

The Feminist Sex Wars: 1975-1986

University of Michigan Winter 2018

January 3, 2018

ANTHROPOLOGY 658.003

WOMEN'S STUDIES 698.004

AMERICAN CULTURE 601.011

Wednesday 1:00PM-4:00PM

Professor: Gayle Rubin

Office Hours: Monday 1:30- 3PM or by appointment

210 West Hall

grubin@umich.edu

104B West Hall

647-0947

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar is an excavation and exploration of a piece of the history of the present. The aim is to make sense of some common contemporary discourses on pornography, sexual representation, and sexual conduct by exploring their sources in feminist political conflicts of four decades ago, as well as examining how the feminist engagement in these issues was entangled in other trajectories of conflicts over sexual representation and sexual media.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the feminist movement was rent by a series of acrimonious debates over issues relating to sexual conduct and representation. While there were disputes over many aspects of sexual behavior, some of the most intense controversy focused on “pornography,” although the definition of what constituted “pornography” was itself contested. Nonetheless, the roles of certain kinds of sexual imagery and behaviors in the creation and maintenance of male supremacy, and their causal relationships to violence against women, were contested with unusual ferocity. While these debates have largely subsided within feminism, they have not disappeared. Moreover, they continually affect a variety of other cultural conflicts which erupt on an almost daily basis.

Debates about government funding of sexually explicit art, concern over the putative dangers of on-line sexual content, and struggles over what imagery is appropriate for public display are constant features of the cultural landscape. And most of these discussions draw upon tactics, rhetoric, and assumptions first pioneered among feminists almost forty years ago. Ideas that were once found only in obscure feminist journals have become important fixtures in many contexts outside of organized feminism. This course traces the history and conceptual basis of these feminist “sex wars,” and their complex legacy in mainstream discourse, right wing rhetoric, law, and social policy.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

You are expected to keep up with the reading, attend classes, and participate in class discussions. We will have a forum set up in Canvas, on which you should post brief comments on the readings along with a topic or question for discussion in class. Posts are due by 8 PM on the Tuesday before each class. You may be asked to help lead class discussions from time to time on a rotating basis.

There will be a research paper of 20-25 pages. The paper should focus on investigating some aspect of the course material more deeply than it can be explored in class, or you may explore one of the topics we will not address in depth. Or, it can relate the course content to some aspect of your own research interests. The topic is subject to my approval. A one paragraph abstract of the project and a brief list of sources is due at the beginning of class on February 14. The final paper is due by 4PM on April 18.

Your grade will be based on your contributions to the online forum, your participation in class, and the research paper.

READINGS

This book is available as a digital download on the library website, or you may obtain a hard copy:
Whitney Strub, Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right.

The following books are available from Common Language Bookstore, 317 Braun Court, 734 663-0036. Common Language will visit class to sell the books once they have all arrived, time TBA.

Walter Kendrick, The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture, 1996 (1987), University of California Press.

Carolyn Bronstein, Battling Pornography: The American Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement, 1976-1986, 2011, Cambridge University Press.

Other readings will be posted on CANVAS. Anything not in one of the text books will be on CANVAS.

Additional and recommended resources: the literature on pornography, obscenity, censorship, and the politics thereof is vast. But here is a small sampler of useful books.

Alilunas, Peter: Smutty Little Movies: The Creation and Regulation of Adult Video

Beisel, Nicola: Imperiled Innocents: Anthony Comstock and Family Reproduction in Victorian America

Bronstein, Carolyn and Whitney Strub, Porno Chic and the Sex Wars: American Sexual Representation in the 1970s

Comella, Lynn: Vibrator Nation: How Feminist Sex-Toy Stores Changed the Business of Pleasure

Comella, Lynn and Shira Tarrant, New Views on Pornography: Sexuality, Politics, and the Law

Cosman, Brenda et al, Bad Attitude on Trial: Pornography, Feminism, and the Butler Decision

DeJean, Joan: The Reinvention of Obscenity: Sex, Lies, and Tabloids in Early Modern France

Lisa Duggan and Nan Hunter, Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture

Alice Echols, Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975

Elias, James et al: Porn 101: Eroticism, Pornography and the First Amendment

Miller-Young, Mireille: A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography

Nash, Jennifer: The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography

Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, Powers of Desire

Strub, Whitney, Obscenity Rules: Roth v United States and the Long Struggle over Sexual Expression

Carole S Vance, Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality

Wheeler, Leigh Ann: How Sex Became a Civil Liberty

Williams, Linda: Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"

Williams, Linda: Porn Studies

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 January 3

Introduction and Logistics. The Question of Pornography; the Pornography Question

Film: Not a Love Story: A Film About Pornography, 1981, dir. Bonnie Sherr Klein

Film: Perversion for Profit, 1965, Citizens for Decent Literature

Week 2 January 10

The Politics of Porn in the mid-20th century: Religion and the Right

Whitney Strub, Perversion for Profit, chapters 3, 4, 6 and 7.

Week 3 January 17

Before Pornography: A Brief History of Obscenity and Erotic Literature

Kendrick, chapters 1-4.

Lynn Hunt, "Introduction: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1900," from Hunt, The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1900, 1993, Zone Books.

Planned Parenthood, Sex Code of California. Two sets of selections on assorted sex laws, state of California, 1970s.

Week 4 January 24

Before WAVPM Came: Purity and Print in the United States

Kendrick, 5-7.

The Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, US Government Printing Office, 1970. Selections.

Note: this is a large document and you need not read it all. Please at least read Part One, the Overview of Findings, and the Statement of Charles H. Keating, Jr. If possible, also peruse the section on "Traffic and Distribution of Sexually Oriented Materials in the United States." You may find other aspects of the report to be of interest.

Joyce Murdoch and Deb Price, Courting Justice: Gay Men and Lesbians v. The Supreme Court, 2001. Basic Books. Chapter "One Standard of Justice."

Recommended:

De Grazia, "Girls Lean Back Everywhere," chapter on Margaret Anderson, Jane Heap, and the Trial of Ulysses, from Edward de Grazia, Girls Lean Back Everywhere: The Law, Obscenity, and the Assault on Genius, 1992, Random House.

Jennifer Yamashiro, "In the Realm of the Sciences: The Kinsey Institute's 31 Photographs," James Elias et al, Porn 101: Eroticism, Pornography, and the First Amendment, 1999, Prometheus Books.

Stanley Fleishman, "Art, Literature, and Obscenity in the United States Supreme Court," Elias et al, Porn 101.

Week 5 January 31

(Some) Feminists Discover Pornography

Nan Hunter, "Contextualizing the Sexuality Debates: A Chronology 1966-2005," from Lisa Duggan and Nan Hunter, Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture, 2006, Routledge.

Susan Brownmiller, Against Our Will, 1975, Simon and Schuster. Selection.

Diana E. H. Russell and Susan Griffin, "On Pornography," Chrysalis, no 4, 1977.

Andrea Dworkin, Pornography: Men Possessing Women, 1981, Perigee. Chapter 6, "Pornography."

Andrea Dworkin, Right-Wing Women, 1983, Perigee. Chapter 6, "Antifeminism."

Linda Williams, Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible", 1989, University of California Press. Selection on "Snuff."

Recommended:

Deb Freidman and Lois Yankowski, "Snuffing Sexual Violence"
Lisa Downing, "Snuff and Nonsense"
Anne Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm"

Week 6 February 7

The Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement: WAVPM and WAP

Bronstein, "Introduction" and Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7

Laura Lederer, Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography, 1980, William Morrow, Selections. Women Against Violence in Pornography & Media, Newspage. Selections, 1977-1980. Clippings, anti-porn activism circa 1977-8; protests of Story of O.

Recommended:

Anti-porn goes mainstream:

Karen Durbin, "Pretty Poison: The Selling of Sexual Warfare, Village Voice, May 9, 1977
"Really Socking it to Women," Time, February 1977.

WAP and the Remaking of Times Square:

Samuel Delaney, Times Square Red, Times Square Blue
Papayanis, "Sex and the Revanchist City: Zoning out Pornography"
Bart Eeckhout, "The Disneyfication of Times Square: Back to the Future?"

Week 7 February 14 Paper Proposal Due

Sexual Fault Lines in Feminism, circa 1980: Gay men, drag, transsexuality, improper lesbianism, SM

Laura Shapiro, "Is There Sexism in the Closet?" Mother Jones Sept/Oct 1978.

Sally Gearhart, "An Open Letter to Voters in District 5 and San Francisco's Gay Community from Sally Gearhart. Broadside, 1979. Priscilla Alexander, "Sally's Letter," Bay Area Reporter, August 30, 1979.

Penny and Liza, "Can Some Men Be Women? Transsexuals in the Women's Movement," Dyke, A Quarterly, Fall 1977.

NOW resolution on lesbian and gay rights, 1980: documents. National Lawyers Guild response.

Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Lesbian Continuum," Signs, vol 5, no 4, Summer 1980.

Gayle Rubin, "Samois," Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History in America.

Samois, "What Color is Your Handkerchief," 1979, Samois. Selections

WAVPM, "A Forum on S & M in the women's community" (Benefit for Women Against Violence in Pornography & Media); leaflets "Anti-Lesbian Propaganda" and "This Forum is a Lie About S/M"

Samois, "Coming to Power," 1982 (1981), Samois. Selections including:

Rubin, "The Leather Menace"

Califa, "History of lesbian SM in the Bay Area"

Robin Ruth Linden et al, Against Sadomasochism: A Radical Feminist Analysis. Selections

Week 8 February 21 Feminist Critics Emerge

Heresies #12: Sex Issue Selections, including:

Joan Nestle, "Butch-Fem Relationships: Sexual Courage in the 1950s."

Amber Hollibaugh and Cherrie Moraga, "What We're Rollin Around in Bed With: Sexual Silences in Feminism: A conversation Toward Ending Them."

FACT, Caught Looking: Feminism, pornography, & censorship, Selections from the early W.A.P. phases, including:

Ellen Willis, "Feminism, Moralism & Pornography"

Ann Snitow, "Retrenchment vs. Transformation: the politics of the antipornography movement."

Paula Webster, "Pornography and Pleasure."

Deirdre English, Amber Hollibaugh, and Gayle Rubin, "Talking Sex," Socialist Review July-August 1981.

John D'Emilio, "Women Against Pornography: Feminist Frontier or Social Purity Crusade?"

Gayle Rubin, "Misguided, Dangerous, and Wrong"

Recommended:

Lynne Segal, "Does Pornography Cause Violence? The Search of Evidence," from Pamela Church Gibson and Roman Gibson, Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power. 1993, BFI .

Irving Copi and Carl Cohen, Introduction to Logic, 1990, Macmillan. Chapter on "The Fallacies" (aka, the informal fallacies). Plus logic cartoon.

Week 9 February 28– Spring Break– No Class

Week 10 March 7 The Sex Wars Move East: Barnard

Primary documents:

Diary of a Conference, Excerpts, GLQ

Coverage, off our backs, June, July, August-September 1982.

Additional documents including:

more Diary

Women Against Porn et al, "We Protest." leaflet.

Press coverage of the conference from off our backs, June-Sept, 1982.

"Notes and Letters," Feminist Studies Fall 1983.

Carole Vance, "Epilog," Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality, 1984

Carole Vance, "More Danger, More Pleasure: A Decade After the Barnard Sexuality Conference, 1989

Rubin, "Thinking Sex suite" excerpts from Deviations

Recent Commentary:

Lynn Comella, "Looking Backward: Barnard and its Legacies"

Rachel Corbman, "The Scholars and the Feminists: The Barnard Sex Conference and the History of the Institutionalization of Feminism"

Carolyn Bronstein, "Clashing at Barnard's Gates: Understanding the Origins of the Pornography Problem in the Modern American Women's Movement"

Week 11 March 14 Why We Call them the Sex Wars: Scorched Earth Debates

Robin Morgan, Anatomy of Freedom, 1982, Anchor Doubleday. Selection

Ellen Willis, "Who is a Feminist? A Letter fo Robin Morgan," Village Voice, Dec 1982; Letters to the editor.

Five Colleges conference on Feminism, Sexuality and Power, documents including: program, Margaret Hunt, "Discord in the Happy Valley," Gay Community News, Dec 7-13, 1986; letters from off our backs, January 1987.

ANU Humanities Research Centre 1993, documents including:
“A protest at the Emphasis of the Humanitise Research Centre’s 1993 Conferences” and press coverage.
Rubin, “Blood Under the Bridge,” 2011, Deviations, Duke University Press, pp 200-215 (sections on Barnard, Five Colleges, Australian National University, Bay Area SM wars).

Week 12 March 21 The Ordinance: Civil Rights Antipornography and the Turn to the State

Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women’s Equality, 1988.

Mackinnon, “Not a Moral Issue”

Emerson, “Reply to MacKinnon”

FACT, Caught Looking, Selections from the C.R.A.P. period, including:

Lisa Duggan, “Censorship in the Name of Feminism.”

Lisa Duggan, Nan Hunter, and Carole Vance, “False Promises: Feminist Antipornography Legislation.”

Gayle Rubin, “Anti-porn laws, the Right, and Women’s Liberation,” Gay Community News, December 22, 1984.

Brief Amici Curiae of Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce, et al, in American Booksellers Association v. Hudnut. In University of Michigan Journal of Law Reform, Fall 1987-Winter 1988.

Week 13 March 28 Mobilizing the State from Left and Right: Fraser, Meese, Butler, and the NEA

Special Committee on Pornography and Prostitution, Porno graphy and Prostitution in Canada. 1985.

Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography, Final Report. 1986. Selections.

Press coverage and response from anti-porn feminists.

Carole Vance, “Negotiating Sex and Gender in the Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography,” in Faye Ginsburg and Ann Tsing, Uncertain Terms: Negotiating Gender in American Culture, 1990, Beacon.

Carole Vance, “The Pleasures of Looking: The Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography versus Visual Images,” in Carol Squiers, The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography, 1990, Bay Press.

Carole Vance tetralogy from Art in America, “The War on Culture” 1989, “Misunderstanding Obscenity” 1990, “Reagan’s Revenge” 1990, and “Feminist Fundamentalism” 1993.

Butler Decision, documents:

Recommended:

Brenda Cossman et al, Bad Attitude On Trial: Pornography, Feminism, and the Butler Decision Forbidden Passages: Writings Banned in Canada

Week 14 April 4 TBA

Week 15 April 11 Last Class: the Future of Sexual Politics?

Linda Williams, “Second Thoughts on *Hard Core*: American Obscenity Law and the Scapegoating of Deviance,” Gibson and Gibson, Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power.

April 18 Final Paper Due 4PM