

# Gender...Gone Wild: The Sexual Economy of Reality Exploitation

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As an idiom popularized through the fervent feminism and sexual revolution of the 1960s, “male chauvinist pig” was used predominantly in describing men holding positions of authorial power who abused their gendered privilege, in both public and private spheres, to the detriment of American women. If second-wave feminism was defined by pointing the accusatory finger of blame at these “male chauvinist pigs,” *New York* magazine editor Ariel Levy traces the escalation of an entirely different cultural phenomenon in the late-1990s and the early years of the twenty-first century. *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* explores how and presumably why the behavior of young American women has changed in the past three decades: “Only thirty years (my lifetime) ago, our mothers were ‘burning their bras’ and picketing Playboy, and suddenly we were getting implants and wearing the bunny logo as supposed symbols of our liberation. How had the culture shifted so drastically in such a short period of time?”<sup>1</sup> Among those institutions Levy considers in the rise of a distinctly feminized raunch culture, one cited consistently in her argument is the media channel known as *Girls Gone Wild*. This franchise and its critics, who claim that the outlet operates primarily through a matrix of exploitation at the expense of young college-aged women, have existed contemporaneously ever since the first *Girls Gone Wild* production was released in 1999. While Levy’s critique of twenty-first century feminism, or lack thereof, is persuasively supported, further evidence for her reflections have risen out of American visual culture since the publication of *Female Chauvinist Pigs* in 2005. By examining a supposedly reciprocal cultural phenomenon, first appearing on the softcore market in 2004 while Levy was concluding research for her text, this paper will argue that *Guys Gone Wild* has since given the exploitative culture of *Girls Gone Wild* a new and revealing referent. In its highlighting of male exhibitionism, the rise of *Guys Gone Wild* has complicated the ways in which collective identities of gender, both male and female, are currently represented through American mass media. Ultimately,

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<sup>1</sup> Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (New York: Free Press, 2005) 3.

even though an ostensibly comparative male equivalent now exists on the market, softcore reality exploitation remains lacking in any substantial notions of equitable gender representation and has, perhaps, become even more destructive to the public image of young American women.

Any useful deconstruction of the representational spectrum between *Girls Gone Wild* and *Guys Gone Wild* should consider the principal comparison between what, in terms of physical specificity, is actually being represented. In a visual genre whose *modus operandi* is informed almost exclusively by the presence of a male gaze, questions and degrees of visibility, both for the subject and the spectator, reign supreme. In his text *Male Myths and Icons: Masculinity in Popular Culture*, Roger Horrocks notes the long-standing tradition of representative discrepancies between men and women in pornography. Citing the work of feminist critic Linda Williams, Horrocks writes, “The open vagina shot might be interpreted as an invitation to the penis – penetrate me. But there is something else here... That is, the mystery of female sexuality is exposed to the camera and the viewer”.<sup>2</sup> If critics of pornography have implicated its corporeal displays as another manifestation of institutionalized male authority, this assertion is similarly sustained as the definitional term within pornographic hierarchies, meaning that the presence of the penis has proven dominant as principal determinant: “One of the crucial distinctions between soft and hard core porn is the presence of the (hard) penis. This can be seen as a kind of Lacanian ‘lack’: soft porn lacks the penis, which in hard core is one of the key images”.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Lacan’s theory of *manqué*, translated from the French as “lack,” posits that the condition of lacking is always related to manifestations of desire. This desire, within Lacan’s structuralist rubric, is generated by men as they constantly endeavor to obtain the phallus and its indication of definitive masculinity. Although compellingly argued, Horrocks’ Lacanian examination of soft and hardcore pornography lacks certain essential caveats. Although the penis is physically present in both genres, distinctions arise around the male member’s utility and efficacy. Indeed, a Lacanian reading of the softcore *Guys Gone Wild* franchise holds true only insofar as the penis rarely enacts its function in the capacity of either erection or ejaculation. Its ontology in physical space nevertheless remains. As comparisons and discrepancies between the visual politics of *Girls* and *Guys Gone Wild* will reveal, the definitional terms of softcore pornography still remain heavily reliant on greater female exposure than male.

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<sup>2</sup> Roger Horrocks, *Male Myths and Icons: Masculinity in Popular Culture* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995) 115.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

This inconsistency consequently impacts the collective gender identities both of these softcore franchises promote.

In her seminal text *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, cultural theorist Judith Butler famously undermines the patriarchal, masculinist discourses that have historically assumed authority over the construction of heteronormative gender binaries. As one of the most influential contributors to poststructuralist gender theory, Butler strikingly notes that gender, investigated at its lowest common denominator, can always be reduced to socially constructed signs of performative action: “words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause”.<sup>4</sup> Butler’s emphasis on surfaces and exteriority, working to discredit gender as somehow biologically inherent, provides the foundation for how she conceives of socially constructed articulations of gender as consistently performative:

Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse.<sup>5</sup>

The genre of softcore reality exploitation provides both challenging and stimulating complications to Butler’s claims for gender understood as constantly performative. Undoubtedly, the culturally specific artifacts that have influenced the genesis of *Guys* and *Girls Gone Wild* were not generated within the confines of a social vacuum. *Girls Gone Wild* and its male equivalent are, of course, the products of previously established public discourses pivoting on public sexual performance and heteronormative gender expectations. However, Butler’s assertion of cultural causality may become complicated in the twenty-first century when an institution such as *Girls Gone Wild* becomes, as Ariel Levy suggests, a gendered lexicon for societal and public discourse in and of itself.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 136.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Levy, 17.

Engineered by media mogul Joseph R. Francis for his production company Mantra Entertainment, advertisements for *Girls Gone Wild* first appeared on late-night television in 1999. Originally showcasing female college co-eds with a penchant for drunken breast exposure, the cultural proliferation of *Girls Gone Wild* has continued to grow exponentially. *Girls Gone Wild* currently offers paid subscriptions to a members-only website as well as its trademark videos, currently numbering a catalog of over two-hundred and fifty volumes on DVD with many additional entries offered in the high-definition Blu-Ray format.<sup>7</sup> According to *Variety* magazine reporter Terence Keegan, “such fringe programming—which often enjoys a lucrative audience niche but also has baggage of one form or another—is now so accessible that it’s constituting an ever-larger slice of an overall homevid pie that generated about \$24 billion in consumer spending” in 2006.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, *Girls Gone Wild* “is so popular they are expanding from soft-core videos to launch an apparel line, a compilation CD with Jive Records (of GGW-approved club hits), and a Hooters-like restaurant chain”.<sup>9</sup> According to Levy, the gendered, exhibitionistic performances representative of a distinctive youth culture in the late-1990s were a niche market simply waiting to be exploited:

It sounds like a fantasy world dreamed up by teenage boys. A world of sun and sand where frozen daiquiris flow from faucets and any hot girl you see will peel off her bikini top, lift up her skirt...all you have to do is ask. It’s no surprise that there’s a male audience for this, but what’s strange is that the women who populate this alternate reality are not strippers or paid performers, they are middle-class college kids on vacation—they are mainstream...The heat is turned up a little in Miami, but a baseline expectation that women will be constantly exploding in little blasts of exhibitionism runs throughout our culture. *Girls Gone Wild* is not extraordinary, it’s emblematic.<sup>10</sup>

As both *Girls Gone Wild: Dormroom Confessions* and *Girls Gone Wild: Hottest Moments Ever* reveal, the deck of softcore media exploitation is intentionally stacked against positive representations of young American women.

Kate, an 18 year-old college freshman, is the first woman interviewed within the traveling confessional of the *Girls Gone Wild* tour bus in *Dormroom Confessions*. Kate has always wanted to show off her wild side and takes the

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph R. Francis, “Girls Gone Wild.” 27 April 2009. <<http://www.girlsgonewild.com>>.

<sup>8</sup> Terence Keegan, “Raunch Goes From Trickle to Mainstream Gusher.” 24 April 2007. 27 April 2009. <<http://www.variety.com/homeentertainment>>.

<sup>9</sup> Levy, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 17.

opportunity before her to confess her proclivity for “rough sex” in which she is constantly “on top.”<sup>11</sup> Encouraged by the cameraman’s appraisals that she is “so cute” and “adorable,” Kate is eventually convinced to remove the entirety of her wardrobe.<sup>12</sup> As a common trend within the exploitative rubric of *Girls Gone Wild*, women are persuaded to continuously interact with their own bodies through the senses of taste, smell, and touch. When asked what her favorite feature of her body is, Kate responds, “I love my nipples...like honestly.”<sup>13</sup> Concluding in traditional *Girls Gone Wild* fashion, Kate is shown masturbating on camera for a period of over ten minutes until her eventual climax. In its habitual insistence on manual female stimulation, *Girls Gone Wild* reverses Freudian anxieties surrounding manifestations of female sexuality. In tracing the maturation of female sexual practices, Freud theorized that women, in order to avoid homosexual tendencies or other sexual aberrations, must undergo a turn “away from the active, masculine, and aggressive clitoral stimulation toward the passive, subordinate, masochistic---toward receiving vaginal stimulation”.<sup>14</sup> According to psychologists Claire and Frank Wesley, Freudian notions of female sexuality consistently denigrate the practice of auto-stimulation: “Freud considered the clitoral-vaginal shift a necessary condition for normal, female sexuality. He states that a girl, unlike a boy, should not manually stimulate her genitals too often during her phallic period (4-7 years) because she should not accustom herself to receiving pleasure from her ‘stunted’ penis, her clitoris”.<sup>15</sup> Not surprisingly, the era of *Girls Gone Wild* has turned Freudian notions of female sexuality on their heads. However, instead of working to approximate some manifestation of equilibrium between modesty and healthy sexual expression, *Girls Gone Wild* has polarized its own version of female sexuality in the opposite direction of Freud, honoring those young women whose hyperactive libidos have taken sexual exhibitionism to new heights. Indeed, Kate exhibits little fear or apprehension while masturbating and gladly does so in front of the *Girls Gone Wild* camera.

In her 2006 article “The Staging of Agency in *Girls Gone Wild*,” Karen Pitcher submits that exploitative media outlets such *Girls Gone Wild* can be understood as a twenty-first century manifestation of Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the “carnavalesque”. Originally cited in his text *Rabelais and his World*, a study of the French Renaissance theorist François Rabelais, Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque indicated “a temporary liberation from the established order, a

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<sup>11</sup> *Girls Gone Wild: Dormroom Confessions*. Mantra Entertainment, 2008. DVD.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Claire and Frank Wesley, *Sex-Role Psychology* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1977), 135.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

suspension of (bourgeois) cultural norms and prohibitions. While carnivalesque practices retain the critical and cultural tools of the dominant classes, these very tools are utilized to degrade and mock forms of high culture; they revel in this contradiction”.<sup>16</sup> This dichotomous contradiction between bourgeois cultural norms and carnivalesque transgression is largely played out in *Girls Gone Wild* through the experience of the collective collegiate vacation, known popularly as Spring Break. In a 1998 study entitled “Casual Sex on Spring Break,” three cultural anthropologists became enmeshed within “an atmosphere in which the usual rules and moral codes did not apply. Students provided detailed descriptions of how some had behaved ‘totally out of character’ or in ways that ‘they never would at home’”.<sup>17</sup> Significantly, Pitcher notes that discrete expressions of carnivalesque behavior on the part of these individuals are almost always endorsed by a collective group consciousness:

This type of behavior is often encouraged by a peer group, whether informally or more overtly in the form of a group pact. Therefore, with a heightened level of peer pressure, coupled with an atmosphere of perpetual bawdy activity situated outside everyday norms, Spring Break becomes an opportunity for college students to temporarily step outside typical middle-class boundaries with few social repercussions.<sup>18</sup>

While manifestations of a collective consciousness are essential to deconstructing the motives for women simultaneously hiking their tops in *Girls Gone Wild* or a group of men “mooning” the camera in *Guys Gone Wild*, Pitcher’s analysis fails to recognize a further consequence of their exploitative dialectic. Not only are the carnivalesque performances in *Guys* and *Girls Gone Wild* endorsed by the larger peer group of the participants, but that approval generates the compounding effect of constructing a gendered group identity defined in terms of these visual carnivalesque practices. Consequently, if there is an existent lack of equity in the representative visual economies between *Guys* and *Girls Gone Wild*, the collective gender identities they construct are correspondingly disparate.

Perhaps the most explicit scene in *Dormroom Confessions* is provided through an interview with Brynn, a sophomore at the University of Georgia majoring in psychology. As Brynn is enjoying a festive evening out at a jam-packed dance club, she is gradually approached by the *Girls Gone Wild* camera

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<sup>16</sup> Karen C. Pitcher, “The Staging of Agency in *Girls Gone Wild*,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 23.3 (August 2006): 203.

<sup>17</sup> Cited in Pitcher, 204.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

crew and encouraged by her friends to give them a show. Within the confines of Brynn's modestly sized apartment, her bed becomes the primary attraction of the camera's focus. Asked to simply stand still for a moment, the representational politics of *Girls Gone Wild* becomes obvious by means of extreme close-ups of Brynn's rear-end and cleavage. According to pioneering film theorist Béla Balázs, the use of the close-up "can show us the very instance in which the general is transformed into the particular...it not only revealed new things, but showed us the meaning of the old".<sup>19</sup> If this sliding scale between generality and precision can be visually codified by the use of camera zoom, *Girls Gone Wild* stakes a far greater claim in scrupulous meditations on specific elements of female anatomy through the use of tight camera angles than does its male counterpart in privileging certain aspects of the masculine body.

Bribed with promises of official *Girls Gone Wild* apparels including a tank-top and "booty shorts," Brynn fully exposes herself for the camera and confesses her especial fondness for her "real boobs".<sup>20</sup> Indeed, within its sexualized matrix, *Girls Gone Wild* claims particular access to realms of realism not available through traditional outlets of narrative cinema. In her essay "Soft-Core in TV Time: The Political Economy of a 'Cultural Trend'," Vicky Mayer notes that the collective gender identities generated by a media conduit such as *Girls Gone Wild* are facilitated largely through its claim to a particular articulation of visual realism:

The videos were produced with the highest-grade amateur ('prosumer') video cameras available; therefore, they index the 'real' with a seemingly transparent presentation of a grainy and often-shaky representation of real life...The lack of professional lighting, editing, or scripting also enhances the sense of realism in the frame. The mise en scènes are real tourist locations and events that target college students. The women who display themselves in these settings and activities frequently receive t-shirts or hats on-camera in exchange for their performances, furthering their representation as unpaid amateurs.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, the amateurish qualities surrounding Brynn's fifteen minutes of fame in *Girls Gone Wild: Dormroom Confessions* are promoted not only through the representational politics of the camera, but also by the collective feminine identity Brynn invokes to contextualize her performance. Giving the camera a coy smile as

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<sup>19</sup> Béla Balázs, "The Close-Up". Rpt. in *Film Theory & Criticism: 6<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 314.

<sup>20</sup> *Girls Gone Wild: Dormroom Confessions*.

<sup>21</sup> Vicki Mayer, "Soft-Core in TV Time: The Political Economy of a 'Cultural Trend'," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22.4 (October 2005): 304.

she removes her last item of clothing, the cameraman expresses his own delight at the exhibitionism displayed before him: “Man, I love Southern girls”.<sup>22</sup> To this encouragement, Brynn immediately adds her own affirmation: “I know...we’re pretty great”.<sup>23</sup> Brynn’s use of the communal pronoun in this moment should not be underestimated and is, I would argue, especially revealing. By aligning herself with a particular gendered and geographic demography, femininity as it becomes manifest in the American South, Brynn concurrently manipulates the ways in which that population’s own visibility vis-à-vis collective notions of gender are represented within a broader public discourse. Consequently, the scopophilic fantasy of male heteronormative sexuality endorsed by Brynn’s performance informs a visual reading in which any young woman aligning herself within the shared disposition of the “Southern girl” can be convinced to enact similar *Girls Gone Wild*-esque performances.

Indeed, these articulations of gender performance are taken to new exploitative heights in the 2008 release *Girls Gone Wild: Hottest Moments Ever*. Stacey, a young woman vacationing on Spring Break, is celebrating her eighteenth birthday with many of her closest girlfriends. Couching this occasion in terms of a celebratory event worthy of particularly wild behavior, the *Girls Gone Wild* production staff provides Stacey with her first eighteenth birthday present: a fluorescent pink, battery-operated vibrator with multi-speed capabilities.<sup>24</sup> Executing a gradual striptease with emphatic encouragement from the cameraman that the time has come for Stacey to display “the kitty,” the young woman removes the remainder of her clothing and engages in an uninhibited masturbatory session lasting nearly twenty minutes.<sup>25</sup> Just in case her whimpers of ecstasy failed in revealing the cause of their inspiration, Stacey proudly boasts at the interview’s conclusion that the performance she has just put on has showcased her multiple orgasmic capacity.<sup>26</sup> This particularly feminine aptitude is not a pioneering cause for fascination within outlets of popular culture. However, according to Wesley and Wesley, there does exist between men and women,

innate physiological sex differences with respect to orgasm capacity.

Females can have multiple orgasm, one right after another, something males in general cannot do. After orgasm most males find further stimulation of their penis unpleasant and need a rest period before they can have a second or third ejaculation. Those men who can have sequential orgasm report that

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<sup>22</sup> *Girls Gone Wild: Dormroom Confessions*.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> *Girls Gone Wild: Hottest Moments Ever*. Mantra Entertainment, 2008. DVD.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



the first one is the most satisfying, while women who experience multiple orgasm report that the second or third is most satisfying.<sup>27</sup>

If one way in which women may be defined physiologically is through their capability to experience multiple orgasms, *Girls Gone Wild* transforms that capacity into another collective gender trait fit for objectification, exploitation, and commodification.

Of particular note in the case of Stacey is the way in which her overtly sexualized performance is consistently equated with a coming-of-age narrative à la her eighteenth birthday. Although she confesses to having already lost her virginity, Stacey's actions are filtered through a verbal and visual rhetoric of newness and excitement. According to Pitcher, Stacey's interview is emblematic of a particular *Girls Gone Wild* sensibility: "the impression presented both within the videos and in journalistic accounts of *GGW* is that such sexual display is an innocent rite of passage for white, middle-class youth; swept away in the atmosphere of partying and revelry in a place where normal social consequences and perceptions are ignored".<sup>28</sup> In turning to a consideration of *Guys Gone Wild*, notable differences will become apparent almost immediately in the ways its subjects are represented and what notions of a collective masculine identity their performances create.

In their superficial attempt to level the gendered playing field of softcore reality exploitation, Joe Francis and Mantra Entertainment first began running advertisements for *Guys Gone Wild* exclusively on late-night television on July 13, 2004. Retailing for the same price as equivalent *Girls Gone Wild* merchandise, *Guys Gone Wild* productions feature college-aged men in various states of undress, more often than not in their underwear, participating in both "group" and "solo" activities: skinny-dipping, nude football, showers, etc. Currently offering more than twenty releases in its online and mail-order catalog, *Guys Gone Wild* has found success with such subtitled releases as *Hunk Hotel*, *Pool Party*, and *All-American Jock*.<sup>29</sup> The *Guys Gone Wild* franchise has even capitalized on satiric homage to mainstream American cinema, transforming the 2000 teen comedy *Dude, Where's My Car?* into its 2005 release *Guys Gone Wild: Dude, Where's My Pants?*<sup>30</sup> Although *Guys Gone Wild* does feature lengthy displays of full-frontal male nudity, the series gradually alleviates its exploitative potential in two significant ways: first, by encouraging its male subjects to constantly perform

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<sup>27</sup> Wesley, 147.

<sup>28</sup> Pitcher, 204-5.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph R. Francis, "Guys Gone Wild". 27 April 2009. <<http://www.guysgonewild.com>>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

infantilized sexual behaviors, and second, by refusing to dwell upon any of the explicit masturbatory fantasies that have had such a direct influence on the maturation of *Girls Gone Wild*. If, according to Ariel Levy, the rise of a feminized raunch culture has appreciably contributed to the removal of the physical act from notions of “sexy,” *Guys Gone Wild* offers little in the way of rebuttal. Nor does it prove an exception to Karen Pitcher’s claim that outlets of softcore reality exploitation have transposed Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque onto contemporary events such as Spring Break, or even more simply, the collegiate party. However, in exploring the gendered phenomenology of the twenty-first century collegiate party, critical readings of visual texts such as *Guys Gone Wild: Beach Bums* and *Guys Gone Wild: Spring Break* provide significant indications that the sexual politics of softcore reality exploitation do not operate equally along the axes of gender.

Filmed during the Spring Break season of 2008 in Cancun, Mexico, *Guys Gone Wild: Beach Bums* devotes the majority of its camera time, with few exceptions, to the confessional space of the traveling tour bus first popularized by its female predecessor. With the exclusion of Ryan, a 19 year-old college student who is told by his camera-laden female companion on the beach, “Baby, I will follow you wherever you go,” the interviews and exhibitionism of *Beach Bums* take place primarily behind closed doors.<sup>31</sup> The fact that the *Guys Gone Wild* production staff is comprised singularly of women is one of the most important and revealing disparities from its female counterpart. Firmly aligning itself with heteronormative expectations of masculinity, I would argue that the very existence of *Guys Gone Wild* is predicated upon the presence of an exclusively female staff for which young heterosexual men are comfortable displaying themselves sexually.

The first lengthy episode in *Beach Bums* concentrates on a group of three fraternity brothers from Purdue University. Initially attracting the attention of the *Guys Gone Wild* production crew by their frontal and rear flashing from the balcony of their hotel room, two camerawomen venture upstairs in hopes of capturing additional and more personalized footage.<sup>32</sup> The three men are told that Cancun’s Spring Break 2008 will be one characterized by a battle of the sexes with the victor claiming exhibitionistic superiority.<sup>33</sup> In this way, the female production staff of *Guys Gone Wild* enacts direct influence over the gendering of its exploitative practices by employing the stereotypically confrontational dichotomy of men versus women. Although the young men are not convinced into exhibiting any further full-frontal nudity, the scene ends with the addition of three more

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<sup>31</sup> *Guys Gone Wild: Beach Bums*. Mantra Entertainment, 2008. DVD.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

fraternity brothers as all six flash the camera from the rear with the emphatic trademark call of “Guys Gone Wild!”<sup>34</sup>

The longest confessional interview in *Beach Bums* is from Alan, a 19 year-old architectural design student from Houston, Texas. When asked how “wild” he is willing to get for the staff camerawoman, Alan’s reply is clearly coded in heteronormative expectations of the performance of masculinity in front of a woman: “as wild as you need me to get”.<sup>35</sup> As the flirtatious proceedings gain intimate traction, Alan confesses his preference for blonde-haired, green-eyed women who ideally share his passion for intercourse in the missionary position.<sup>36</sup> When Alan is convinced to remove the remainder of his clothing, the work of the camerawoman reveals the broader politics of visual representation in *Guys Gone Wild* as the camera never zooms closer than a shot in three-quarter profile. In contrast to its female counterpart in which this tool is used habitually, the close-up is a visual device *Guys Gone Wild* is disinclined to endorse.

The second in its franchised series, *Guys Gone Wild: Spring Break* was shot and released during the Spring Break season of 2004. In this entry’s first scene, a college-aged male from New York is approached by two *Guys Gone Wild* camerawomen in his hotel and is convinced into being filmed. As the camera begins rolling inside a hotel room, one of the camerawomen makes a coy, yet explicit confession: “I’ve heard you have a very...big...cock”.<sup>37</sup> Although this immediate genital insistence might seem contradictory to Horrocks’ Lacanian reading of softcore pornography, erection or ejaculation for the New York youth is never achieved. The visual boundary of the three-quarter profile shot is also maintained. As the flirtatious events between the camerawomen and the young man continue, the subject in question provides positive proof concerning his ample endowment and the astonishment of size continues to define the remainder of the encounter. Vacillating between exhibitionistic thrill and coyness, the young man is constantly told to “turn around baby...the girls can’t see you”.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the obsessive fascination with size is not a groundbreaking cultural phenomenon initially generated either by *Guys* or *Girls Gone Wild*. However, according to feminist critic Susan Bordo, these absorptions do not function equally between the sexes:

The humongous penis...is a cultural fantasy...And even if he knows, on some level (from his experience in locker rooms and the like) that the Harry

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> *Guys Gone Wild: Spring Break*. Mantra Entertainment, 2004. DVD.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Reemses and Jeff Strykers of the world are not the norm, that knowledge may pale beside the power of the iconography: the meanings attached to having an impressively large member.<sup>39</sup>

Bordo's article is provoking largely because she argues that those larger-than-average penises that do exist in reality are culturally celebrated in terms of achievement that does not find any anatomical correlative on the female body: "We wouldn't usually describe large breasts as 'impressive,' would we?...In contrast, the penis so large as to take a lover's breath away is a majestic penis, a commanding penis".<sup>40</sup> As *Spring Break*'s opening encounter with the well-endowed man from New York reaches its conclusion, the two camerawomen ask him if he is capable of performing any "tricks," such as the ability to "swing it around like a helicopter".<sup>41</sup> If the sexual exhibitionism of *Guys Gone Wild* relies upon a vocabulary of infantile and child-like behaviors, this incitement toward penis puppetry proves no exception. Even still, I would argue that the encouragement given by these camerawomen is so effective in this instance because it unambiguously alludes to a male-centric referent in popular culture. Released in 2001, *Diary of a Sinner: 1<sup>st</sup> Entry* is the first studio album produced by North Carolina-born rapper Petey Pablo and contains the hit single "Raise Up". In this song, young men at parties or dance clubs are encouraged to "take your shirt off / twist it 'round yo head / spin it like a helicopter".<sup>42</sup> To this day, the song remains a dance-floor anthem for college-aged men and would almost certainly have been familiar to the young man from New York persuaded to imitate its same behaviors, especially within the context of the innumerable parties that dominate Spring Break culture.

Concluding "The Staging of Agency in *Girls Gone Wild*" with a brief comparative discussion of that phenomenon juxtaposed with its male counterpart, Pitcher notes that the *Guys Gone Wild* emphasis is indeed "on silliness and bodily humor, rather than sexuality...men run down hotel hallways, attempt cartwheels and somersaults, march in a conga line, and jump on motel beds".<sup>43</sup> Indeed, notions of the infantile and the childish are consistently reified throughout *Spring Break*, in which the lengthiest interview is from an eighteen year-old freshman at Oklahoma State University. The lowered inhibitions of this young man, likely aided by the most popular Spring Break past time of alcohol consumption, become

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<sup>39</sup> Susan Bordo, "Does Size Matter?" *Revealing Male Bodies*. Ed. Cowling, Johnson, et. al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002) 21.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> *Guys Gone Wild: Spring Break*.

<sup>42</sup> Petey Pablo, "Raise Up". *Diary of a Sinner: 1<sup>st</sup> Entry*. Jive Records, 2001.

<sup>43</sup> Pitcher, 214.

apparent as he strips to full-nudity almost immediately. Performing “the helicopter” with equal zeal as his New York counterpart, this young man confesses to the possession of a trick of his own: “the Gonzo”.<sup>44</sup> Personifying the friendly blue creature of *The Muppet Show* fame beloved by children worldwide, his pronounced eyes and protruding nose are reimagined in this scene by the inversion of testicles above the penis, still no visually tighter than three-quarter profile. When later asked if he has ever given a name to his genitalia, the young man forcefully answers: “‘The Captain’ ...because ‘The Captain’ makes it happen”.<sup>45</sup> In considering historical metaphors for male genital labeling, Peter F. Murphy notes that “metaphors of manhood” are useful in exposing “the assumptions about masculinity that American men take to be normal”.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the young man from Oklahoma reacts to this inquiry of penile taxonomy with a tone of decidedly casual nonchalance. However, Murphy also notes that latent anxieties of gender performance and sexuality almost always exist beneath these breezy male bravados: “Ironically, this discourse reflects an objectification of self and sexuality, a phallogentric sexuality, a disembodied sexuality, and a great deal of ambivalence about sexuality”.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, as visual analysis reveals, the entire genre of softcore reality exploitation revolves around the objectification of the self and its sexuality. However, since the advent of *Guys Gone Wild* in 2004, the question of audience has become increasingly significant to deconstructing the masculinist discourse that continues to dominate the softcore industry.

Bill Horn, a spokesman for Mantra Entertainment, initially anticipated the release of *Guys Gone Wild* as one of the great media yarns of the early twenty-first century: “I think it's going to be a big gag gift, bachelorette kind of gift”.<sup>48</sup> While editions of *Guys Gone Wild* may be present at female pre-marital celebrations, this audience actually constitutes a significantly small minority of *Guys Gone Wild* viewers. As an anonymous columnist for the Taipei Times reports, the indulgent fantasies of *Girls Gone Wild* do not find an equivalent in its male counterpart:

The big difference between the male and female versions, though, is the absence of kissing. Much of the allure of the *Girls Gone Wild* series, with titles such as *Girls Who Like Girls* and *Mardi Gras Co-eds*, is the fantasy it

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<sup>44</sup> *Guys Gone Wild: Spring Break*.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Peter F. Murphy, *Stud Tools & The Family Jewels: Metaphors Men Live By* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001) 4.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> “The World's Gone Mad for Wild Guys and Girls”. *The Taipei Times*. 3 July 2004. 27 April 2009.

< <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2004/07/03/2003177572>>.

dangles before its viewers -- the possibility that the wholesome girl next door could, on a drunken spring break whim, tear off her T-shirt and make out with one of her sorority sisters.<sup>49</sup>

According to Horn, the *Girls Gone Wild* franchise gladly endorses homosexual fantasies if, and only if, they involve two women performing for the pleasure of a straight male viewing audience: "Let's face it -- there's a double standard when it comes to guy-on-guy as opposed to girl-on-girl... It's sexy to see two girls making out. It's not considered sexy to see two guys making out. That's just the reality and we were there to capture the reality".<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the collective gender identities promoted by *Guys* and *Girls Gone Wild* heavily implicate women as more easily swayed into same-sex sexual practices than men. Although guy-on-guy kissing may not be sexy to Horn, it may prove a profitable maneuver in whatever future the franchise envisions, as young to middle-aged gay men continue to constitute *Guys Gone Wild*'s largest viewing audience. While noting that female-centric pornography has been on the rise since the 1990s, Horrocks importantly asserts that male-targeted porn remains "commoner because it reflects the dominant position of men and their 'consumption' of women as sex objects. Another point is that men are perhaps more 'perverse' than women, because they are more traumatized by sexual difference".<sup>51</sup> Regardless of motive, the fantasies of a straight male audience still continue their dominant pervasion of pornography.

In succinctly defining the experience of exploitation, psychotherapist Alan Wertheimer notes that "a transaction between A and B is exploitative only when (1) A expects to gain something of value from a transaction or interaction with B, and (2) B is harmed by the transaction (harmful exploitation) or gains less than he or she should (mutually advantageous exploitation)".<sup>52</sup> Some audiences have reductively noted that the question of exploitation when turned to *Guys* and *Girls Gone Wild* needs to be considered in terms of moral relativism: if these amateur performers don't feel harmed or manipulated, are they truly being exploited? Whatever thrill may be gained from bearing it all in front of a camera, the reward of a t-shirt pales in comparison to the multi-million dollar profits Mantra Entertainment currently enjoys each year and, if money continues to talk, its disparate exploitative formulas will continue their reign over the softcore reality industry. For as long as outlets of American mass media ascribe to the sexual

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Horrocks, 117.

<sup>52</sup> Alan Wertheimer, *Exploitation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 167.

double standard cited by Horn as a cultural truism, the genre of softcore reality exploitation will remain unequal in its gender and representational politics.

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