



Photo: Mario Scattoloni

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Un membre du mouvement de la Colombie-Britannique des "Femmes contre la violence envers les femmes" discute ici le mouvement anti-pornographie dans cette province, et tout particulièrement les réactions à l'arrivée de la "Red Hot Video" en 1982. Dans la nuit du 22 novembre 1982, trois magasins de vidéo pornographique furent dynamités par le Wimmin's Fire Brigade. La controverse qui s'en suivit amena le sujet au grand jour et la police fit finalement plusieurs rafles dans des magasins de pornographie en janvier 1983. Quand la télévision payante First Choice annonça son contrat avec Playboy, les femmes de la Colombie-Britannique se joignirent aux femmes à travers le Canada pour exprimer leur colère. Le mouvement anti-pornographie s'est alors engagé dans d'autres débats sur la censure, les réglementations de l'industrie, les amendements au Code Criminel, etc. En mai 1983, Red Hot Video est passé en jugement à Victoria, fut trouvé coupable, et reçut une amende de 300 dollars.

The Anti Porn Movement in B.C.

Red Hot Video is part of a multi-billion dollar pornography industry that teaches men to equate sexuality with violence. Although these tapes violate the Criminal Code of Canada and the B.C. guidelines on pornography, all lawful attempts to shut down Red Hot Video have failed because the justice system was created and is controlled by rich men to protect their profits and property.

As a result, we are left no viable alternative but to change the situation ourselves through illegal means. This is an act of self-defence against hate propaganda. We will continue to defend ourselves.

*Wimmin's Fire Brigade, press release,
November 22, 1982*

Pornography, an industry which is devoted to maintaining lies about women, celebrates the sale of women's bodies for use and abuse by men. Pornography portrays women being bound, gagged, beaten, displayed, raped, and liking it; women are silenced or given words only to voice the fantasy of a male viewer.

While feminists have always criticized the sexual objectification of women, by the advertising industry in particular, few had looked at the trends which were developing in the pornography industry. When more blatant images of violence against women began to be employed by the advertising industry and when rumours about *Snuff* (a film which depicted a woman actually being tortured and murdered) were confirmed, feminists

decided to analyse the contents of pornography. This examination led many to the conclusion that "Pornography is the undiluted essence of anti-female propaganda" (Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, Bantam Books, p. 443).

Feminists began to describe the contents of porn and to make public the relationship between the images and reality of violence against women. Response from the rest of the community was wary, suspicious, and sometimes hostile.

As the more blatantly violent images spread further into shop windows, grocery stores, fashion magazines, and record covers, larger numbers of women became aware of the threat presented by these images. Yet the apologists for pornography continued to argue that these "erotic" images were harmless. Indeed, they argued that they had the beneficial effect of enabling men who might otherwise be sexually violent to release their frustrations. Women were not convinced by this argument. Instead, they argued that, since people learn from example and from written and graphic depictions, there was no basis for the claim that the effect of pornography was an exception to the norms of learning behaviour.

Not a Love Story, a feature-length film on pornography released in November, 1981, provided women with a valuable tool for community education. In addition, the release of the film sparked an animated discussion on the content of the film and, by extension, a discussion of the issue in the media.

Ironically, as *Not a Love Story* was coming to B.C., so was Red Hot Video. In February of 1982, the first outlet of Red Hot Video, specializing in "adult-entertainment" video cassettes, opened its doors. By 1983 there were an additional ten outlets in B.C. When Red Hot Video announced its intention to open an outlet on Vancouver's North Shore, concerned women attempted to convince the North Vancouver Council to refuse to grant the operators a business licence. When their campaign was unsuccessful, they took copies of some of the more violent tapes to

the police station to lay a complaint, on the grounds that the contents of the tapes violated the obscenity provisions of the Criminal Code. In addition, they provided copies of Red Hot's video catalogue, in which tapes were listed under subject headings such as rape, incest, first sex experience (willing and unwilling), and gangbang. Crown counsel, backed by the attorney general, took the position that, instead of being charged, Red Hot Video would be asked to remove a few of the most violent tapes from its shelves.

In November, 1982, the B.C. Federation of Women, angered by the government's lack of response to women's concerns, vowed to shut down all the Red Hot Video outlets in B.C.

During the night of November 22, 1982, three Red Hot stores were fire-bombed; two were seriously damaged. The action was claimed by the Wimmin's Fire Brigade.

Reaction to the firebombings was divided, generally according to gender. Callers to a television open-line show, two days later, typified the responses. The men called the Fire Brigade and the women's groups that had expressed sympathy for their motives fascists and/or uptight lesbians; the women, while usually critical of the tactics, shared the concern about the proliferation of pornography and understood the frustration at the government's inaction.

The firebombings touched off a widespread controversy about pornography. The pages of newspapers were suddenly filled with articles on the availability, contents, and effects of pornography. Reports investigated pornography in local corner stores and were appalled by what they found. Feminists were called to comment.

Police raided numerous pornography outlets on January 7, 1983. One can only assume these raids were prompted by the demands for action and indications of tacit support for the motives of the Wimmin's Fire Brigade. While women were pleased at having elicited some response from the authorities, the action was interpret-

ed as merely a first gesture. When the *Vancouver Sun* featured a photograph showing two policemen standing in the police station with a pile of seized tapes and magazines, and also showing a pin-up on the wall behind them — an apparent fixture — faith in the authorities' ability to address women's concerns waned.

In January, 1983, First Choice announced its contract with Playboy to provide "adult entertainment" for pay-TV. Women all across the country were outraged. "Media Watch" and W.A.V.A.W. (Women Against Violence Against Women)/Rape Crisis Centre had appeared before the Canadian Radio and Telecommunications Commission in Vancouver, only a month previously, to oppose granting licences to pay-TV applicants who had expressed an intention to include "adult-entertainment" programming. First Choice's announcement indicated, once again, the refusal of the authorities to acknowledge the connection between degrading and violent images of women and the corresponding reality of degradation and violence.

The controversy over First Choice generated further debate within the antiporn movement. Debate over questions of prior censorship, "hardcore" vs. "soft" porn, industry regulation vs. Criminal Code amendments, resurfaced within the Women's Movement. While movement concerns were raised about the temptation to focus on explicitly violent images and ignore the airbrushed *Playboy* centrefold (in order to attain the earliest possible removal of the excessively violent products), the response of the federal government was to propose possible amendments to the Criminal Code and to pressure women's groups to draw the line between the acceptable and the unacceptable in some "practical" way. Feminists, suspicious that Criminal Code amendments would not reflect the reality of the spectrum of degrading images of women, stuck to their demand that the government attempt to enforce the present provisions of the code.

As this article is being written,

we are awaiting the judgment from the May trial of Red Hot Video in Victoria.* There the onus is upon the Crown to prove that the contents of three seized video tapes transgress "community standards" — the community being the community of Canada from coast to coast. While some communities are organizing to express their refusal to tolerate violent pornography, many feminists maintain that it is an issue which divides the "community" into two halves, along gender lines. While there are exceptions on both sides, it has been suggested that, until this division is acknowledged and until it is recognized that women are victims of pornography which is, in fact, hate literature directed against one-half

of the population, discussions of "standards of tolerance" will be fruitless.

Drawing the line to prohibit some forms of sexual degradation may be useful for mobilizing community support in the short-term, but it will not address the concerns of those working toward the long-term goal of ending violence in the lives of women. Prohibiting specific forms of sexual degradation implies a legitimizing of other forms of "antifemale propaganda."

**Editor's note: Red Hot Video was found guilty and fined \$300.*

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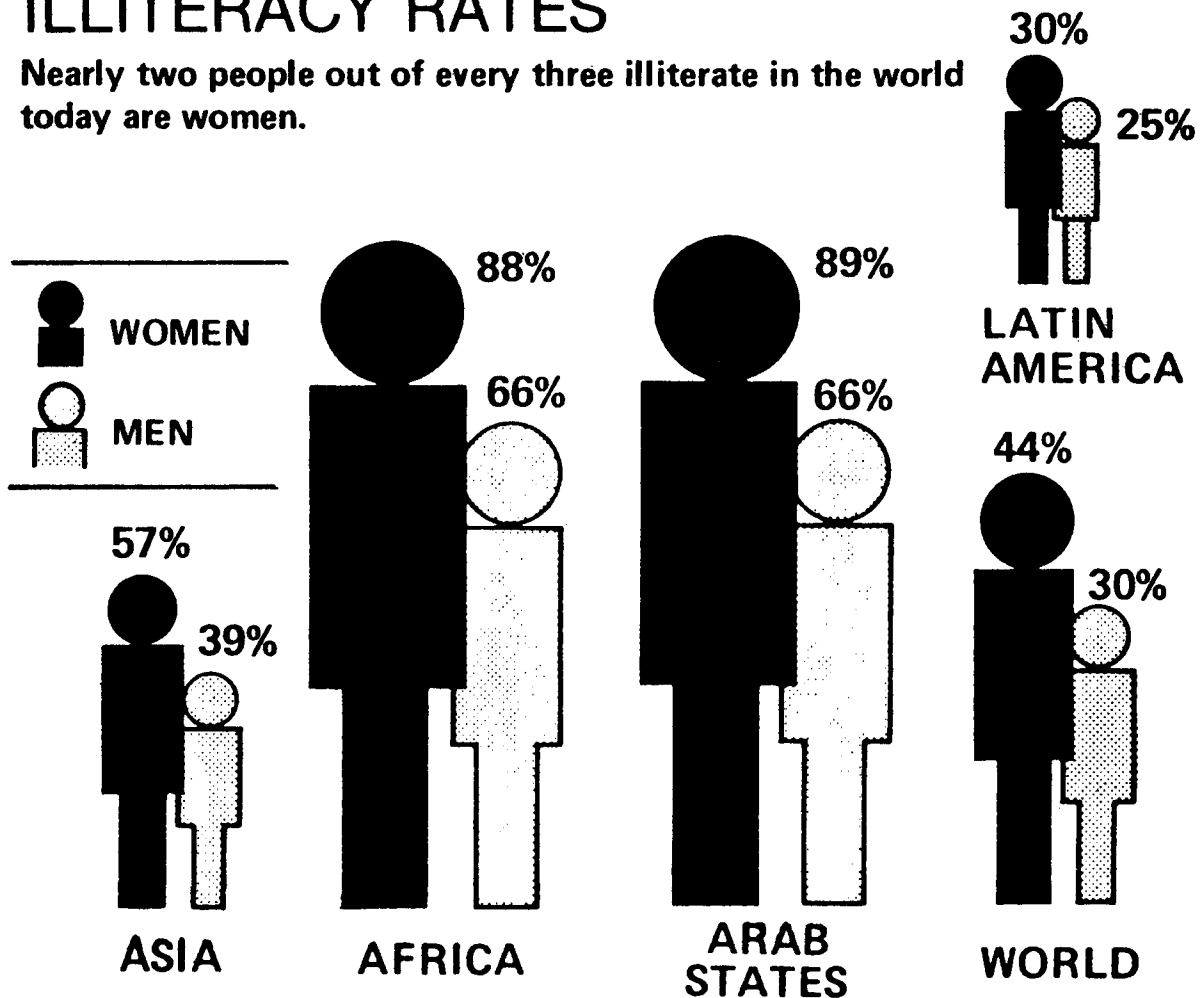
29th of December

It seems to me that if I speak of friendship in this day of sun and snow it would frame the beauty of the day with adequate poetry and connect for ever two delicate beauties.

*Giovanna Peel
Toronto, Ontario*

ILLITERACY RATES

Nearly two people out of every three illiterate in the world today are women.



1979 'State of the World's Women' Report for the United Nations Decade for Women.