

# The Anti Pornography Movement

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The anti-pornography movement is part of the larger “moral reform” movement, which is comprised mainly of women and religious individuals. Though the movement today is known to be an issue of importance mainly to the right wing Christian groups, it enjoyed a great deal of growth and support under the guidance of left wing feminist organizations. My analysis of the anti-pornography movement will focus on this shift in movement activity, from radical feminists to conservative women. However, I suggest that throughout the span of the movement, conservative men have played an important role in legislation and enforcement.

I believe the anti-pornography movement can be greatly elucidated in the context of the Political Process Model theory of social movement. In particular, two technological innovations, the VCR and the Internet, are responsible for the growth of the pornography industry, and concurrently, the growth of the anti-pornography movement. Opportunities for anti-pornography legislation have also arisen as conservative men have been appointed to different positions in government.

The anti-pornography movement cannot be understood without also taking into account the “framing” of grievances, and I will demonstrate how the shift in movement activity from the radical feminist sector to the conservative Christian sector was accompanied by a shift in framing. Though this shift may at first appear to be a complete transformation, I will argue that it was, in fact, not absolute. Rather, the contemporary anti-pornography movement has succeeded in bridging itself to various concerns, and the result is a broader frame.



The 1970s were characterized by an extraordinarily high level of social movement activity (Baumgartner 2002). In *Social Movements, the Rise of New Issues, and the Public Agenda*, Frank Baumgartner suggests that several of these movements were interconnected and simultaneously enjoyed a great increase in congressional attention. In particular, the feminist movement gained strength from the Civil Rights Movement, which preceded it. Data shows that, “the timing of the increase of attention to civil rights is somewhat earlier to that of women’s issues [...] but the correspondence between the growth of the size of the interest-group population active in the area and the amount of congressional attention to the issue is just as striking,” (Baumgartner 2002: 7).

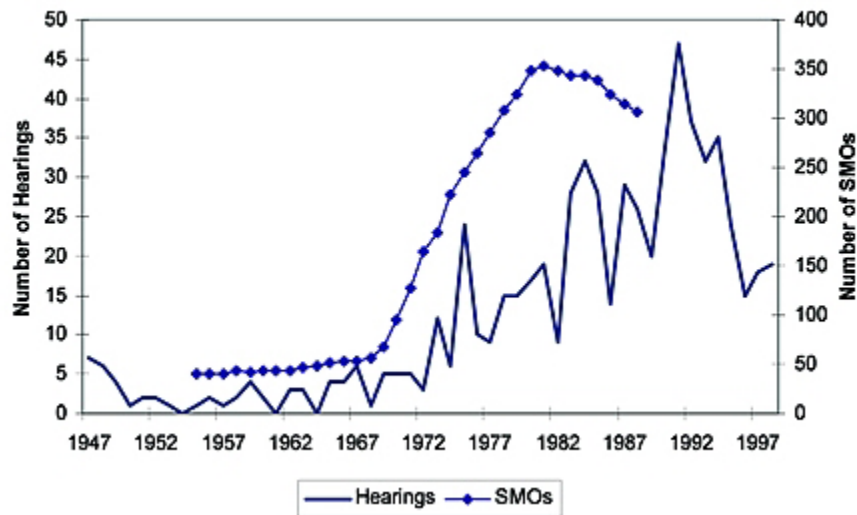


Figure 1. Women’s Groups and Congressional Attention

The first feminist anti-pornography movements arose in the early 1980s, shortly after the advent of the VCR. Feminist writers and theorists took advantage of this political opportunity by redefining pornography in terms of its impact on women (Cavalier, 1996: 1). As shown in Figure 1, the feminist movement had already seen a great deal of success before it began to address the issue of pornography. In fact, the rise

of the anti-pornography movement appears to be related to an overall decrease in feminist social movement organizations.

Although women's issues saw a continued increase in congressional attention throughout the 1970s, 80s, and into the 90s, there was already a great deal of confusion within the feminist movement itself in the late 70s. I would like to suggest that this confusion was in fact a result of the movement's success, because many feminists harbored a great deal of resentment towards men, and woman's significant gains were not enough to exhaust the deep well of passion that remained within the movement. The anti-pornography movement was an outlet for those who felt oppressed by pornographic media that pleased men by depicting women as subordinate. A statement made by Christina Sommers – a “dissident feminist” – in an interview with *Think Tank*, makes the connection between the success of the feminist movement and the rise in frustration in the radical sector. She says, “No women have ever had more opportunities, more freedom, and more equality than contemporary American women. And at that moment the movement becomes more bitter and more angry (Wattenberg 1995: 1).”

One feminist theorist in particular, Catharine MacKinnon, helped direct this anger against what she interpreted as the “institutionalization of violence” against women: pornography. MacKinnon can be credited with framing the movement in a way that captured the hearts and minds of women on all sides of the political spectrum. She borrowed a great deal from the Civil Rights Movement; yet the anti-pornography movement was heavily criticized by racial minority women. At a conference of the social movement organization known as Women Against Pornography (WAP), many were not shy about voicing their complaints:

- “A woman describing herself as a Puerto Rican lesbian feminist complained about the trend in sectors of the feminist movement to ally with reactionaries,” (Brooke 1979: 8).
- “Finally, a black lesbian responded to why more black women weren’t there: there was so much racism and fighting among ourselves at feminist events,” (Brooke 1979: 8).

To these women their sexual orientation was just as important as their race, and indeed many lesbians have been vocal about their belief that pornography is not just a heterosexual issue. Yet many feminists continue to ignore a lesbian or homosexual perspective on pornography when they speak out against it. Instead, they remain convinced that pornography is an issue of men and women. Diana Russell, in her speech at the *Women’s Worlds 99* convention allies herself with the Civil Rights movement while opposing women against men, “Just as African Americans in the United States were the primary force in the struggle against racism, it is women who must initiate and sustain an organized movement to combat pornography. Hence, it is vital that women are educated about the contents of porn and the causal role it plays in promoting misogyny as well as primarily male crimes such as rape, child sexual abuse, woman battering, sexual harassment, and femicide,” (Russell 1999: 18). Furthermore, the anti-pornography organization, Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media (WAVPM) went so far as to say that the proliferation of pornography in media, which arose due to new technologies such as the VCR and color TV, was in fact a response to the feminist movement: “We see this proliferation of pornography, particularly violent pornography and child pornography, as part of the male backlash to the women’s liberation movement.

Enough women have been rejecting the traditional role of subordination to men to cause a crisis in the collective male ego,” (Califia 1994: 10).

In response to these claims, lesbians asked whether violence could be monopolized by men. One lesbian feminist named Pat Califia embraced sadomasochism when practiced between two women, and extended that right to heterosexual and homosexual couples. In a letter to *Off Our Backs*, she declared, pornographically, “S/M is not ‘conforming to sex roles,’ nor is it true that role-switching is ‘rare in S/M.’ My ‘slave’ regularly ties me up, torments me, fucks my brains out, and I love it,” (Califia 1980: 2).



Figure 2. Lesbian Violence

It is clear that the anti-pornography movement of the 70s and 80s was always fraught with dissent from within. Yet images of violent pornography and MacKinnon’s claim that these images were linked to rape and battery truly struck a chord in the hearts of those who worked with battered women. One activist confesses, “Most of us had firsthand experience with women abuse. Many of us had been sexually assaulted or

battered; many of us worked in transition houses or rape crisis centers. We saw pornography as yet another form of women abuse,” (Ridington 1994: 1) However, as the movement progressed, this activist came to see different sides of the issue, asking, “Are there different standards of tolerance when violence in pornography is depicted by women [against] other women? [...] Yet when I see pictures of people in bondage, or subjected to pain, whether male or female or heterosexual or gay or lesbian context, it is pain I see and feel,” (Ridington 1994:6) She makes no attempts to hide her own confusion, which reflects the confusion that many women, on both sides of the pornography debate, felt deeply.

Intimately related to the question of whether anti-porn equals anti-gay and lesbian is the question, did the very act of lobbying for anti-porn legislation place feminists in an unholy alliance with the religious right? To answer this question, we must consider the political context in which feminist lobbyists like Cathryn MacKinnon were working. Ronald Reagan was elected president for two consecutive terms in the early 1980s, and he “won reelection in 1984 by a landslide, owing a very large indebtedness to the Religious Right,” (DeWitt 2003: 3). Furthermore, both Reagan and his attorney general, Edwin Meese, took sexual morality very seriously. Indeed, one of Reagan’s favorite causes was against “children having children” and “welfare queens” (Cocca 2002: 4). The concern over teen sexuality that burgeoned during the Reagan Administration signals an important shift in the framing of the anti-pornography movement, from the rights of women to the rights of children, i.e. minors under the age of 18. However, religious conservatives did not reject MacKinnon’s suggestion that pornography violated the civil rights of women.

When MacKinnon arrived on the scene, there existed no legal definition of “pornography.” The word that has always been used is “obscenity,” which is rather vague, as Jonathan Elmer points out in *The Exciting Conflict*, “Rather than defining obscenity, the Court’s standard simply reasserts the *possibility* of defining obscenity, a possibility assured by the assumed coherence of a community and a self able to judge,” (Elmer 1988: 49). The emphasis here is on community standards, which are dependent on the location of the community in space and time. But in the context of MacKinnon’s definition of pornography, “Abstract notions of obscenity become irrelevant when pornography is thus conceived as a discriminatory practice which constitutes an infringement of the civil rights of women,” (Elmer 1988: 52). Furthermore, her definition invokes John Stuart Mill’s “harm principle” as a valid excuse for circumventing the First Amendment (Cavalier 1996: 1). This newly evolved weapon in the fight against obscenity or pornography was welcomed by moralists.

It seems clear that MacKinnon was aware that she was allying herself with the right wing, when she said, “the media has been conducting a campaign out of whole cloth about our relationship to conservatives [...] We thought someday that would pay off,” (Douglas 1986: 2). However, within organizations like WAP, many women were concerned about this alliance. One woman is quoted as saying that she didn’t want to align herself with “the folks in my hometown who think sex is evil. I don’t want government censorship because the boys won’t censor themselves, they will censor us,” (Brooke 1979: 3). Other issues of concern were that WAP make clear that it supported prostitutes, and “differentiate itself from the right-wing on this issue,” (Brooke 1979: 4). However, the overwhelming climate of the organization appeared to be anti-prostitution

(Brooke 1979: 5). Furthermore, WAP was quite willing to accept money from the right wing, considering that they had few options. (Brooke 1979: 7).

Concerns about right wing influence were not unfounded, and though legislation was passed due to feminist lobbying, wording was often corrupted or simply insufficient in the eyes of feminists (Ridington 1994). Perhaps it is no surprise that they were not satisfied, considering their apparent confusion over the issue themselves. Some issues that were never addressed were, “a legal definition of pornography that would replace the definition of obscenity and distinguish it from erotica and limit violent pornography and child pornography” and, “obscenity provisions moved out of the ‘Offences Tending to Corrupt Morals’ section of the Criminal Code,” (Ridington 1994: 3). The lack of a clear definition of pornography versus the more woman-friendly “erotica” was also a cause of confusion within the WAP (Brooke 1979: 6, 7).

Often legislation simply seemed to be gained at too high a price for some feminists. In particular, enforcement of laws that anti-pornography feminists had lobbied for was often directed at the gay and lesbian community. Canada was one of the first places to embrace the definition of pornography as violence. After the law was passed, one lobbyist named Kathleen Mahoney proudly proclaimed the key to her movement’s success, “We made the point that among the seized videos were some horrifically violent and degrading gay movies. We made the point that the abused men in these films were being treated like whores and the judges got it. Otherwise, men can’t put themselves in our shoes,” (Ridington 1994: 7). Soon enough, gays and lesbians were targeted. Specifically, gays were targeted in the search for child pornography. Pat Califia claims that, “Gay men who have sexual relationships with boys (and the boys themselves) are

the *real* victims of the kiddy-porn crusade” (Califia 1994: 1). She buttresses this statement by citing an incidence of the New York City police raiding the Athletic Models Guild in response to “an alleged complaint from a fourteen-year-old whom police say was photographed at the studio,” (Califia 1994: 3). Though no child pornography was found on the premises, mailing lists were seized, containing the names of “some three thousand” homosexuals.



Figure 3. Caged Homosexual

Even MacKinnon acknowledged the difficulties of her task when the Indianapolis Supreme Court overturned legislation that she had helped construct in 1984: “MacKinnon said the decision will make it more difficult to find communities willing to enact ordinances like the one she drafted,” (Douglas 1986: 3). Anti-pornography feminists began to differentiate between activism and legislation, and sometimes even opposed legislation. The Feminist Anti Censorship Taskforce, a countermovement that arose in response to MacKinnon’s ideas, was extremely effective in opposing anti-pornography legislation (Rich 1985). Legislation was thus passed and later overturned, and the

feminist anti-pornography movement began to wind down. A look at the feminist movement as a whole shows that “disputes over sexuality, class, and race contributed to the decline of the radical feminist branch of the movement” and “radical feminism gave way to a new cycle of feminist activism sustained by lesbian feminist communities,” (Taylor 1992: 174).



Figure 4. Lesbians Unite

It is my belief that MacKinnon’s definition of pornography, while not perfect, would have worked just as well as any other if it weren’t for dissent within the movement itself. Fear of being co-opted by the right wing and a desire to form stronger alliances with the burgeoning gay and lesbian movements were a couple important concerns leading to the decline of activity in the radical feminist anti-pornography movement. Yet despite the decline of the movement, MacKinnon’s framing of pornography in terms of “violence” and bridging that frame to the Civil Rights Movement had a great deal of resonance even beyond the feminist community. Today her definitions live on as the

debate over violent and child pornography continues, and to some extent her words have been appropriated by the right wing in their own fight against pornography.



The popularity of the Civil Rights Movement did indeed provide a political opportunity to discuss pornography within the framing of “violence.” But the Civil Rights Movement declined as the feminist anti-pornography also began to wane, as is shown in the graph below.

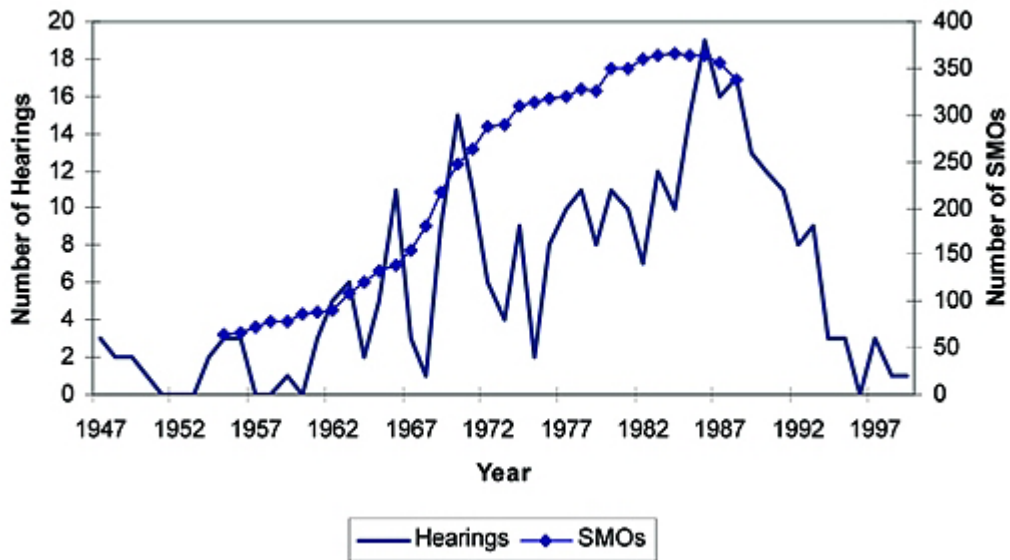


Figure 4. Congressional Hearings and SMOs on Civil Rights and Minority Issues

The Christian Right followed closely on the heels of the Feminist movement. A comparison of the two movements reveals similarities, specifically in the importance of framing and identity. “The collective identities of sectarian evangelical Protestants were crucial to the origins of the Christian Right in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. In this sense, the movement closely resembles the origins of ‘new social movements’ on the left, such as feminism,” (Green 1999: 155). The primary difference between the two movements is that feminists sought to change what they believed were outdated concepts,

and the Christian Right was invested in maintaining what they defined as “traditional values,” (Green 1999: 155). Thus, the feminists perceived pornography as a manifestation of ancient misogynistic attitudes towards women, whereas the Christian Right saw pornography as a challenge to the stability of the nuclear family and the Biblically defined sexual roles to which men and women must adhere. The Christian movement’s framing of issues within the “pro family” context “captured the most popular part of the Christian Right’s moral agenda,” (Green 1999: 159).

The Christian Right distinguished itself from the feminist anti-pornography movement by framing the movement more squarely within the context of family values. Thus, pornography was centered on the violation of children’s rights, rather than those of women. One group that exemplifies this attitude and its truly oppositional role towards feminism is the Concerned Women for America (CWA), founded by Beverly LaHaye in 1979 (Gardiner 2000: 1). LaHaye is quoted as having formed the social movement organization in response to the leader of the National Organization for Women (NOW), Betty Friedan, having said that her views represented those of many American women. Upon hearing this, LaHaye “Jumped up and said, ‘Betty Friedan doesn’t speak for me and I bet she doesn’t speak for the majority of women in this country,’” (Gardiner 2000: 1). The context of Friedan’s statement is not given, but it is quite possible that what she said was in fact, “I want to express my view, on behalf of a great many women in this country, feminists and believers in human rights, that this current move to introduce censorship in the United States in the guise of suppressing pornography is extremely dangerous to woman,” (Cavalier 1996: 2).

Friedan, the founder of NOW, was eventually expelled from NOW (Wattenberg 1995: 6), and NOW made clear its disapproval of pornography, sadomasochism, pederasty and public sex, which it felt were “mistakenly correlated with lesbian/gay rights by some gay organizations and opponents of lesbian/gay rights who [sought] to confuse the issue,” (NOW 1980). NOW is often seen as representing the views of the majority of feminists in the broader women’s movement (Wattenberg 1995: 6), and its decision to disassociate itself from the pornography debate, and in fact to adopt the position that pornography “is an issue of exploitation and violence, not affectional/sexual preference/orientation,” (NOW 1980) shows how threatened it was by the “moral high ground” that women such as Beverly LaHaye were taking, in opposition to the feminist movement as a whole.



Figure 5. Woman Against Woman

There is a distinct change in power relations with the introduction of women like Beverly LaHaye onto the anti-pornography scene. Feminists eventually relinquished their anti-pornography lobbying campaign because of the threat of co-optation by the

greater Christian Right, yet women like LaHaye had no such fears. One of the greatest successes of the Christian Right is “the forging of a strong relationship between sectarian evangelical activists and the Republican Party,” (Green 1999: 162). This was already the case during the time of the feminist anti-pornography movement, and feminists disapproved of lobbying for legislation because it tended to ally them with Republicans, from President Reagan to Attorney General Jesse Helms. For the CWA, however, the existence of Christian men in key governmental positions offers a distinct advantage. Furthermore, the Christian Rightists are free to borrow feminist language, which can be very useful. The feminists demonstrated that as long as pornography is framed in terms of the harm that it inflicts, obscenity need not be defined and legislation remains immune to First Amendment protection. The framing of this harm, however, has been shifted away from women and centered on children and the institution of the family.

The CWA is not only more powerful than its feminist counterparts by virtue of its male supporters in key governmental positions; it also has a budget, membership, and media network that trumps that of the feminist anti-pornography movements. Membership estimates vary widely, from 350,000 to 750,000 women, yet either estimate is significantly greater than that of the WAP or the WAVPM combined. An annual budget of \$10 million makes it clear that co-optation by the left wing is not an issue for the CWA. Furthermore, the CWAs monthly newsletter has 200,000 subscribers and its radio show, “Beverly LaHaye Live,” reaches “upwards of 350,000 people on twenty-eight stations nationwide.” The women of the CWA also have no doubts about their role within the broader context of the Christian Right, and thus there is little or no dissent within the movement. The strength of purpose of women like LaHaye can be attributed

to the strong framing of the movement within the context of women's traditional roles. LaHaye coined the phrases, "spirit controlled woman," and "kitchen table lobbyist," and has been quoted as saying that the spirit controlled woman is "truly liberated" because she is "totally submissive" to her husband (Gardiner 2000: 1).

Although the CWA does oppose many threats to the family, including feminism, pornography, sex education, and gay rights, there is no doubt that each threat, including pornography, is given its due attention. The organization employs extremely effective campaigning methods, which "can be devastating as thousands of letters and phone calls bombard Capitol Hill in a matter of days." The essence of the response to the CWA has been that, "Legislators in both houses and in both parties, particularly those who depend on conservative support, know that a 'wrong' vote on one of these hot issues will come back to haunt them at the next election [...] They may not expect the support of the CWA crowd, but they definitely don't want to be targeted by them as a special enemy in the next election," (Gardiner 2002: 2, 3). The contrast between the CWA and feminist organizations, including the WAP and WAVPM, is stark. Some of the most hailed victories of the feminist anti-pornography movement were the destruction of a local movie theater showing a "pornographic thriller" called *Snuff*, the Take Back the Night March, which involved 5,000 women demonstrating in the streets of San Francisco, and tours of New York's "pornography strip" that led over about 2,000 women in a year's time (Lederer 1980: 15). Not only were the feminists a great deal more radical, they were operating on a completely different scale. However, they can be credited with capturing the attention of the media.

Although the CWA has been in operation since the late 1970s, the recent challenge of a new, unregulated frontier, easily accessible to children nationwide, i.e. the Internet, has spurred activity within its ranks, and among its allies in the Christian Right. There is no doubt that the first profitable industry to hit the Internet was pornography, and that the Internet is characterized by free-flowing sexual information, discussions and media. Like the VCR, the Internet has contributed greatly to the pornography industry's growth, but the Internet is a much more powerful tool than the VCR. One significant aspect of the Internet is that it constitutes a community with its own standards of decency; in fact, there seems to be no limit to the obscenity that one might find in this community. Naturally, the anti-pornography movement is threatened. Although attempts have been made to restrict sexual material on the Internet, the Internet community is extremely resistant to regulation. According to one social movement theorist, "many Internet users see themselves as constituting a community that does not recognize external authorities," (Peckham 1988: 7).

Computers have moved into many women's homes and stolen the attention of their children and their husbands, for even Christian men are often "seduced" by the pornographic climate of the Internet. The threat to the family has never been more obvious, and organizations have responded to women's cries. The American Family Association (AFA), National Campaign to Stop Pornography (NCSP), Family Research Council, and Traditional Values Coalition are just a few of the numerous right wing organizations involved in the rousing battle against Internet pornography. Although pornography may not be the most popular cause for social movement leaders to champion, many organizations have been happy to defend pornography in the name of

free speech. Some of these organizations are the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), Hands off! The Net, Voters Telecommunications Watch (VTW) and last but not least, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) which has always been a defender of the First Amendment.

Though it may seem unfair to say that the Internet anti-pornography battle was initiated by women, it is my view that women have always formed the “radical flank” of the anti-pornography movement, though they must continuously rely on the support of men in the Christian Right to pass legislation. There are a very few women in powerful governmental positions. One significantly powerful woman, Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, declared that nude dancing is not protected by the First Amendment because “Being in a ‘state of nudity’ is not an inherently expressive condition.”



Figure 6. Nudity is Not Inherently Expressive

Another remarkably powerful “church lady” is Linda Smith, who once sponsored the “heavy petting bill,” which outlawed sex for those under 18 (The Position 2003). Yet

there are simply not a significant number of women in the legislature. Yet those who oppose pornography have historically been overwhelmingly female, though Christian women are able to influence Christian men with the weight of the Bible into supporting the movement. One new group of male anti-pornography activists, called “Promise Keepers: Men of Integrity,” has demonstrated its commitment to the cause, however, and one might expect to see more male anti-pornography social movement organizations in the future.

Shame is always an important weapon in the anti-pornography movement, that has manifested itself in the form of software programs that do not block pornography websites, but rather keep an account of websites that have been visited and rate them according to their content. The idea is that wives will be able to shame their husbands into abandoning their nocturnal forays into the realms of Internet porn. Names like “Internet Accountability” emphasize the confessional nature of the program. Accountability is the first step on the road to recovery. Here we see another, very important expansion of the framing of the anti-pornography movement: pornography becomes an addiction, necessitating treatment for men and firm regulation to protect children from exposure. Just as the Civil Rights movement provided a political opportunity for discussing pornography in terms of violence, the ever-popular War on Drugs allows pornography to be discussed in terms of addiction. According to Dr. Wells of the Sexual Recovery Institute of Los Angeles, “The Internet is the crack cocaine of sexual addiction,” (AFO Net).

The first legislation designed to combat Internet pornography was the Communications Decency Act of 1996. It was passed without a second glance during the

Clinton Administration. Although Clinton was a democrat, it should be considered that he passed the legislation because it would be shameful not to do so. The Act was designed to protect children from indecent sexual material, and if Clinton were to deny the legitimacy of this cause, the media would likely shame him publicly. Such public shaming can have devastating political consequences. Take the example of Randy Tate, head of the Christian Coalition, who was elected to the House of Representatives because of a mailing campaign that accused his opponent of being a child molester, (The Position). Tate disavowed knowledge of the campaign, but insisted that “it was legitimate because of his opponent's opposition to publicizing a list of teachers who had been accused of child abuse when he was state superintendent of public instruction,” (POINT 1997). Thus, opposition to initiatives designed to protect children can be interpreted as endorsement of child abuse.



Figure 7. Children are Curious.

The Communications Decency Act was met with opposition from the Internet community, and soon many aspects of it were overturned. Much of the disagreement

arose about the use of the word “decency,” which was considered by First Amendment activists and lawyers to be a “far looser concept” than obscenity (Curiel 1997: 2). However, anti-pornography lobbyists have learned to de-emphasize decency *and* obscenity, and, taking cues from the feminists, stress the harm that is inflicted on children. Thus, the newest evolution is the PROTECT Act, which “adds a new child pornography crime which defines as obscene materials that appear to be, but are not, of children [...] and adds 25 prosecutors to mount an assault on the erotic media industry,” (DeWitt 2003: 6). This new type of child pornography is called “virtual child pornography,” in which no one truly knows whether the individual involved was or was not under the age of 18. The Department of Justice claims that this complication makes it “immeasurably more difficult to eliminate the traffic in real child pornography,” (DOJ 2003).

Defining child pornography as media that may or may not depict children brings up another unique feature of the Internet: anonymity. Michael Peckham defines two important resources on the Internet in his essay “New Dimensions of Social Movement/Countermovement Interaction: The Case of Scientology and its Internet Critics;” these resources are anonymity and “bandwidth.” Anonymity allows Christian men to confess their sexual sins online at websites like “Fires of Darkness” without actually revealing their identity. It also allows anonymous individuals to disseminate pictures of anonymous boys and girls. Bandwidth, on the other hand, refers to the amount of space that is occupied in the borderless domain of the internet by a single social movement organization. The pro-pornography movement, if it can be called that, got a head start on anti-pornography movements by “sucking up bandwidth.” Today sex

addiction websites and other anti-pornography activists gain ground by accumulating enough bandwidth to establish a community on the internet that has its own standards of decency.



The anti-pornography movement is best considered from the Political Process Model, in which “social movement is held to be above all else a *political* rather than a psychological phenomenon,” (McAdam 1997: 172) because the theory makes it possible to discuss the unique circumstances in which the movement arose. The movement arose in the 1970s because of the presence of feminist organizations and vocal theorists like Catharine MacKinnon who believed that men were responding to the increase in power among women by turning towards violent and child pornography. To feminists, pornography constituted “a massive hate crime against women as a gender,” (Russell 1999: 15). Furthermore, the movement was a manifestation of unspent aggression towards the male population after considerable success in the feminist movement.

The advent of the VCR also contributed to a proliferation of pornography and the growth of the pornography industry. Feminists’ responses to “pornographic thrillers” such as *Snuff* were violent and unorganized (Lederer 1980: 15), but drew media attention to the feminist anti-pornography movement’s cause. Catharine MacKinnon and organizations like Women Against Pornography sought to take advantage of the conservative, anti-porn Reagan administration by lobbying for anti-pornography legislation. However, dissent within the movement and fear that “the enemy of our enemy is not our friend” (Brooke 1979: 6) led to the dissolution of the anti-pornography feminist movement. Concern that anti-pornography legislation would negatively affect gay and lesbian communities and social movement organizations was also a significant

cause of dissent. Eventually the radical branch of feminism came to identify itself with lesbianism (Taylor 1992).

The Christian Right grew in response to the feminist movement, partly because it recognized the similar importance of identity in its own ranks, and partly as a countermovement, in the case of the Concerned Women for America. When the feminists laid down the anti-pornography cause, the Christians were ready to pick it up once again, and had no qualms about using feminist rhetoric to gain movement supporters and help pass legislation. In particular, defining pornography by the *harm* it inflicts on women, children, and the institution of the family bypasses First Amendment Protection, and also garners support from left wing politicians. Others were simply shamed or frightened into supporting the powerful Moral Majority (Gardiner 2000: 3). Women continue to play an important role as the radical flank of the anti-pornography movement, while men in key governmental positions provide the institutional basis for implementing legislation.

Framing has been extremely important throughout the anti-pornography movement. Diana Russell helped amplify the importance of women in combating pornography by opposing women against men. In “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation,” David Snow points out that the “amplification of antagonists” (Snow 1997: 215) is a common method of encouraging individuals to “take a stand” on a certain issue. Furthermore, Russell bridged the frames of the anti-pornography and the Civil Rights movements when she said that black people championed the Civil Rights movement, and women must do the same for the anti-pornography movement (Russell 1999: 18; Snow 1997: 213). Similarly, the Christian

Right bridged their “pro family” frame to the women’s movement by adopting the position that pornography caused harm to women, children and the institution of the family. Furthermore, the advent of the Internet and the ever-popular War on Drugs made it possible to extend the framing of the anti-pornography movement even further, this time as a fight against “sexual addiction.” The concept of sexual addiction has become so established that there are clinics that treat it and even the “Oregon Attorney Assistance Program” has a section designated for “Sex Addiction Resources,” (OAAP 2003).

The differences between feminists and Christian women are somewhat explained by comparing two ethics, the “ethic of care” and the “ethic of justice.” Whereas feminists emphasize an “ethic of justice” in their harm-based argument, “moral lobby women” emphasize an “ethic of care” as they strive to protect their children and families. There appears to be a certain “high ground” adopted by moralists that protects them from confusion and dissent in their ranks. “Notably, the fundamentalist women, whose opposition to pornography stems principally from religious morality, experience less conflict [...] The feminists’ positions [often] represent a compromise for many,” says Diana Luff in “The Downright Torture of Women: Moral Lobby Women, Feminists and Pornography” (Luff 2001: 88).

Although the feminist standpoint may seem to be more justifiable than the moral one, one must consider the perspectives of dissident feminists. One such feminist suggests, “Advocates such as Dworkin and MacKinnon [...] have encouraged gender inequality by assuming that women are weak and cannot cope with images presented to them,” (Hedberg 2002: 2). Hedberg is not alone in this belief. An anti-pornography feminist who ended up joining forces with the Feminist Anti Censorship Taskforce asks,

“Dworkin, MacKinnon, and others seem to be pushing at the question, have women any sexual appetites or fantasies which have not been expropriated through repression, coercion, terrorism and the equation of sex with violence in media and culture?” She then suggests that a new type of “discourse on women’s sexuality” has just begun (Rich 1985: 2). Many feminists believe that women must counteract violent pornography with their own types of erotica: “In educating ourselves and each others about pornography, we come to have a say about it and thus to gain a voice; in expressing ourselves through erotica of our own making, we can begin to change the contours of sexual speech,” (Carse 1995: 11).



Figure 8. Silent Woman

Jonathan Elmer suggests that women are complicit in the denial of their sexuality, by saying that they in fact enjoy knowing that they are sexually attractive yet do not want to reveal this knowledge. It is as if women prefer that their sexuality remain a secret: “The woman gives herself to be looked at, provided the look is anonymous or furtive. Her satisfaction derives not from direct sight, but from the privileged displacement of the

gaze, from the place of the Other: she watches the pleasure of others watching her, who by contract, do not acknowledge her vision of their pleasure,” (Elmer, 1998: 67).

Whether this is true or not, it is ironic that women are the most active players on both sides of the pornography debate, both in their denial and exemplification of sexuality. It seems, then, that the fight will not end until *woman* says so.



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## **Exhibits**

- Figure 1. Women's Groups and Congressional Attention

Baumgartner, Frank R. (2002). "Social Movements, the Rise of New Issues, and the Public Agenda," *Routing the Opposition: Social Movements, Public Policy, and Democracy*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

- Figure 2. Lesbian Violence

Photo by Ana Belinda Carreon.

Taken at the Folsom Street Fair in San Francisco.

- Figure 3. Caged Homosexual

Photo by Ana Belinda Carreon

Taken at the Folsom Street Fair in San Francisco

- Figure 4. Congressional Hearings and SMOs on Civil Rights and Minority Issues

Baumgartner, Frank R. (2002). "Social Movements, the Rise of New Issues, and the Public Agenda," *Routing the Opposition: Social Movements, Public Policy,*

*and Democracy*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

- Figure 5. Woman Against Woman

Photo by Ana Belinda Carreon

Taken at the Folsom Street Fair in San Francisco

- Figure 6. Nuditiy is Not Inherently Expressive

Photo by Ana Belinda Carreon.

Taken at the Folsom Street Fair in San Francisco

- Figure 7. Children Are Curious

Photo by Ana Belinda Carreon

Taken at the Folsom Street Fair in San Francisco

- Figure 8. Silent Woman

Photo by Ana Belinda Carreon

Taken at the Folsom Street Fair in San Francisco