

'Porn Is Here to Stay'

By Amitai Etzioni

Mayor Beame may well be sincerely disgusted with pornography; only he is much better at keeping his feelings about erotic material private when no election looms.

After all, about 80 percent of all Americans favor tough laws against pornography. But porn is here to stay: Several of the joints Mr. Beame closed were back in business the same night—and the Mayor's drive is almost exclusively for the voters' excitement, not satisfaction—as good a definition as any of an unsavory act.

Studies of pornography document not its dangers but rather the difficulties many citizens experience in dealing with sexuality openly. These studies suggest that most adults who view X-rated materials are not affected by them, or only briefly. During that period, they do a little more of what they have been doing anyhow.

Thus, in the P.G.-rated language of scientific studies of pornography, we learn that "when masturbation follows exposure, it tends to occur among individuals with established masturbatory patterns" and that while "coital frequency increases" it is among "experienced persons with established and available sexual partners." In contrast to the view that porn corrupts people, most experts concur that "established patterns of sexual behavior were found to be very stable and not altered substantially by exposure to erotica," to quote the "Report" of the President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography (1970).

Contrary to the popular view that porn breeds sex, it seems mainly the other way around: Those already having an active sexual appetite add porn to their menu. Porn is consumed more by men than women, more by younger than older persons, more by people less likely to attend church, and by those generally more active sexually.

In an often-cited experiment, a bunch of young men at the University of North Carolina were served up "repeated" and "prolonged" porn. Result: monumental and increasing boredom. Censorship, this study suggests, makes the material less accessible and shrouds it with the lure of forbidden fruit; ready availability is the best treatment.

Even for those who continue to wallow in porn, there is little support for the widely held notion that pornography breeds criminality. Studies comparing delinquent with nondelinquent youth found generally they were exposed to pornography for the first time at about the same age, viewed the same stuff, guzzled up similar amounts, etc. As to sex crimes, porn seems to provide a relief rather than a stimulant.

In recent rallies against smut in Times Square, porn, prostitution and crimes of violence have been lumped together. Theater and restaurant owners and others are agitated over the effects of concentrations of smut on their neighborhood. But porn is not the cause of prostitution or mugging, and its concentration in Times Square is largely the result of its being persecuted elsewhere in the city.

If it were accessible to all who want it in their neighborhoods, X-rated theaters would be sprinkled across the community the way newsstands are. Explicit displays on the street, which make it impossible to avoid porn, might be curbed. But if it is freely available indoors, it will not be pushed into the streets and flood Times Square. Of course, prostitution and crime will still have to be dealt with in their own right.

Why do 67 percent of Americans agree with the statement in a 1976 Daniel Yankelovich poll that "the government should crack down more on pornography in movies, books and nightclubs"?



Eduard Thony

About half of these people are "sexual hard hats." They state quite openly that they would wish to suppress it even if there were no evidence that it is harmful and if it were consumed only by consenting adults in their own homes. Indeed, while they are at it, they would also suppress speeches against God and books that attack our form of government.

The other half, which contains a high number of older, less-well-educated, smaller-town folk, is also more conservative than average but not quite so blue-nosed about it. They are the soft core of the anti-porn camp.

Many of both groups have difficulty accepting their own sexuality and feel

that unless the authorities keep the lid on, their urges may erupt.

A democratic society requires holding at bay these sexual anxieties and their repressive political expressions. Politicians who pander to these feelings would do well to reconsider their campaign themes.

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