

Point

Counterpoint

Madonna's book exposed

The three and a half years I have spent studying at a women's college have been very valuable to me mainly because they have forced me to look at my gender, and have helped me to find security in my identity as a strong, independent woman of the nineties. Unfortunately, I have also learned in the past three and a half years that the Barbie dolls I loved as a child will someday cause in me a desperate need to be blond, buxom, nine feet tall, and to have tacky blue eye shadow tatoored to my eyelids.

Fearful that I would want to be like Barbie, I distanced myself from her as quickly as possible and cast around for more timely and politically correct role models. Enter Madonna and her new book *sex*. Right.

I have to admit, I felt more than a little bit embarassed standing in a crowded B-Dalton waiting to preview a book that required me to produce my drivers license before I could peek inside. "Wow," I thought, "Madonna must be really gutsy to turn out something this high security."

By the time I was at the end of the metal-covered, black and white photoed sex-fest, I was feeling a little queasy. I suddenly realized that Madonna's book had set women back farther than Barbie ever dreamed.

As an English major I would be the first to picket any library that tried to ban *Huckleberry Finn*. I have never been one for censorship of the arts in any way, shape or form. But after seeing the book, I am at least able to understand why the Japanese have said "No way Jose" to *sex*.

I started thinking, "Do we really care about seeing Madonna naked?" No, of course not. After all, you can't avoid Madonna in the buff. She's even recently bared all in such high-priced fashion magazines as *Vogue*. My

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In the last ten years Madonna has caused a great deal of controversy because of her less than traditional approach to music entertainment. She is brassy, straightforward, and not afraid of anything. Her approach works, but a great many Americans feel that she should not be allowed to produce her more risque videos or her book *Sex*. What these people advocate is called censorship, which is intolerable in a community that embraces freedom of expression.

The first amendment of the U.S. Constitution states that "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech." It has been argued that this

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freedom protects only political speech, but the majority of Americans (and certainly the Supreme Court) feel this protects all forms of speech with the exceptions of "fighting words" and pornography. The issue we must address, then, is whether or not Madonna's *Sex* and her videos ("Erotica" in particular) constitute pornography.

The traditional test to identify pornography has three parts: 1) does the material "appeal to a prurient interest in sex;" 2) is the material "patently offensive" to "contemporary community standards;" and 3) is the material "utterly without redeeming social value" (Roth v U.S., 354 US 476 (1957)). Madonna's *Sex* and "Erotica" may appeal to prurient interests, but it is not "patently offensive" to contemporary community standards. I concede that her work does not reflect the kinds of sex the typical American has, but many Americans do practice and fantasize about exotic sexual acts such as the ones Madonna shows us. Finally, her material is not without redeeming social value. The quality of the photography in her book has been debated, but many people do consider it art. I feel comfortable arguing that if at least a few people consider the work art, they ought to be allowed access to it.

The issue of pornography has been popular in feminist circles, and most feminists argue that pornography is detrimental to women and must be abolished. The feminist litmus test for determining pornography is somewhat different than that of the Supreme Court. In "Pornography and Respect for Women," Ann Garry attempts to identify pornography by looking for situations in the work that are degrading and sexist. I would like to add an additional category to her analysis: does the work contain material in which one or more of the participants was coerced into taking part in the production of the work. This includes children, animals (there can be no consent if there is no real communication), and women who "consent" to taking part in the material out of economic necessity.

Does Madonna's work fit into this "feminist" category of pornography? I believe it does not. The first question, is the work degrading, is the most difficult of the three questions to answer. Madonna seems to have enjoyed herself, and there is nothing trully degrading about sexual pleasure so long as the sexual act is consented to by the participants. On this basis I believe we can assume that there is nothing degrading in her material. The answer to the second question, is the work sexist, is again no. Yes, there are times when Madonna plays inferior/subordinate rolls, but she also plays superior roles. There is nothing sexist about mutually agreed upon superior/inferior roles. Finally, we need to address the issue of coercion. Obvioulsy from viewing the video there are no children or animals in her "fantasy." It is more difficult without further information to determine whether she was somehow financially coerced into consent, but I believe we can safely assume that she did not create her book or video out of economic desperation. Again, based on the three "feminist" categories, her work does not constitute pornography.

It is wrong to suggest that Madonna's *Sex* and "Erotica" should be subject to censorship. Though some may find the material morally reprehensible, that is no reason to deny the general public access to what others consider healthy entertainment or art. My suggestion to those who oppose her work and advocate its abolition is simple. If you don't like it, don't buy it.

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