

Andrea Dworkin has been an influential writer, speaker, and activist for over two decades. She claims to be a feminist, and that her ideas are beneficial to women. This paper will show that many of her most popular beliefs are not only detrimental to society, but also not in the best interests of women.

In letters from a war zone, Andrea Dworkin presents a collection of speeches and short articles she has composed during her career as a writer and activist. Many of her articles deal with censorship and pornography. One claim is central to all of these, pornography is an act and not an idea, thus censorship is not relevant to it.

In response to a New York Time Review of her 1981 book, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, Dworkin writes, "Pornography says the women want to be hurt, forced, and abused; pornography says women want to be raped, battered, kidnapped, maimed; pornography says women want to be humiliated, shamed, defamed, pornography says that women say no but mean yes - Yes to violence, yes to pain." (Dworkin p 203)

In response to Dworkin's fiery rhetoric, Wendy McElroy writes that Dworkin has scientific backing and even cites evidence to the contrary. "In Japan, where pornography depicting violence is widely available, rape is much lower per capita than in the United States, where violence in porn is restricted." McElroy attacks the belief that pornography cause violence, stating that even if a correlation is present, it does not necessarily mean there is a causal relationship. (McElroy 102)

Lynne Segal sees an inherent harm in trying to link the two together. She believes that feminists who try to do so are wasting valuable time that could be spent on other important issues. "In the end, anti-pornography campaigns, feminist or not, can only enlist today, as they have invariably enlisted before, guilt and anxiety around sex, as well as lifetimes of confusion in our personal experiences of sexual arousal and activity." "In contrast, campaigns which get to the heart of men's violence and sadism towards women must enlist the widest possible resources to empower socially." (Gibson 19)

Another argument of Dworkin's is that pornography should not be protected as free speech under the first amendment. It is her contention that protecting what pornographers say, is protecting what pornography does. Pornography is more than words. They are acts against women. "Pornography happens to women." As a result, bans on such material are warranted, not only because it is harmfully and discriminatory to women, but also because there are no civil liberties that are violated in preventing an act. (Dworkin 185)

Since it is uncertain whether there is even a correlation between violence against women and pornography, any attempt to ban it must be viewed as censorship. What ever it is referred to, it still has the same effect.

In many of Dworkin's writings, she laments the silencing of women. She is partially responsible for this silencing. In 1992, The Canadian Supreme Court ruled in favor of a legal restriction on pornography based on the psychological damage it does women. "Ironically, this obscenity law has been used almost exclusively against gay, lesbian, and feminist material." (McElroy 87)

The effect of censorship is absolutely detrimental to the weaker voice, as is the case with the Butler decision. Dworkin herself fell victim, when her book, *Pornography*, was seized by Canadian customs officials. Censorship is contradictory to feminist goals, because freedom of speech is the most powerful weapon in the feminist arsenal. Medical journals used by medical students, and the testimony of women victimized by sexual abuse are prime targets of censorship. (Strossen 77)

An episode involving Dworkin and her cohort in censorship, Catherine MacKinnon, demonstrates the dangers of censorship. At a symposium at a Michigan law school, at which Dworkin and MacKinnon were speaking, a group of feminists had prepared a series of documentaries of the topic of the conference, prostitution. Dworkin refused to speak at the symposium if adversarial speakers were there, so the documentaries were the only voice of opposition to them. When work got out

that the documentaries could possibly pornographic, Dworkin and MacKinnon insisted on their removal. When the presenter refused, they coerced the students with threats of leaving, to force the removal of the documentary exhibit. What had started out as an academic symposium quickly turned into a forum for the exclusive advocacy of Dworkin ideals. Her action epitomized the danger of censorship to society and other feminists, she silenced the weaker voice. (Strossen 211-214)

Dworkin's opinions on pornography are summed up nicely by Wendy McElroy; Pornography is morally wrong; Pornography leads directly to violence against women; Pornography, in and of itself, is violence against women. Five individual allegations are made based on the third point; Women are physically coerced into pornography; Women in porn who have not been coerced have been so traumatized by patriarchy that they cannot give real consent; Capitalism is a system of 'economic coercion' that forces women into pornography in order to make a living; Pornography is violence against women who consume it, and thereby re-enforcing their own oppression; Pornography is violence against women, as a class, who must live in fear because of the atmosphere of terror it creates. (McElroy 91)

The first three allegations deal with coercion. The first claim is based on a few isolated cases and should not be used to characterize the entire industry. The second allegation is not only arrogant, but degrades women because it undermines a woman's ability to choose. "If women's choices are being trashed, why should radical feminists (i.e. Dworkin) fare better than other women?" This sends a dangerous message that women lack full capacity to make choices. The third allegation fails in a similar manner as the second. Dworkin draws no line between consent and coercion, and thus she rejects a woman's right to contract. (McElroy 92-95)

The fourth and fifth claim of Dworkin's are also in contradiction with women's best interests. The fourth claim completely ignores the possibility that women might actually enjoy pornography without falling victim to it. Allowing women access to a means of sexual expression with actual sex grants them increased sexual freedom. The final allegation is based on the notion that, "Women are not individuals, but members of a class with collective interests." In making this claim, Dworkin must destroy the notion of individuality, and condition unsuitable for not only women, but all humanity. (McElroy 96)

Another criticism of Dworkin, is that many of her arguments contain logical inconsistencies or outright contradictions. For one thing, Dworkin wants to validate the experience of women who have been silenced by patriarchy yet refuses to accept the voices of women who participate in pornography. Dworkin also believes that pornography is the bastion of patriarchy, yet conservatives, tradition champion of patriarchy, also crusade against pornography. (McElroy 98)

In one of her writings on cesarean sections, Dworkin makes staunch, graphic, remarks about the topic. It is laced with information about conspiracies and loaded with vulgarity. Such extreme language may work against the interests of women, because even though a problem might exist, it might be written off by readers due to Dworkin's 'hyperbolic harangue.' (Strossen 196)

In general, Dworkin's writings while claiming to be feminist, are often in direct conflict with mainstream feminist agenda. Many of her views portray women as helpless victims incapable of rational thinking. In her support of censorship, she is also met with harsh resistance from prominent women's groups such as N.O.W.. Many of her views are seen as harmful to the cause of women's equality, and in this regard are more dangerous than anti-women's factions, because it is written under the banner of feminism. (Gibson 118)

Andrea Dworkin's influence has created an environment where free speech and equality are compromised. Though she claims it to be in the best interest of society, this just is not true. Most feminists reject her ideas as counterproductive to their goals. Her writings are not only detrimental to women, however, everyone is affected. By advocating censorship, she undermines every principle that this country was founded on and every ideal that keeps it unified and free from oppression. Ironically, Dworkin seeks freedom from oppression for women, but in doing so advocates universal oppression for all people, women and

men.

Works Cited

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