 forum threads, resulting in 2096 peer-to-peer posts. A second dataset consists of 32 editorial features (E), including 'agony aunt' texts. These discuss the same scenario or pornographies more generally.

The pathologising discourse of (cyber)porn/sex addiction was occasionally mobilised, especially in the Spanish forums. More generally and significantly shaping the contours of the debate was an emphasis on women (and couples) increasingly as consumers of pornographic material.¹ Informed by a feminist poststructuralist discursive approach (Gavey 2005), I examine here the dominant motif across the research data: the articulation of 'postfeminist biologism', a contradictory ideological formation suturing elements from postfeminism and EP. My analysis is organised around two broad themes. The first is based on the naturalisation of men's consumption of pornography through gender essentialist accounts. In the second theme, explored more briefly, women are urged to undergo numerous personal transformations in response to the 'ways of males'. In unpacking these thematic patterns, I draw attention to discursive parallels with EP literature, including research on popular media and pornography.

'A Fact of Life': Male Immutability

The editorial and user-generated content of women's online magazines is littered with what discourse analysts call 'extreme case formulations' (Pomerantz 1986) such as: 'All blokes watch porn, it's a fact of life' (F-UK). The 'porn trouble' thread-starting comments are repeatedly interpreted as rooted in ignorance about the 'fact' that 'men are programmed differently to women' (F-Spain), and most significantly: 'their minds work in different ways' (F-UK). In a distinctively postfeminist manner, some texts accompany these claims with a 'different but equal' note: 'men and women are different (*equally valuable and important, but not the same*)' (F-UK, my emphasis). The quintessential symbolization of difference in postfeminist (media) culture is also used: 'it's a mars venus thing' (F-UK). Most posts highlight, however, the 'scientific' basis of sexual difference: 'women and men are different, science says so' (F-Spain). Respondents accordingly exhort women to gain information about men's 'nature' and 'innate' sexual differences. Whether implicitly or explicitly, this tends to involve EP, with comments like: 'read up on the differences between men & women ... there's many! [...] it's just basic psychology stuff' (F-UK) and 'There is actually a pretty good proposed evolutionary psychology rationale of how this all came about' (F-UK). Suggesting the growing presence of EP in educational curricula, others similarly declare: 'We did this in evolutionary psychology, it's universal' (F-UK). Below I examine the main rationales elaborated across the user-generated and editorial

content in women's online magazines for a universal, intimate connection between men and pornography.

Women posting their concerns are told that 'men need porn' because 'men are visual creatures' (F-UK/Spain). More specifically, for contributors: 'Men are biologically programmed to find an attractive mate using a visual reference' (F-UK). Contrasts in female/ male sexuality are also elaborated to elucidate 'why the conflict and lack of understanding can occur' (F-UK). This notably concerns an emotional/visual dichotomy:

Men are very visual creatures and so porn is a great way for them to get themselves off—whereas women need more of an emotional connection. This is not his fault, simply a part of his biology. It may be difficult for him to understand how you feel, given that we are programmed differently to each other. (E-UK)

As seen in the editorial advice above, women are expected to undertake the non-reciprocal emotional labour of understanding men. Discursive closure on the subject is orchestrated through appeals to biologically determined—and thus unaccountable—male sexuality. A post in a Spanish forum similarly reads: 'It's not his fault it's the testosterone'. Other people posting provide greater detail about binary sexual desire:

Women are still generally attracted to a man with power, strength, financially secure as they should provide a better chance for their off-spring to survive. Men are still attracted to primitive visual references of a healthy mate such as hip to waste ratio, long healthy hair, pert boobs, rosey cheeks and lips. (F-UK)

Following a similarly problematic statement regarding biologically driven 'choices of mates', another commentator proclaims: 'whilst it may be considered shallow, it's a fact of nature' (F-UK).

It is remarkable how closely the cited quotations reproduce academic EP thinking. EPs argue that 'fitness-favouring' actions are not consciously chosen. The focus is rather on the 'activation' of mind mechanisms (and 'evolved hormonal mechanisms') (Saad 2013, 65), understood as 'computational adaptations' or 'programs' (Tooby and Cosmides 2005; Malamuth 2008). It is further held by EPs that given their greater bearing and raising costs, in addition to 'constraints on the maximum reproductive output', selection has favoured females who are discriminating ('choosy') and slow at arousing sexually to facilitate careful assessment of mate quality before consenting to sex (Ellis and Symons 1990; Pound 2002, 444). This apparently comprises 'indicators of genetic quality', but also, importantly, high status, physically protective males willing to invest time and resources (Hald 2006; Salmon 2012, 154). In the case of ancestral males, it is argued that a key adaptive problem involved gaining access to—and so identifying—as many fertile partners as possible. Men have therefore been designed by selection to experience sexual arousal on the basis of observable cues to reproductive value. Purportedly non-arbitrary universal components of female attractiveness include clear, smooth and firm skin; full lips; long, lustrous hair; large, symmetrical, firm and high sitting breasts; long legs; and a 'waist-to-hip ratio of roughly .70' (Malamuth 1996; Buss and Schmitt 2011; Salmon 2012; Saad 2013, 69). These evolutionary currencies allegedly explain men's

perception of women as 'mere collections of female body parts' (Vandermassen 2010, 74).

Like the journalists and users of women's websites, EP scholars assure us that: 'These asymmetries between male and female psychosexuality are a fact of life' (Vandermassen 2010, 72). In particular, according to many EPs 'male sexual fantasies tend to be more ubiquitous, frequent, visual, specifically sexual, promiscuous, and active'; in contrast: 'Female sexual fantasies tend to be more contextual, emotive, intimate, and passive' (Ellis and Symons 1990, 529). In the materials analysed, these dichotomous psychosexualities are straightforwardly correlated with media consumption as follows: 'Watching porn is for men like watching rom coms is for women' (F-UK). EP has played an important role in reinforcing and elevating to the status of 'scientific fact' such longstanding analogy between 'pornotopia' and 'romantopia' (Salmon 2004). Indeed, EPs argue that 'evolutionarily recent phenomena (such as romance novels) can be just as informative as phenomena that existed in the Pleistocene, or more so' (Ellis and Symons 1990, 531). Part of a growing body of work investigating popular culture via an evolutionary lens, a number of studies proclaim that contemporary pornography and tales of romance are the products of biologically based universal 'gender dimorphism in sexuality mechanisms' (Malamuth 1996, 2008; Pound 2002; Salmon 2004, 2012; Hald 2006; Salmon and Diamond 2012). Their framework sidesteps 'issues of politics and morality' (Salmon 2012, 158) to focus instead on how cultural products trigger ancestral mating adaptations, and purportedly thereby 'arrive at a far more satisfying and comprehensive understanding' (Fisher and Salmon 2012, 105) than that offered by 'antiscience approaches' or 'pseudointellectual fads' such as social constructivism, Marxism or feminism, which are seen as 'typically' 'wallowing in the victimology ethos' (Saad 2012, 114).

Paralleling the comments that appear in my research sites, EPs have argued that 'modern pornography is exactly what should be expected' (Salmon 2004, 226). It allegedly 'attests to the deeply visual nature of male sexuality', and offers men an 'optimal' 'short term mating strategy fantasy realm' (Salmon and Diamond 2012, 195). From this perspective, pornography 'is exactly what males are looking for' (Hald 2006, 583) since their psychological mechanisms are designed to desire unencumbered, impersonal, low-cost/ investment matings with high-value females (Pound 2002; Salmon 2012). Other specifically male adaptations that EPs maintain pornography triggers are readiness for sex, along with a desire for novel females and sexual variety—the so-called Coolidge effect. To demonstrate such effect in his analysis of 'collective wisdoms' as manifestations of biological 'global realities', Saad (2012, 112) quotes an 'unknown author': 'Every time you see a beautiful woman, just remember, somebody got tired of her.'

The material analysed is replete with references to these kinds of 'universal truths' (Saad 2012) about men's sexuality to explain their consumption of pornography. Examples include 'men love sex all the time' (F-Spain) and 'men are wired to be sexually attracted to more than one woman and we are programmed with the urge to seek gratification for this' (F-UK). In addition to 'tech' analogies, which also pervade EP texts (e.g. in references to 'computational programs'), these claims are supported via invocations of biology. This includes reference to the endocrine system, where pornographies are put forward as 'expressions of the never-ending and insatiable hormonal urges men have towards women' (F-UK). The desire-need for

pornographic media is also linked to male polygamy as a biological imperative for gene propagation: 'Men are biologically programmed to want to impregnate as many women as possible—that's a scientific fact' (F-UK). Again, the resonances with scholarly EP literature are readily evidenced, with EPs arguing that in their (unconscious) striving to promote fitness, men might even seek 'totally uninvited sex' (Malamuth 2008). Ongoing discussions in this field about rape as resulting from the distinctive evolution of male sexuality clearly inform this post:

Men are also programmed to hedge their bets to ensure his DNA is spread as much as possible and jump on any other suitable female at any opportunity, forced or consensual [...] We may be in the 21st century with equality, but human relationships are still based on billion year old evolution. (F-UK)

As is common in postfeminist discourse, the commentator simultaneously highlights gender equality as achieved *and* having natural limits.

Grounded in the idea of men as innately incapable of monogamy, in the examined Spain and UK-hosted sites pornography is advanced as a technology of male infidelity prevention. An illustration is this UK 'agony aunt' response to one reader's letter titled 'My boyfriend would rather watch porn than have sex with me!': 'Like it or not they are programmed to want to have sex with lots of women for procreation, but this method means that he is having an element of that, however still remaining monogamous.' The naturalisation of male promiscuity injuriously positions women as perpetual competitors. It also functions to legitimise the demand for women to constantly work on their sexual appeal and practice (see below). According to many EPs, this is an evolutionary inevitability: 'Women must compete to attract and retain' the 'valuable asset' that is a 'high-quality man', and their 'currency' in the 'sexual marketplace' is physical attractiveness, Campbell declares (2013, 178). It should be of concern to feminist scholars that the construction of male sexuality as voracious and emotionally detached—a key aspect of the 'cultural scaffolding of rape' (Gavey 2005)—is still pervasive and reproduced so boldly across these popular sites, as well as in contemporary academic (EP) scholarship.

'Work on Yourself': Female Adaptation

As seen above, in women's websites pornography is represented as a fundamental need for men. Women are therefore advised not to disclose their discomfort to their partners—even if 'it's the lying about it that hurts you' (F-UK). And they must certainly never ask men to modify their consumption practices, because, for some commentators, that 'is like asking him not to breathe' (F-UK). In distinct contrast to the stress on male fixity, the overriding advice for women on their 'porn trouble' is: 'work on yourself' (F-Spain). Specifically, women are expected to subjugate their own views, needs or desires, and dutifully adapt in response to men's apparent fixity through a total makeover of the self.

Key to this makeover is accepting the biological inevitability of male sexuality, as urged in: 'All men do this, learn to resign yourself' (F-Spain) and 'Men just like looking at different fanjitas. Get over it' (F-UK). Resting upon the previously highlighted assumption that men are sexually insatiable creatures and pornography is an anti-infidelity technology, women are also encouraged to perceive their partners' consumption in a positive light: 'surely it is better that he is seeing to his needs this

way rather than with another woman?’ (E-UK). Endorsing this activity is thus advanced as the rational, informed and strategic choice for women who want monogamous relationships. Lack of such endorsement is associated with a personal psychological deficiency or inadequacy, such as immaturity, irrationality, profound ignorance or reality denial. Accordingly, and in line with contemporary modes of gendered regulation, women are (re)directed to psy-experts: ‘So the problem is you, look for psychological help to be guided regarding the reality of life’ (F-Spain).

Pervading these posts is an unempathetic notion of ‘the self-deluding woman’. This figure of feminine pathology is variously exhorted to ‘assume reality’ (F-Spain) and to stop living in her ‘porn-free fantasy land’ (F-UK). This is often accompanied by a ‘cruel but true’ credos: ‘Men watch porn, it’s what we do accept it because it’s never going to change. Harsh, but it’s the reality’ (F-UK). Part of this collective attempt to teach women the ‘inconvenient truths about evolution’ (F-UK) includes highlighting the apparent futility of (feminist) wishing for a different state of affairs: ‘The truth is human beings are not some fairytale art-house creation, we are a finely tuned system over 100,000 years of evolution. You can’t change 100,000 years of biological hard wiring with 10 years of feminist discovery’ (F-UK). This online commentary closely resonates with the ‘inconvenient truth’ accounting in EP scholarship, and related critiques of ‘ideologies of nurture’ (Andrews and Andrews 2012). Mirroring the posts above, EPs advise (particularly feminist) critics: ‘if self-deception ceases to be feasible, the alternative adaptive strategy may be to learn to live with the realities’, namely the ‘dark side of human nature’, the harsh Darwinian truths (Silverman and Fisher 2001, 215).

Besides practising ‘reality acceptance’, a further form of psychic labour women are repeatedly called to undergo is that of confidence and self-esteem. Examples include: ‘you need to work on your self-esteem’ (F-UK) and ‘Get some confidence and start living in the real world’ (F-UK). This psychological work on the part of women is presented as crucial for the preservation of (hetero) relationships, as in this post, which combines the ideological discourses of female ‘toxic ignorance’ and ‘toxic insecurity’: ‘I don’t know how your relationships survive if you don’t understand men are different and you are so insecure’ (F-UK). Such perceived toxicity partly explains the remarkable sense of urgency for women to ‘get over it!!!’ (F-UK). This imperative is also connected to the notion that men are being unjustly castigated by women who fail to accept their nature: ‘Men are biologically different and you simply refuse to accept that’ (F-UK). Female users are consequently prompted: ‘we need to stop being so judgemental of men and accept that they are different’ (F-UK). This speaks to a broader cultural understanding of heterosexual men as increasingly under attack, vilified and pathologised in contemporary society (García-Favaro and Gill 2015). This postfeminist modality of male victimisation operates not only to remove any form of accountability from men, but also to position related discussions—let alone calls for change—as intrinsically coercive.

Coexisting alongside calls to confidence is a female subject whose personal aesthetic standards are failing or lacking, and need (ongoing) scrutiny and work: ‘do you maintain your sex appeal for your husband?’ (F-Spain). Supported by the ‘visual creature’ figuration of men, the advice offered in these online spaces is chillingly detached, normative and disciplinary. One example is this response to the UK thread, ‘Help, he’s a porn maniac!’: ‘You will have to make every effort to appeal to him more visually. This will mean keeping in shape, wearing nice clothes/high heels around

him, wearing makeup in the house, buying attractive underwear etc ...' Drawing on a typical postfeminist move to evade critique—seen in much EP literature—this contributor notes: 'I know this advice may sound harsh or even a little sexist'; to then locate it as the rational response to the 'fact' that 'men are not the same as women (shock horror)'. This ridiculing comment reflects a recurrent delegitimisation strategy within EP wherein opponents are accused of 'biophobia' (e.g. Campbell 2013).

Men's consumption of pornography is portrayed as resulting not only from women's undesirable bodies, but also from their inadequate sexual supply, both in terms of quantity and quality: 'are you sure you satisfy him correctly?' (F-Spain). In addition to having more sex, elements of the compulsory sexual labour for women in relationships include performing a striptease, experimenting with sex toys and costumes, and producing 'sexy selfies'. The woman posting is also exhorted to 'watch porn with him' (F-Spain) and engage in the activities depicted in the material—together with whatever else men might want: 'ask him what turns him on and do that' (F-UK).

Conclusions: Postfeminist Biologism

Drawing on peer-to-peer and editorial discussions about men's consumption of pornography in women's online magazines, my analysis has shown how pseudo-scientific discourses heavily informed by EP give ideological support to narratives of male immutability and female adaptation in heterosexual relationships. By way of concluding, I want to reflect now on how this represents not simply the continuing cultural force of EP, but also critically the manner in which contemporary iterations of evolutionary/biological gender essentialism are distinctively shaped by postfeminism (and neoliberalism) to constitute a contradictory ideological formation I call 'postfeminist biologism'.

EP has long worked with and reinforced ideas of sexual difference, but these are nourished by a political moment in which a postfeminist sensibility has powerfully taken hold across diverse cultural sites and contexts. Like EP, postfeminism as a cultural sensibility is deeply invested in reductive, dichotomous understandings of gender. Like postfeminism, EP as an academic discipline needs to take feminism into account—if only to then 'undo' it (McRobbie 2009). And like postfeminist media and EP literature, those posting on the sites I examined portray feminism as confounded by insuperable restrictions fixed by ahistorical, asocial and apolitical forces, principal among which is the forces of evolutionary sexual selection. This then facilitates the unabashed promotion of a sexual regime that systematically privileges (though also patronises and limits) men.

But the fixity of biological determinism conflicts with a deeply gendered neoliberal program. Certainly, in contrast to the notion of immutability that surrounds maleness, in the spirit of neoliberalism women are constituted as adaptive actors fully responsible for their self-care and enhancing their own well-being through strategic cost-benefit calculation. In the 'porn trouble' scenario this means promptly abandoning negative feelings about pornography—and a partner's lying—through recognising the 'scientific fact' that men are 'biologically programmed' to consume such material (or cheat), and reconstructing oneself as a wiser, better-adapted, heterosexual feminine subject: a gender unquestioning, porn-accepting, lust provoking, 'great sex' provider.

Making this sexual regime palatable is a postfeminist moment where gender polarity has not only been re-naturalised but also re-*eroticised*, and where pornography has not only been mainstreamed but also rebranded as liberating, chic, 'cool' for women (Gill 2007). Indeed, pornographic and other sex industry aesthetics and practices are advanced as models for the constitution of a contradictory postfeminist normative ideal: the 'sexual entrepreneur', a feminine subject who is always 'up for it' and 'spiced up', within narrowly defined parameters that are tightly policed (Harvey and Gill 2011). Further to such 'compulsory sexual agency', the cultural climate of postfeminism also effectively masks the normalization of sexual compliance through the 'related assumption that women no longer make decisions outside of free choice in (assumedly) egalitarian relations' (Burkett and Hamilton 2012, 825). These are heterosexual relations that postfeminist culture additionally depicts as structured by antagonistic polarity and the forces of the 'sexual marketplace', not least 'seller-buyer dynamics in relation to sex drive' as EP advocate Campbell declares (2013, 330). Certainly, EP zealously propagates these ideas, which in turn respond to deeply embedded neoliberal rationalities. All this suggests that current EP discourses are influenced by neoliberalism (see McKinnon 2005) *and* postfeminism.

The ideological formation of postfeminist biologism predominates in contemporary EP literature, suturing notions of women's equal *social* rights and opportunities with deep investments in western normative gender arrangements and a totalitarian 'real science' of androcentric 'common-sense', fallacious 'neutrality' and vindictive 'universal truths'. In EP, the possibility of political critique and radical imaginaries are delegitimised by what we might call a 'pleistocene mystique'. In line with the gender regime of postfeminism, the main preoccupation here is not so much upon returning to past arrangements, but rather upon preventing further change *and* dismantling feminism as a political force. The increasing eagerness to 'reconcile' EP and feminism (see Kelly 2014) is evidence of this, as a strategy of fragmentation and containment 'from within'. And a similar argument might be made about the recent interest among EPs in undertaking media and cultural research, which, to their chagrin, is generally marked by the politics of questioning, change and social justice.

Learning about these growing academic interventions was a particularly disturbing aspect of my encounter with EP—and one that many feminist scholars understandably avoid: Why engage with a literature that is inexcusably malign *and* utterly wrong? But I found the dominance of the logics and narratives—moreover, the exact same language—of scholarly EP in my research data alarming, travelling across the user-generated and editorial content from globally accessed sites in Spanish and in English. Alarming too is its important role in lending legitimacy to a pernicious ideological formation. My primary concern is the manner in which postfeminist biologism not only suppresses romantic and erotic creativity, but functions to secure an unjust and injurious sexual regime through disciplining women while privileging men. Ultimately, it establishes a brutally alienating framework for intimate relationality—and, indeed, human sociality. The travels of postfeminist biologism make a reinvigorated collective 'politics of discursive intervention' (Gavey 2005) all the more urgent.

Notes

1 For academic discussions of the figure of the cyberporn addict, and women's shifting engagements with pornographies, see Attwood (2010).

References

- Andrews, D., and C. Andrews. 2012. "Film Studies and the Biocultural Turn." *Philosophy and Literature* 36 (1): 58–78.
- Attwood, F. 2010. *Porn.com: Making Sense of Online Pornography*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Burkett, M., and K. Hamilton. 2012. "Postfeminist Sexual Agency: Young Women's Negotiations of Sexual Consent." *Sexualities* 15 (7): 815–833.
- Buss, D. 2005. "Introduction: The Emergence of Evolutionary Psychology." In *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology*, edited by D. Buss, xxiii–xxv. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Buss, D., and D. Schmitt. 1993. "Sexual Strategies Theory: An Evolutionary Perspective on Human Mating." *Psychological Review* 100: 204–232.
- Buss, D., and D. Schmitt. 2011. "Evolutionary Psychology and Feminism." *Sex Roles* 64 (9–10): 768–787.
- Cameron, D. 2007. *The Myth of Mars and Venus: Do Men and Women Really Speak Different Languages?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Campbell, A. 2013. *A Mind of Her Own: The Evolutionary Psychology of Women*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, B., and D. Symons. 1990. "Sex Differences in Sexual Fantasy: An Evolutionary Psychological Approach." *The Journal of Sex Research* 27 (4): 527–555.
- Fisher, M. L., and C. Salmon. 2012. "Human Nature and Pop Culture." *Review of General Psychology* 16 (2): 104–108.
- García-Favaro, L., and R. Gill. 2015. "Emasculation Nation Has Arrived': Sexism Rearticulated in Online Responses to Lose the Lads' Mags Campaign." *Feminist Media Studies*. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14680777.2015.1105840?journalCode=rfms20>.
- Gavey, N. 2005. *Just Sex?: The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape*. London: Routledge.
- Gill, R. 2007. *Gender and the Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Grossi, G., S. Kelly, A. Nash, and G. Parameswaran. 2014. "Challenging Dangerous Ideas: A Multidisciplinary Critique of Evolutionary Psychology." *Dialectical Anthropology* 38 (3): 281–285.
- Hald, G. 2006. "Gender Differences in Pornography Consumption among Young Heterosexual Danish Adults." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 35: 577–585.
- Harvey, L., and R. Gill. 2011. "Spicing it Up: Sexual Entrepreneurs and the Sex Inspectors." In *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, edited by R. Gill & C. Scharff, 52–67. London: Palgrave.
- Kelly, S. 2014. "Tofu Feminism: Can Feminist Theory Absorb Evolutionary Psychology?" *Dialectical Anthropology* 38 (3): 287–304.
- Malamuth, N. 1996. "Sexually Explicit Media, Gender Differences and Evolutionary Theory." *Journal of Communication* 46: 8–31.
- Malamuth, N. 2008. "Pornography." In *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace and Conflict*, 2nd ed., edited by L. Kurtz. Oxford: Elsevier. <http://0-0->

- search.credoreference.com.wam.city.ac.uk.wam.city.ac.uk/content/entry/estpeace/pornography/0.
- McKinnon, S. 2005. *Neo-liberal Genetics: The Myths and Metaphors of Evolutionary Psychology*. Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm Press.
- McRobbie, A. 2009. *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pomerantz, A. 1986. "Extreme Case Formulations: A Way of Legitimizing Claims." *Human Studies* 9 (2): 219–229.
- Potts, A. 1998. "The Science/Fiction of Sex: John Gray's Mars and Venus in the Bedroom." *Sexualities* 1 (2): 153–173.
- Pound, N. 2002. "Male Interest in Visual Cues of Sperm Competition Risk." *Evolution and Human Behavior* 23: 443–466.
- Rose, H., and S. Rose, eds. 2000. *Alas, Poor Darwin: Arguments Against Evolutionary Psychology*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Ruti, M. 2015. *The Age of Scientific Sexism: How Evolutionary Psychology Promotes Gender Profiling and Fans the Battle of the Sexes*. New York: Bloomsbury Press.
- Saad, G. 2012. "Nothing in Popular Culture Makes Sense Except in the Light of Evolution." *Review of General Psychology* 16 (2): 109–120.
- Saad, G. 2013. "The Consuming Instinct: What Darwinian Consumption Reveals about Human Nature." *Politics and the Life Sciences* 32 (1): 58–72.
- Salmon, C. 2004. "The Pornography Debate: What Sex Differences in Erotica Can Tell Us about Human Sexuality." In *Evolutionary Psychology, Public Policy and Personal Decisions*, edited by C. Crawford & C. Salmon, 217–230. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Salmon, C. 2012. "The Pop Culture of Sex: An Evolutionary Window on the Worlds of Pornography and Romance." *Review of General Psychology* 16 (2): 152–160.
- Salmon, C., and A. Diamond. 2012. "Evolutionary Perspectives on the Content Analysis of Heterosexual and Homosexual Pornography." *Journal of Social, Evolutionary, and Cultural Psychology* 6 (2): 193–202.
- Silverman, I., and M. Fisher. 2001. "Is Psychology Undergoing a Paradigm Shift? Past, Present and Future Roles of Evolutionary Theory." In *Evolutionary Approaches in the Behavioral Sciences: Toward a Better Understanding of Human Nature*, edited by S. Peterson & A. Somit, 203–216. New York: Elsevier.
- Trivers, R. L. (1972). Parental Investment and Sexual Selection. In *Sexual Selection and the Descent of Man 1871–1971*, edited by B. Campbell, 136–179. Chicago: Aldine.
- Tooby, J., and L. Cosmides. 2005. "Conceptual Foundations of Evolutionary Psychology." In *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology*, edited by D. Buss, 5–67. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Vandermassen, G. 2010. "Woman as Erotic Object in Mainstream Cinema: A Darwinian Inquiry into the Male Gaze." *The Evolutionary Review: Art, Science, Culture* 1: 69–75.