

WHAT PORN IS? WHICH PROBLEMATIC → CUSTOMS
 STRATEGY → LAWS → Fed. Laws →
 CUSTOMS → Civil Ordinances →
 OTHER STRATEGIES →
 "sex ed. debate -
 erotic fantasy -
 - PORN -"

A) defin -
 B) strategy -

• PORN - 7/8 / STRAT. - 10/12
 • PORN - 7/8 / STRAT. - 10/12

30-40
 MINS

BLINDFOLDED OR PROTECTED?

Censorship Beware!!!

Sara Diamond

To slightly twist Pat Benetar, if sex is a battlefield then the struggle over its representation in images can be called the porn wars. Those of us who oppose censorship fear increased surveillance of all imagery, the suppression of images that contest the dominant regime of imagery and ideas, the jettisoning of a discussion of female sexuality and pleasure barely begun on its own terms, the empowerment of the organized right and the danger of intensified prescription. On the other side are the supporters of censorship who perceive immediate and irreparable harm to women and children from porn imagery, or to the institution of the family. On this pivotal point of sexual imagery, diverging ideologies collide head-on.

Its important to begin by outlining the agreements in much of the feminist discussion on this issue in Canada. That:

1) The majority of heterosexual pornography provides evidence of gender inequality, of male power over women as represented in sexual imagery.

2) Most heterosexual porn is produced with a male audience in mind.

3) The porn industry is big business, concerned with perpetuating itself and its profits.

4) There are genres of pornography which depict in their content violence against women.

5) Violence against women and the sexual exploitation of children is deplorable and requires militant and legal action.

Despite the agreements, differences on censorship as strategy encompass both analysis and strategy.

To bring in a censorship process, requires an agreement on what is "offensive" about pornography.

This issue of definition is important, for the strong right-wing lobby against pornography has problems not with violence against women, but with the degradation of the family, premarital sex, lesbianism, female sexual pleasure outside of reproduction, "animal pleasure" in humans, interracial sex etc.

Andrea Dworkin, Catherine MacKinnon and the working groups on

sexual violence, suggest a series of criteria, developed in the Minneapolis bylaw. For example, porn, "the sexually explicit subordination of women(men, children or transsexuals) " occurs when, "women are presented in positions of sexual submission; (or sexual servility, including by inviting penetration); or "women are presented being penetrated by objects or animals", or, "women's body parts--including or not limited to vaginas, breasts and buttocks, are exhibited , such that women are reduced to these parts..."

These criteria are ambiguous to say the least, certainly defining what constitutes subordination (penetration????) For example, women as well as men might associate memories of pleasure with an image of a penis, a vagina, or a breast, and thus "objectification" or inattention to the whole person and attention to the parts, as a principle is a problem in pleasure. Penetration could mean masturbation and postures of sexual submission are subjective, read through the viewer's eyes. And what if a woman does feel aroused at an image of a man lying naked at her feet, should there be legal recourse for action against such a fantasy.

In Catherine MacKinnon's view, women's sexuality is completely colonized.."The substantive principle governing the authentic politics of women's personal lives is pervasive powerlessness to

men, expressed and reconstituted daily as sexuality."

Sex then becomes the central question, the tool of subordination of women and the location of male violence and power. Thus, Susan Cole speaking of the right to sexual privacy states, "Most women do not crave privacy, they dread it." This analysis opens the way to seeing all representations of sexuality within the culture, whether violent or not, as subordinating women, and therefore "actionable".

But, there is a strong legacy of female culture, whether Paleolithic art work, Black women's blues in North America, the erotic writings of Anais Nin, Sappho's poetry, recent French films such as *Entre Nous*, the videoworks of Lisa Steele, that speak to women's sexual pleasure within patriarchal cultures. The last two decades have brought an increasing blurring of gender identities and images. That women have begun again to make images about our pleasure, not only in the feminist press and galleries, but in mainstream literature, art, film, and now, pornography, suggests that sex for women is not pure victimization, nor is sexual oppression the only problem that women face!

Which brings me to several other, seldom discussed, features of pornography:

Porn allows a specific form of sexual activity to occur: voyeurism. In voyeurism, pleasure is obtained without activity and the related human responsibilities occurring. Voyeurism also allows sexual curiosity to be satisfied. Voyeurism is not bad or MALE per se, although, traditionally, porn operates to meet male needs for pleasure through viewing, not women's. When it meets women's its often inadvertent. I know women who look at porn, not because of coercion but because they are searching for their own desire. They enjoy at least elements of it. (Though they're trying to make tapes for women now too).

Porn is media, that is IT IS PRODUCED. Camera angle, composition, construction, editing styles etc, production budget, script all separate the image from the "real" experience that it seeks to represent. As image, porn often relies on assumed agreement about symbols for its reading (e.g. until recently, men coming outside of the vagina and in a visible way seemed necessary to assert masculinity [he could be faking orgasm?]) The fact though that porn is produced and that in its production it relies on codes, allows for two things: changes in the production process(intervention) and changes in the codes (see end).

But there is more to porn than sexist images. NOT ALL PORN IS SEXIST. Entire elements of porn images or scripts are simply explicit sexual images. Some images are innocuous, some absurd.

Some porn is far less sexist than Three's Company, Dynasty and Another World.

The right-wing/feminist alliance, whether organizational or imperial around this issue is alarming. REAL WOMEN has made porn one of their year's top two issues (the other is defeating the inclusion of gay rights into the constitution). And just last year, Bernice Gerrard boasted openly on CJOR of working with ineffective pro-choice feminists to clean up the province. It was a reality at the meeting in Vancouver with MaryLou McAuslane and the A.G., where a speaker before the election of our Bible Belt premier) began her intervention, "I am pleased to be a Christian woman in a Christian land" & finished with applause from some pro-censorship feminists in the audience... How can feminism support censorship in B.C. after the B.C. government's flagrant attacks on human rights?

After all, has the Canadian state regulated sexuality in pro-feminist terms? It is only under duress that minimal rights have been secured. The state has defended the interests of a patriarchal and competitive society. Historically, laws have regulated access to birth control and abortion. The state is concerned with age of consent laws as part of the project of reinforcing the traditional family unit. Deviance from celibacy by young women has meant punishment within a series of state in-

stitutions (prisons and mental hospitals). Homosexuality has been prohibited and regulated despite the longterm existence of these desires in significant numbers of Canadians. The state has played an equally active role in reinforcing sex-role stereotyping, a process that delineates sexual as well as other elements of identity.

Feminist anxiety about censorship stems not from an acceptance of existing imagery, or a belief that misogynist images are harmless, but a sense that sexist images are a refraction of far deeper structures and attitudes. [see Women Against Censorship, Burstyn et al, 1985]. The elimination of the image is not the solution to misogyny and violence but a process that will make some images move underground to meet continuing demand. To truly change women's status state control must be weakened, not strengthened.

This is not to argue that women should not fight for legislation, but that we need laws that empower us, such as equal pay and opportunity laws, not those which strengthen state regulation. Censorship legislation empowers the MOST conservative elements within the state apparatus, the police and courts, to make decisions about the circulation of ideas and fantasies about sex.

By its nature, representation brings to consciousness issues, acts, cultural norms through the convex lens of the producer and/or industry. These issues are experienced often in isolation by individuals. Other "private" activities: eating, sleeping, quarrelling, housekeeping, thinking and so on, are represented by images. Yet what is suggested here is that we keep the lid on sexuality, that we keep it unspeakable.

Cultural critics contest an easy distinction between pornography and erotica, or an objective schedule of what is oppressive, exploitative and objectifying about an image. Certainly one of the reasons why pornography is so popular is because sex itself is taboo and mystified. This restriction of sexual representation simply continues a long tradition, one which has centred on a vision of the female body as innately "evil" or "obscene". It continues a separation between the "private" (feminine) world of the bedroom and the home and the "public" male world. This separation has been resisted by feminists when dealing with the traditional split of public/private on other issues (like who changes the diapers). Status and acceptability again reside for women, on being the virgin and not the whore. Gay and lesbian images also face restriction. This is a double jeopardy, for gay erotica (porn) creates a small space of acknowledgement in a hetero-dominant world.

Sex is an area of experience that is fraught with emotional pain, crisis, intimacy and identity, anger, confusion, power, as well as pleasure. It is an arena of inequality and of potential communication and empowerment. Sex is as constructed, as socially produced, as any other area of human experience. It is precisely this unspeakable quality of sex within the culture, especially sex as perceived and experienced by women, that mystifies sexuality, separating sexual object from her subjectivity.

Continued prohibition is based on the idea that there is something wrong with achieving pleasure through looking at images. Yet, we experience delight constantly with non-sexual images, and we experience sexual memories and fantasies and the accompanying pleasure for the most part without images.

There is great divergence on what is valued as erotic material, amongst women as well as men. Some women take the view that there the entire visual arena of sexual representation is so male dominated that there is not space for women to experience visual pleasure. Others set very strict guidelines for acceptable images (natural references, loving, equal exchange etc.) Others feel that criteria of equality, loving exchange are as restrictive to the exploration of their full sexual potential as are the standard misogynist images. What one needs and wants in a fantasy is not always what one wants in relationship! Women's

sexuality has been so suppressed, unspoken and unexplored that placing a new standard of morality onto it, especially one which equates explicitness with pornography, is destructive.

Sexist sexual images are no more harmful than advertising and television cop shows. These images reach far more people than the 11% of Canadians who buy pornography. The mass media promotes an unreachable and controlling norm, for women and men. Images abound of mother as ever-willing servant, images of soap as a substitute for love and respect; images of casseroles as the epitimomy of female pleasure; images of secretaries who are ever available and filing their nails, not their boss' correspondence.

Images that celebrate male violence against women reinforce the misogyny in our society. As some researchers suggest, men who are stimulated to act by these images are most like predisposed to violence. For most men, there are levels of social mediation between an image and an act. Masculine fantasies about power over women are tied to the suppression of "femininity" (as we know it) in men, the enforced childhood rejection of the nurturant mother in a society where women are denigrated. That men repeat the type of material they buy (girl next door, blond bombshell, etc.) suggests that images don't desensitize and create a desire for most violence, but rather reinforce the viewer's established, sexist taste.

Images of sexual violence must be analysed in context: again the issue of subjectivity enters the picture. Take Not A Love Story, a film that entered the debate on porn on the visual terrain early, by showing the pornography that it critiques. One can wonder about the efficacy of reproducing these images as an educational tool. But there is no question that the film has played an important role in consciousness-raising. Whose role is it to critique its visual strategy: educators, feminists, viewers--or the prohibitory measures of state censorship, as was the case in Ontario, where the film was kept from public view?

The production of violent imagery where real abuse takes place is illegal under assault legislation. That porn is produced underground, that sex trade workers in Canada are constantly harrassed by the very people (police) supposed to act on violence against women, that they are looked down upon for being sexual women, that the industry is heavily male dominated, that women remain for the most part unorganized and certainly outside of protective labour legislation, means that they are very vulnerable to real violence and abuse, more so than workers in many other trades. Supporting sex trade workers in organizing and decriminalizing prostitution and performance in pornography would assist women who work in these jobs more than hoping that they

disappear from sight. Women need the financial means and support services to escape from violence. If women are being abused in producing media materials then the law must act against the abuser, even if her is an employer.

The exploitation of children in the production of pornography is abhorrent. Child sexual abuse is abuse: whether at home, school or on a movie set. One of the few positive features of the proposed Bill C are provisions allowing children to testify in court, on video if unable to speak in court, and the removal of the accused from the courtroom to protect the child from intimidation. [Criminal Code Amendments] Child labour laws should also be used to prohibit the employment of children in pornography.

Prohibiting the image is not a solution. Important work, such as Loyalties; My American Cousin, and educational materials that depict childhood sexuality will be suppressed. Even material that could be used to alert children to the dangers of abuse could be swept up or left untouched by fearful publishers. These works will suffer in order to prohibit a genre that represents a tiny proportion of available material in Canada, material primarily available underground.

Child abuse is not created by pornographic images. Even

if some abusers now use child pornography to coerce children into having sex with them, the problem of sexual abuse existed long before child pornography was commercially available. It resides in the unequal power between men and women and children. It is a direct correlative of the idealization of youth in a death-obsessed culture. Sexual abuse speaks eloquently to the lack of rights that children have to assert their experience. It is testimony to the power of concepts of family and privacy to silence the victims within.

There are many levels of mediation between reality, the image and its reading. Every image, no matter how realist in its style, encompasses an idea of reality, diluted and fantasized. Commercial fantasies involve some abstract idea of values and feelings or need that the consumer would want translated into image form. Images are produced involving actors, sets, camerapeople and technology. It is then read by the audience.

The understanding of the image derives from the use of generalized but culturally and historically specific codes, the viewer's subjective experience relative to the image, their knowledge of the medium and other factors. There is a big gap between the creation of an image and its interpretation. And there is a bigger gulf between that reading and any action on the part of the viewer. We respond to images in part with emotion

(pleasure, disgust, etc.) but also with our intellects.

Women share this process. Given the variety of mediations at play, it is unlikely that there will be an Everywoman who reacts to images in a uniform and consistent way. A problem with the porn discourse is that it assumes that all men are interested in the same fantasy, one about sexual domination. If one actually looks at the range of commercial porn available there are a wide range of fantasies, some benign.

Thus, it is dangerous to assume one reading of the erotic for women, based on an implicit agreement about a shared sexual experience or vision. If we acknowledge the tremendous repression of women's sexuality within this society and the generalized violence that pervades everyday life and the sense of lack of control we experience, then we must acknowledge that women as well as men will internalize violence. When women begin to explore fantasies, including sexual fantasies, loss of control and perhaps violence, at least for some women, will be a factor. If existing fantasies (commercial and artistic) for the most part reinforce and express male desire then new imagery can and must be made for women to explore and hopefully transform our desire.

Censorship intervenes directly into this process. It enshrines the existing power imbalance within imagery--one in which women are passive and objectified, within the law. We en-

ter a society where the visual depiction of sexuality and all the associated problems of sexism get frozen at the point of existing sexist images (with here a snip, there a snip) and the monologue proceeds. For creation and exploration of female sexual imagery requires that there be active social support for women artists and educators in the form of resources and that the age old stigma against the public depiction of women as sexual beings is torn away. Censorship makes it socially risky for women to engage in this discussion as viewers as well as to produce images.

As an artist and image-consumer I suspect the implication that women, because of some essential quality, do not find pleasure in visual images. While most images, including sexual ones, are made with masculine taste in mind, some women do find echoes of their own desire within. Others find these lacking in what they desire, others may not respond to images but to context and other erotic stimuli, preferring non-photographic media which better create ambience. Other women may fear sexual explicitness or feel degraded by it--no surprise given who sex-negative our society is towards women's pleasure.

Artists are gravely fearful of the disappearance of a public space for viewing. Censorship of one type of imagery (sexual) to-day sets the framework for the suppression of other

"explicit", perhaps politically critical images tomorrow (ftnote Lisa Steele at CAA).

It is valuable to examine the ways that censorship acts to frame sexual discourse. In the United States during the 1940s and 1950s homoerotic representations were illicit. Thomas Waugh suggests that a set of symbols and assigned subcultural meanings evolved within the gay media--primarily muscle and then more general men's magazines--to speak to gay male desire. [Paper given at Ottawa Symposium on Sexuality and Representation, Gallery 101, 1984] Explicit homosexual imagery was usurped by phallic symbols (weaponry for example), symbols that appropriated traditional tools of domination and prescribed masculinity and subverted them. Gay male desire and the desire for images to represent it did not go away, despite prohibition and persecution. Rather, the symbols became precious and fetishized. Magazines constantly pushed the boundaries the law, fighting to establish the legality of the homoerotic image, or were pushed by prosecution to defend particular representations.

A similar process will occur with images of sex, with censorship laws in place. Sectors of the porn industry will tread water displaying women as objects, others will imply sexual activity and yet others will push the boundaries.)

The legal prosecution of porn enhances its value. The idea of the porn industry and its male consumers becoming the victims/heros in a fight for civil liberties is unattractive indeed.

Laws continue to accept eighteen as the dividing line between childhood and adulthood as regards access to sexual images and to sex aides. This contradicts the sexual realities of many, many young people. How absurd that a sixteen year old woman can have sexual intercourse, get pregnant, but not buy a vibrator! It reinforces a view of youth sexuality as appropriately defined and controlled by adults. The restriction of access to sexual images on protective grounds is thus posed as an effective way to control or shape the behavior of young people at the same time that no effective alternatives for education are posed. Action is argued on the basis of protecting society's values, but the actual status of Canadian youth is not probed, nor is their consciousness. They are never asked if they want to see or perhaps produce sexual imagery.

What's more it does not work! Young people are still fascinated by sex. How can they not be, in a society that places sex at the core of individual identity. Pornography substitutes for sex education for many teenagers. If porn is illegal its authority is magnified a hundred fold. Youth need media education

which enables a critical dismantling of porn within the school system and community and sex education is essential.

This educational process cannot be limited to the prevention of sexual abuse nor to dry biological fact.

Part of the allure of pornography is its fantasy aspect, what could be termed its entertainment value. Material that provides non-sexist alternatives has to be well packaged if it is going to reach young people (let alone adults). Restricting sex education to the school system is inadequate. Teachers have power over their students, kids are often uncomfortable talking about sex, a taboo subject at home and in the world. This is especially true in an environment with strong hierarchical lines of authority where they fear judgement. Availability of sexual information, images and discussion must exist in the community as well as in the school. For this reason restricting public access for young people is double jeopardy.

The more information and options that exist for young women and men to enable them to unravel who they are as sexual beings, the better opportunity for future generations to change the structures of sexual oppression which make the unequal images within pornography so attractive.

Vancouver's Coalition for the Right to View has

developed alternatives to censorship. Our solution requires social resources to flow into education and services, rather than police surveillance of galleries and distributors or the courts:

1) On the most fundamental level, women and youth require economic independence, to eliminate the urgency of work in prostitution and pornography. All policies which enhance the status of women socially and economically effect the desirability of misogynist pornography and the power of the women who work within the sex trade.

2) Central to this process is the organization of workers within the sex trades, to provide vehicles to express their needs directly and to press for decent wages and conditions.

3) We need a law that decriminalizes pornography and other sexual representations. We need to strengthen laws to intervene against sexual abuse of children and violence against women. Education of law enforcement agencies in these areas must be intensified.

4) The network of social services to support victims must be reinforced. Education about abuse, self-defense training for children and women, child abuse teams, shelters for battered women are part of this infrastructure. Censorship is a cheap and

unacceptable alternative.

5) Age of consent laws must be lowered to realistically address youth sexuality. They must be made uniform, regardless of sexual orientation as the Fraser Committee suggests. Young people must not be punished for being sexually active, whether with youth or adults. Sex abuse by adults must remain criminalized.

6) All sanctions against sexual choice must end. Sex education should include positive recognition of gay and lesbian lifestyles.

7) Comprehensive sex education programmes should be developed for use in schools and communities.

8) Child labour laws should be applied against those who employ children in the porn industry. Since most child pornography is produced outside of Canada, we could fight for a boycott of countries that do not prohibit child labour and sexual abuse.

9) Safe birth control and abortion must be available. Birth control education should be enhanced, not cutback.

10) Alternate sex-positive and pro-woman images must be

produced for mass media circulation and display in communities and galleries. Social resources must be devoted to producing educational and entertainment materials for adults and youth. Affirmative action policies should be implemented by funding agencies to insure that women producers are well represented in developing alternate imagery.

11) Men must encourage other men to take responsibility for their sexism, both attitudinal and behavioral. Given that pornography primarily targets the male consumer, men must make its misrepresentation of women and men a central concern.

12) Community action should continue against porn distributors who carry extremely violent heterosexual porn. The argument against censorship presented in this paper is not an argument for free speech at all costs, but an argument against asking the state to shape what we can or cannot see. It is reasonable to organize against hate literature whether the content is mysogny, racism or anti-semitism. The aim of organization must be educational and not sex-negative.

These ideas may seem ambitious but they offer a more coherent response to the problem of pornography than does the manipulation of a few existing laws. Unfortunately, what will

- Research on tolerance porn:
- market expansion -
 - visual -
 - other porn -

NOV. 25th
 ≠ forum. ✕

emerge from rigorous state censorship is likely to be a different set of images than pro-censorship feminists imagine, ones that may outdistance the obscenity of current standards.

Conclusion

① P's optimism →
 ② mobilizing position → law becomes tool

Naturalism / Greek art →
 Plato - US letting children hear all stories

- older people, not take enemy for granted
 - how screen + stream out -

- LAW - methodology of law - verbal, linear vs
 - shared social values aesthetic / poetic

- subjectivity of view -
 - law: minimal values } what occurs in public
 - greater freedom } reg.

- Ontario: long. sustained trad. repression -
 of Dorothy Cameron (T.O.)

SYMBOLIC ACT: - won't see uniformed police in
 B.C. -

- Motion Picture Act → stores
 Kitten Reatre

- still = matter of concern
 - subtle coercion into altering work -

- AEO -

- VAG -

- CAV legis. morality - 154 } change in public
 22 } attitude -
town vs US
and Rights -

STM
 Fantasies
 Texas: Celony to
 have homosexual
 sex → fines + jail
 ent. govt
 PC govt
 Fed's
 educ. tool
 enforcement
Customs