



📷 Dave Pickoff / AP Photo

It was more than 15 years ago but I still remember feeling the heat of the asphalt under my sandals as I walked across the parking lot to my father’s Florida porn shop, The Premier. I had heard about this place my entire life, yet I had never visited until that day. I was a 25-year-old social worker living in New York City. My life was far from anything associated with the porn industry, but I was eager to get a glimpse of this side of my father’s life.

He had never planned on being a pornographer, but while working as a stockbroker in Philadelphia in the 1970s, he distributed *Deep Throat* and invested in adult businesses. In 1974, he was indicted by the federal government on obscenity charges for distributing *Deep Throat*. His career as a stockbroker abruptly ended and his full-time job as a pornographer began. As a child, I remember my father’s federal prosecution in the case and the tumultuous transition to his new career. There were long absences while he stood trial in Memphis, Tenn., alongside porn star Harry Reems and producers and distributors of the film in 1976, and then again in 1978. I saw him on TV when neighborhood residents picketed his Philadelphia strip club, The Golden 33. *Deep Throat* affected my life in a direct and personal way, but it’s worth remembering how the film changed our culture and the lives of women, 40 years after its premiere in New York’s Times Square.

What *Deep Throat* did was imagine female and male sexuality as being equivalent: through a catchy plot about the conceit of the clitoris in the throat, the film showed how women could receive as much sexual pleasure as they gave. And though the film showed women achieving orgasm through the male fantasy of oral sex, there were some real consequences. In spite of the inequities that persist between men and women, today we have a greater awareness of and respect for female sexuality. With this newfound respect came a broader public acknowledgement that female sexual desires were as important as male sexuality. Men benefited too, as women opened themselves to new sexual experiences. The age-old role of women being sexually subservient and men the sexual masters had effectively ended. The message of the 1970s sexual revolution was that everyone was a sexual free agent, allowed to pursue what was deemed normal human sexuality. *Deep Throat* encapsulated this beautifully in the image of Linda Lovelace giving and taking equally in her perfect, and very self-satisfying, blowjobs.



Striving for sexual equality in turn affected a whole host of women’s issues, such as career, marriage, and family. And after *Deep Throat* in the ’70s became a vehicle that spread the gospel of liberation among the ’60 generation, it inspired a younger generation of women born in the ’70s and ’80s who had no qualms about not hiding their sexuality and taking the reins of power. Women no longer cast themselves as the victimized version of Linda Lovelace that feminists Andrea Dworkin and Gloria Steinem loved to focus on. Instead they adopted the version of Lovelace who embraced what made her special—her incredible fellatio skills—which in turn gave her influence and power. This new confidence inspired by Lovelace and embraced even by those who had never seen the movie spilled over into other areas of women’s lives. Women figured out how to become fearless in the way they approached life.

In the 1970s it was no easy task for women to embrace this movement. My mother, for example, had to reconcile two worlds: one as a traditional Italian wife and mother, and another as a pornographer’s wife. My mother chose to accept my father’s career and didn’t think there was anything inherently wrong with *Deep Throat* or the adult business. Her choice sent an important message to me that my father wasn’t perverted or bad for distributing *Deep Throat* and that the things the movie represented weren’t wrong, just different.

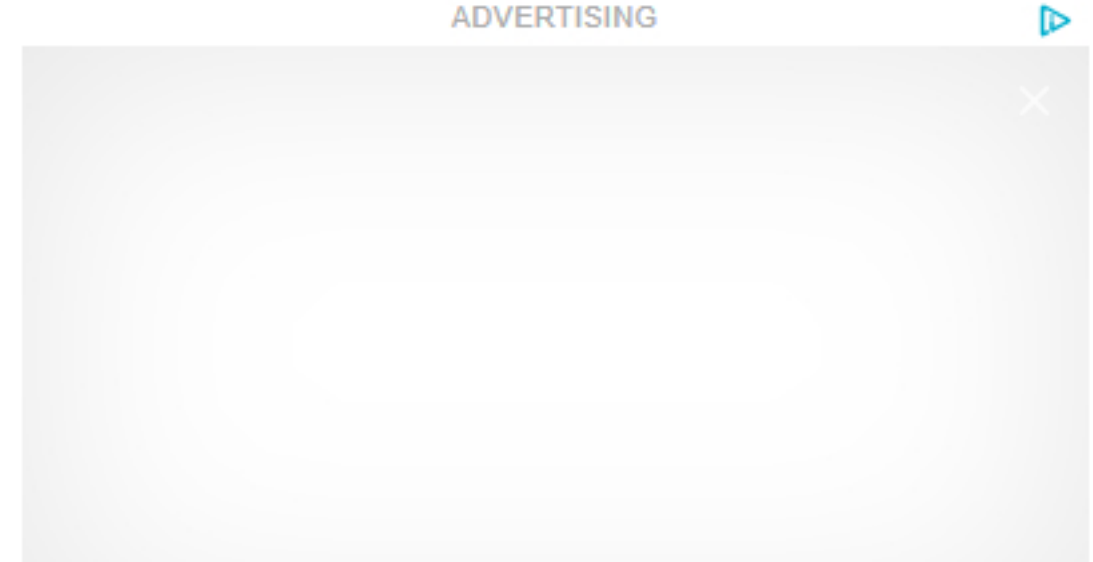


I think about what might have been had *Deep Throat* not changed the course of my family’s lives or had the film not created an opportunity for the women’s movement to debate these issues and inspire the notion of greater sexual equality. It arrived as the women’s movement and organizations such as the National Organization for Women advocated for child care, equal workplace opportunities, greater access to birth control, and the legalization of abortion. The film placed a wedge between two sides of the women’s-rights debate. A growing anti-pornography movement, spurred on by radical feminists, claimed *Deep Throat* objectified women, while on the other end feminists, claimed *Deep Throat* objectified women, while on the other end of the spectrum, other women were thrilled that their sexual satisfaction finally held a greater importance. Many women accepted *Deep Throat* as a part of our culture, though others lamented the film’s lack of focus on women’s true sexual fantasies. Still, *Deep Throat* did give way to the creation of women’s erotic porn and novels, including the bestselling *50 Shades of Grey* series and leadership roles for women in the porn industry.

Looking back 40 years later, *Deep Throat* was a tipping point for the women’s-rights movement and breaking taboos about sex, all of which combined to create an environment in which we can have frank conversations about this important topic. The anti-pornography feminists of the 1970s argued that porn exploited women, but they never foresaw the emergence of the major porn stars and entrepreneurs of the last two decades, including Nina Hartley, Jenna Jameson, Joanna Angel, Jessica Drake, Stormy Daniels, and Alexis Texas. These stars and many others are clearly not the victims of abuse or degradation at the hands of men but rather have shaped the adult industry to control their own destinies. As Drake says of her own career: “I am very proud of the things I produced for Wicked Pictures, and the movies that I was a part of. I love my job, I love every opportunity that’s been afforded to me.”

The controversy around pornography and women’s sexual equality endures today. Republican presidential candidate Rick Santorum claimed pornography damages relationships, while debates about access to birth control and Rush Limbaugh’s “slut” imbroglio hark back to a time when it was shameful to acknowledge women as sexual beings. So is it possible we might lose ground on women’s issues? It’s scary to think it might be possible, but I don’t think we’ll go back to a time when people are so uncomfortable dealing with the fact that we are all sexual beings. We have simply come too far in our journey.

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So on this 40th anniversary of *Deep Throat*, I am again thankful that the film broke so many taboos, helped advance women’s causes, and permanently changed perceptions and attitudes about sex. I also have no misgivings about how the film changed my life. It started my father’s business, which provided me a private high-school education, loan-free college and graduate-school tuition, and financial security throughout my childhood. Thank you, *Deep Throat*, for everything you have given to all of us.