Should Adult Material Be Censored? Essay, Research Paper

Susan Brownmillers’s essay “Let’s Put Pornography Back in the Closet”, is an well-argued essay. However, adult material is protected by the First Amendment, which protects the freedoms of speech and press. Beginning in the first paragraph, she tries to get the reader’s sympathy by showing that she is not against the First Amendment. She begins her essay by, “Free speech is one of the great foundations on which our democracy rests.” So starting with her introduction she gets the reader’s sympathy. She introduces the First Amendment and defines what it means. “[The First Amendment's] purpose is the protection of unpopular ideas and political dissent.” Then she goes on to quote Chief Justice Warren Burger – “To equate the free and robust exchange of ideas and political debate with commercial exploitation of obscene material demeans the grand conception of the First Amendment and its high purposes in the historic struggle for freedom. It is a misuse of the great guarantees of free speech and free press.” This gives the reader the impression that what she says is a valid argument because a Judge said it in a court. However, Judges are people too, and they have their opinions, and it doesn’t mean that it’s right. After she talks about how the book industry won a battle to keep some potentially offensive books in print, she starts talking about the real issue at hand – pornography. She talks about the Miller case of 1973, who was a porn distributor that sent unsolicited stuff through the mail, and the court came up with guidelines that it hoped would strengthen obscenity laws by giving more power to the states. She believes that the courts made everything even more confusing by setting up a three part test which said, “The materials are obscene if they depict patently offensive, hard-core sexual conduct; lack serious scientific, literary, artistic, or political value; and appeal to the prurient interests of an average person – as measured by the contemporary community standards.” The above sentence is not correct. It should state “The materials are obscene if and only if ” The way Susan states it, it means that there could be other way that the material can be considered obscene, while the courts said that this was it, if it didn’t pass the three part test, then it was not obscene.Susan shows what the dictionary word prurience means, and again tries to get the reader’s sympathy by showing that she is not totally against the First Amendment. “Here we part company rather swiftly with old-line conservatives who don’t want sex education in the high schools, for example.” She defines why feminists are against pornography. “The feminist objection to pornography is based on our belief that pornography represents hatred of women, that pornography’s intent is to humiliate, degrade, and dehumanize the female body for the purpose of erotic stimulation and pleasure. We are unalterably opposed to the presentation of the female body being stripped, bound, raped, tortured, mutilated, and murdered in the commercial entertainment and free speech.” I think Susan goes a little bit too far over here. Not all, if any, pornography fits this description. A lot of pornography is just like playboy – artful pictures of the female body. Some pornography has the act of intercourse pictured, and yes some hard core pornography has rape, S&M, and other fetishes. These are taken using women who do it willingly, women who enjoy S&M, and other fetishes. And if that is not the case, then there are other laws at work here, laws that punish criminals for rape and murder.

Susan states, “Justice William O. Douglas wrote in his dissent of the Miller case that no one is compelled to look. This is hardly true. To buy a paper at the corner newsstand is to subject oneself to a forcible immersion in pornography, to be demeaned by an array of dehumanized, chopped-up parts of the female anatomy, packaged like cuts of meat at the supermarket.” Even though this is not true, I like the way Susan uses words to get the reader on her side. “Dehumanized, chopped-up parts of the female anatomy, packaged like cuts of meat at the supermarket.” This almost brought me over to her side. This is simply not true. At most supermarkets, the magazine section is away from the newspaper section, and most pornographic magazines either have their own section or are hidden behind other magazines so only the name shows. Susan tries to show that obscenity laws are nothing new. “We live quite compatibly with a host of free-speech abridgements. There are restraints against false and misleading advertising or statements – shouting ‘Fire’ without cause in a crowded movie theater, etc. – that do not threaten but strengthen, our societal values. Restrictions on the public display of pornography belong in this category.” This is simply not true. Shouting “Fire” in a crowded theater without reason can cause a panic during which people might get hurt. I do not see how people can get physically hurt from looking at adult material. She concludes again by trying to get on the reader’s side. “We are not saying ‘Smash the presses’ or ‘ban the bad ones,’ but simply ‘Get the stuff out of our sight.’ Let the legislatures decide – using realistic and humane contemporary community standards – what can be displayed and what cannot.” Isn’t it true that because standards vary from one community to another, and from time to time even in the same place her recommendation subjects the rights of a minority to the whims of a majority? The Bill of Rights, after all was supposed to safeguard constitutional right from the possible tyranny of the majority.

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