

Porn Won't Kill You

Pornography and Sexual Deviance, by Michael J. Goldstein and Harold S. Kant, with John J. Hartman, University of California Press, 194 pp., hardcover \$7.95.

About half-way through this book, I was so bored that what I most wanted to do was go out and see a good pornographic movie. However, I live in rural Massachusetts, and I have to provide my own fantasies.

Pornography and Sexual Deviance is a "scientific" treatise, with the authors' research supporting their preconceived liberal assumption that pornography does not lead to sexual deviance. The authors, all professional men, oppose anti-pornography legislation, and their book uses the techniques and style of psycho-sociological research to present this essentially libertarian point of view.

What most bothered me about this work is that the argument is not libertarian, as it should be, but "scientific." In addition, the authors never tell us what kind of pornography, if any, gives them a hard-on. This is a cold, hard study, complete with charts, formulas and bibliographic quotations. There isn't an iota of feeling in the entire book.

Four groups of "sexual deviants" are used in the study: 1) rapists, 2) pedophiles (some boy

"molesters," some girl "molesters"), 3) homosexuals and transsexuals, and 4) habitual pornography users.

I believe that the term "deviants" is a loaded word, though professional sociologists and psychologists argue, I know, that it is a neutral term referring simply to people whose behavior deviates from the norm. As for the term "child molester," it is used indiscriminately, without regard to even the possibility of adult-kid sex that is non-coercive and mutually pleasurable. The unproved assumption here is that sex between an adult and a minor is by definition harmful to the minor.

Now, the authors are not overtly anti-homosexual, and in fact they probably consider themselves to be in sympathy with the goals of gay liberation. But their approach to the subject, their defensive posture against the censorship lobby, leads them to adopt an intrinsically anti-homosexual bias.

Thus they blithely write sentences which associate homosexuality with obviously anti-social activity: "The child molesters and the controls reported the highest arousal from erotic stimuli, while the rapists and homosexuals reported the least arousal to heterosexual pictures."

Their preference for heterosexuality is indicated when they

say: "A male must identify with his biological peers if he is to develop appropriate patterns of heterosexual interest. Failure to identify can result in sexual confusion, homosexuality, or other problems of inadequate sexual orientation."

The homosexuals in the study, 37 men, were contacted through the Los Angeles-based group, One, Incorporated. The authors attended the One, Inc., annual banquet, and they express a measure of respect for the "emancipated" homosexual who belongs to such a group. (We gay liberationists are well-adjusted deviates, you see!)

One of the authors' allegedly important conclusions is that homosexual pornography does not cause homosexuality. (What if it did? They don't say.) Their research reveals that most homosexuals' early exposure to pornography is to heterosexual pornography, with the (incipient) homosexual already focusing on the male body or "identifying" with the female. The authors found that homosexuals have a unique attitude toward pornography -- we are the only group of "deviants" who, in this survey, frequently showed appreciation for the aesthetic aspects of pornographic photographs, drawings and writing.

The authors come up with some interesting, perhaps surprising,

insights. The study shows that rapists are most often people from very repressive backgrounds, very ignorant about sex and even nudity, and who have relatively little exposure to pornography.

Habitual pornography users, according to the survey, often enjoy both heterosexual and homosexual pornography, and they have very satisfactory sexual relations (not the lonely frustrated masturbators one might expect).

Significantly, the authors report, the people most fervently opposed to pornography, those who favor strict censorship, are sexually up-tight men and women who are aroused by pornography but who react to their arousal not by experiencing pleasure but by having strong feelings of guilt.

This book, like most of the current writing on pornography, deals with the "controversial" aspects of it in a very limited fashion. For one thing, very little is said about how pornography relates to women (gay or straight). There is no discussion of pornography as a form of exploitation (the commercialization of the body), nor any discussion of pornography's role in promoting cults of youth and beauty.

It is possible, I believe, to develop a critique of pornography without feeling guilty about enjoying it, and without advocating cen-

sorship. I'd like to see low-cost erotica with people of various ages and average looks. What turns me on now are typical fantasies -- a handsome 20-year-old surfer, for example. But how often can I find a fantasy to sleep with? And how much of a relationship can I expect to emerge from such a fantasy? For people like myself who tend to be locked into heavy youth-and-beauty fantasies, pornography may offer a form of excitement. But it also may help keep us trapped by the fantasies, and thus limited in real-life sexuality.

All this is just theory, but it is a more interesting and helpful area, I believe, for those interested in research into the social and sexual role of erotica.

I am tired of straight researchers dealing with homosexuals as "deviates" and ultimately trying to protect straight norms. This goes for both the repressive shrinks and for liberals such as Goldstein, Kant and Hartman. If gay people participate in research surveys, by and large, I say let's be sure the researchers are gay, and let's also be sure the researchers will not pose as aloof scientists but rather will show that the "topic" has some relevance in their lives, too.

By the way, there are no pictures in this book, another reason not to buy it.