

# To Know Ourselves: Possible Meanings of Canadian Pornography

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**Abstract** All television broadcasters in Canada are required to meet Canadian content regulations. This requirement includes sexually explicit adult channels. Whenever this requirement comes to the attention of the media, through a license application or hearing, there is comic speculation about what might be considered Canadian content in pornography. However, a review of some adult films made in Canada show a distinct Canadian pornography already exists. As with other cultural industries, the pornographic film industry in Canada exists in the shadow of American domination, but survives through various means such as product differentiation, appeals to nationalism, and government support. These factors create conditions that encourage distinct pornography. This paper also considers possible cultural implications of a distinct national pornography, the role of the government in controlling pornographic content through extra-legal means, and the implications of that control.

**Keywords** Canada · Pornography · Television · Film · Porn studies

But in both dramatic and subtle ways, we are distinguishable from other peoples who live within this civilization, including our American neighbours, with whom we tend to be most closely identified by others and often by ourselves. In the case of Americans, for example, while we have much in common, our differences are many and diverse. *To Know Ourselves: The Report of the Commission on Canadian Studies*. T. H. B. Symons, 1975.

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## Introduction

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) recently chastised three specialty TV channels, all featuring adult entertainment, also known as pornography, for not meeting the 15 % Canadian content requirement. The broadcaster claimed a clerical error, and quickly adjusted programming (Hopper 2014).

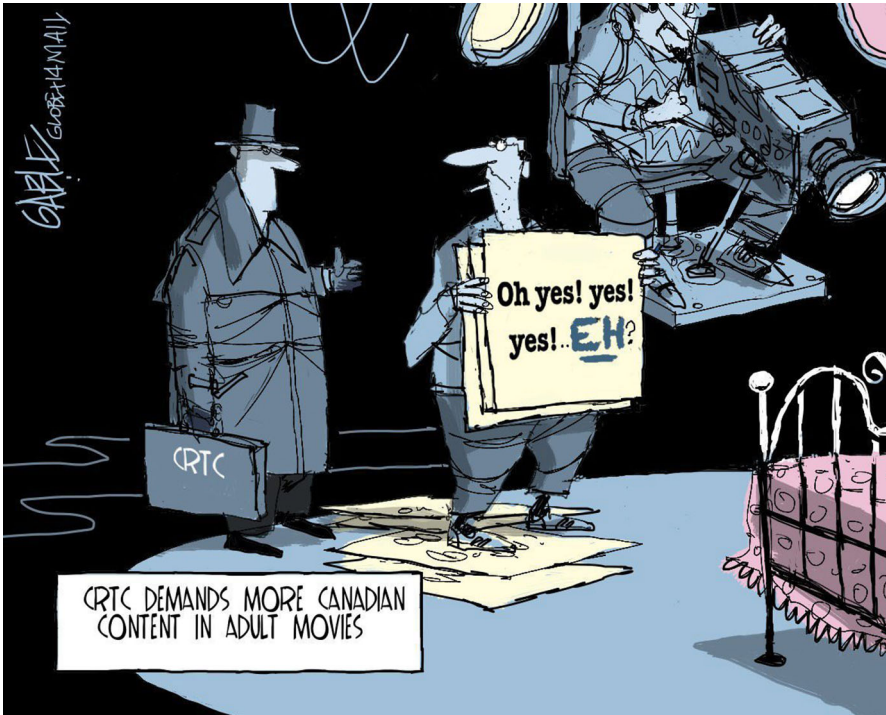
This is not the first time the CRTC has been in the news for its attention to Canadian content in pornography. An earlier licence approval was widely reported. The official decision summarized the application:

1058204 Alberta Ltd. filed an application for a broadcasting licence to provide Northern Peaks, a national, English-language Category 2 pay television service that would consist of adult programming. The applicant stated that the proposed service would be Canada's first adult video channel offering significant [50 %] Canadian adult content. The applicant indicated that it would also air the adult versions of Real Productions' cable television series and produce its own adult movies, events, and series.

Media reports of Canadian content concerns in pornography are largely comic speculations on how Canadian stereotypes might appear in sex films. For example, the *National Post*, under the headline "Debbie Does Flin Flon," wrote:

Avi Lewis and other black-turtleneck filmmakers get thousands of taxpayer dollars to promote their documentaries about the evils of utility deregulation in Guinea-Bissau. But what about films that Canadians actually watch? For too long, this country's eroticists have had no choice but to rely on American films—which insult Canadian sensibilities with their non-bilingual audio tracks, Humans Rights Act-violating plot lines and obscene flouting of the metric system.... Finally, tales of Tim Hortons girls gone wild and all-male hockey lockerroom bacchanalia will be seen... ("Debbie does Flin Flon [Editorial]" 2008)

An editorial cartoon in another national paper shows a staid CRTC inspector giving a thumbs-up on a bedroom film set, after a cue card is updated to read "Oh yes! yes! yes! EH?"



Brian Gable/The Globe and Mail

A few columnists and publications use the CRTC's concern for Canadian content in adult sex films as an example of the foolishness of Canadian content regulations in general, and to remind their readers that pornography has no "redeeming social value. Unlike sitcoms or dramas, which are potentially filled with meaning that contributes to a social conversation, porn is a generic product whose national origins are as unimportant as those of a light bulb or a vibrator" (Taylor 2014).

The humorous speculations and blunt dismissals of Canadian pornography obscure the reality of the content regulation. Canadian cable and satellite distributors of adult sex material are required to provide a minimum 15 % Canadian content, and since adult sex films make up the bulk of their content, distributors purchase or make adult sex films with Canadian content. The regulatory definition of Canadian content, somewhat confusingly, considers only the nationality of the cast, crew, and producers. Although the mandate of the CRTC is to protect and promote Canadian culture, there is no requirement to portray Canadian locations, values, characters, or issues. Content regulations are essentially trade protectionism, not cultural promotion. Thus the series *Boy Next Door*, set in Milwaukee, with American characters, and produced for the American *Playboy* TV channel, qualifies as Canadian content, since it is made in Edmonton by a Canadian company using Canadian talent (Lejtenyi 2008).

More significantly, the media treatment of Canadian content regulations in adult sex films ignore the fact that the national origins of pornography are important, and a visibly distinct Canadian pornography already exists. This paper examines some examples of Canadian pornography, and explores possible meanings of this national pornography.

## National Pornographies

Most of the work under the umbrella of Porn Studies has considered the dominant form, American porn. Estimates of production vary, but according to one analysis the United States releases over ten thousand films per year, while all European nations combined release no more than twelve hundred films (Milter and Slade 2005). An American company might release four films a week while a Canadian company releases two films a month (Lejtenyi 2008). American regulations have also had worldwide influence. The international adoption of performer record keeping compliant with U.S. legal code Section 2257, for films and online, is credited with stabilizing the industry (Milter and Slade 2005).

Alan McKee, writing on Australian gay male pornography, notes that pornography is rarely considered in studies of national identity and that the American perspective in pornography “is so universal as to be often invisible” (as qtd. in Binnie 2004, p. 24). Despite the dominance of American porn, and the generic imperative to present little more than highly visible sexual activities, there are national variations.

As an example, consider the “gang bang” subgenre, where a group of men have consensual sex with one woman. In typical American films of this type, the woman will perform oral sex on all the men, then perform vaginal intercourse with all the men, then perhaps anal intercourse with all the men, and so on until all the men ejaculate more or less simultaneously, usually on the face of the woman. In typical European films of this subgenre, the sexual acts performed with each man, and the order of them, are less ordered and less predictable. The men don’t ejaculate at the same time, or in the same place, and the woman plays a more active role. The differences could be ascribed to a marketing need for product differentiation, different notions of sexual propriety, different levels of homophobia, or different notions of equality. What these differences mean, and how much they are driven by audience demand, film maker intentions, and cultural context are unclear, but the existence of differences justifies Porn Studies consideration of pornographic texts as polysemic. The existence of national variations also underlines the value of studying national pornographies. They are “potentially filled with meaning that contributes to a social conversation,” if one takes the time to listen.

American pornographic companies quickly dominated local markets when censorship relaxed across Europe in the 1960s and 1970s (Sigel 2005). Most countries, with the exception of France, did not protect local producers, leaving them to their own resources. In Canada, all cultural industries exist in the shadow of American domination. They survive through product differentiation, appeals to

nationalism, and government support. The situation is the same for Canadian pornography.

There is no direct government support for Canadian pornography, however the CRTC requirement for Canadian content on pornographic television channels, and the review processes of the provincial film boards, legitimize films that were illegal and circulating clandestinely a few decades ago.<sup>1</sup> The CRTC requirement for Canadian content also guarantees a market for Canadian pornographic film distributors. Industry participants expect the newly licensed channel to increase demand and the talent pool of the industry (Noel 2008).

The majority of films reviewed for this paper emphasize their Canadian origins, and have Canadian content from a regulatory perspective. The marketing is clearly product differentiation, but whether this is an appeal to nationalism is more complex, and will be considered below. It is challenging to locate films which are made in Canada but do not promote their origins. Arguably these films are less significant in terms of national pornographies, since they elide or disguise their nationality, but they may still reveal cultural differences. One of these films is reviewed.

A film could be made in the United States or elsewhere but set in Canada, or feature Canadian characters. Such a film would not qualify as Canadian content. Its role in national pornography would be minimal, since the production circumstances would be those of the country of origin, and it may not even be released in Canada.

## Comparing Films

The Ontario Film Review Board classifies over two thousand Adult Sex Films per year (Ontario Film Review Board 2011). The popularity of most films is difficult to gauge, as these films are generally not reviewed and not released theatrically. The production companies and distributors are privately held and do not release financial information. In addition, distribution of films is uneven, due to the presence of different retail chains in different cities, and relationships between stores and distributors. Stores of the same chain in the same city may stock different films and types of films in different neighbourhoods, to meet local market demand.<sup>2</sup>

The large number of discreetly and poorly distributed films make it difficult to establish representative or significant films for any adult sex genre, especially the small number of overtly Canadian films. To locate films for this paper, I visited some adult video stores in the Ottawa area, looking for films identified as Canadian, or asking staff if they were aware of any Canadian films. I found seven films,

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<sup>1</sup> All theatrical films and home video, including adult sex films, are subject to government approval and classification in most provinces. The provinces cannot determine if a film is criminally obscene, as obscenity law is under federal jurisdiction, but they can ban films, on the grounds of regulating trade. The Canadian Supreme Court's 1978 decision allowing provincial bans (*Nova Scotia Board of Censors v. McNeil*) is similar to the American 1915 *Mutual* decision. That ruling allowed state censors to ban films, and was reversed in 1958 by the *Miracle* decision.

<sup>2</sup> In conversations with retail store clerks, I learned that the softer "couples films" are more popular in downtown locations while cruder "gonzo films" are more popular in suburban locations.

enough to determine that a distinct Canadian pornography exists, though not enough to draw broad conclusions about it.

Identifying the elements that distinguish national pornography requires some knowledge of generic American pornography. Again, there are challenges finding representative films. A further complication, identified by Susanna Paasonen and Laura Saarenmaa, is the tendency of porn historiography to rely on a small number of older and nostalgically viewed films (2008). Here I draw on my own knowledge as a long time student and consumer of pornography.

In the early 1990s, sexually explicit films became legal in Canada, I began studying film, and I read Linda Williams' *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible."* Her preface notes that "pro-sex feminists" and gay men have done most of the scholarly work in pornography, even though heterosexual men are the main consumers. She acknowledges that heterosexual men are the people most viewed with suspicion when expressing an academic interest in pornography, and least likely to "write honestly and well about it." However, she also states "It will be crucial to the development of pornography studies that this group... continue to find ways to express an interest in pornography that is not marked with defensiveness" (1999, p. xii).

Williams' identification of this gap in the literature is call to action and a reminder of responsibility. I am a nominally heterosexual man and I admit being, to use Williams' term, "vulnerable" to pornography, or to put it more bluntly, I find a wide range of pornography sexually arousing. I also have an academic interest in what pornography reveals about gender, nationality, desire, and its film industry and social contexts. At the risk of being defensive, I do not believe my enjoyment of pornography renders me unable to analyze the texts. A food critic may enjoy eating, but this does not blind him to analysis of taste or texture, or issues of nutritional content, cost, atmosphere, sustainability, local sourcing, and food safety.

In the course of my studies I have viewed the "classics," but my research on film classification boards has also meant sitting through many less distinguished films. Recreationally, I have seen films in contexts ranging from an erotic film festival to coin operated viewing booths, but most frequently on DVDs or more recently online. I hesitate to call myself an expert on pornography, but this is more out of humility than shame. For example, prior to researching this paper, I never viewed Canadian pornography. However, of common American pornography, I have seen enough to recognize something different.

## Sample Films

*Canadian Beaver #2* (Everhard 2006): This is a 2 disc set (1 feature, 1 special features) from the large American producer Valentine Video. It chronicles the sexual exploits of Erik Everhard and some companions on a visit to Montreal. Everhard is a Calgary native who started working in pornography in Vancouver, and, like many mainstream Canadian performers, moved south. He is an established actor and director in the American pornography industry.

The setting is established with an opening sequence in a Montreal airport, and a superimposed title: "I arrive in Montreal...." This is a non-sexual sequence, although a female companion flashes her breasts in an elevator. There is also a non-sexual sequence in a shopping mall, with a *Bay* department store sign clearly visible in the background; a sex scene filmed in a local club, with the name of the club shown at the beginning of the sequence; and a sex scene shot on the Montreal subway. On the special features disc there are comments suggesting the latter scene was shot without permission and with some difficulties. Production values are relatively high, and the language is English.

*Fresh Faces #8* (Wolfe 2007): The box cover promises seven women from Ottawa and one from Montreal. The disc begins with a (non-pornographic) music video featuring an Ottawa rap group. The opening shot of the feature is a park in Montreal with the Olympic stadium in the background. A man meets a woman in the park, and there is a shot of them walking through downtown Montreal. Soon after, a shot of a limousine outside a hotel includes Quebec flags, and then inside a hotel room there is a close up of an Ottawa Sun newspaper. The rest of the scenes are in anonymous interiors. There are a variety of sexual acts and couplings, including a woman and two men, two scenes of a male/female couple, two scenes of a lesbian couple, and two scenes of solo women with sex toys. The very limited dialogue is English, and the production values are low. In the hotel room, black cloths cover the window.

*Quebec Perversity #5* (Marchand 1998): This film by Inner View Video, a Montreal company, has bilingual credits, but French dialogue and intertitles. All scenes take place in what appears to be the same simple set, and each ends with the performer talking to a female interviewer. Again, there is a variety of sexual acts and couplings, and the performers are not all conventionally attractive or young. Some of the women have pubic hair, a fetish in contemporary pornography.

*Montreal Perversions #3* (Steve 1998): Although this is a different series from above, the film is from the same company. The couplings, sex acts, and performers are more conventional, and the locations, though generic, are varied. There is variation from scene to scene in the sex acts portrayed and the order performed.

*Bubble Cum* (Diamond Dog 2003): The box cover notes this film is "Shot on location in Montreal," has a "Canadian Cast," and shows a small Canadian flag. The film is produced by two established American companies and distributed by the large distributor Mile High. A short opening sequence uses titles to introduce the performers and sex scenes. In each case, the woman is introduced first, typically with crude language such as, "Whoever says Canadians Can't Fuck, Meet this Blonde Slut." The men are introduced by a simple "With" and their name, except for Everhard. His title card reads "Featuring Canada's Hardest Fucker, Erik Everhard." The feature begins with an urban streetscape showing French signs on businesses, and an ARRÊT sign. A man and a woman meet, and enter a building. This sequence does not appear to have any connection to the rest of the film, and serves only to establish the location.

The sex scenes are all essentially the same, mostly on the same set. Each scene ends with a man ejaculating into a woman's mouth. She then displays the ejaculate as being mixed with the gum she was chewing. There is also one scene with two

women. Most of the language is English, but some of the performers speak French. A stylistic complexity is that each scene begins with the woman alone, chatting with the crew. The film then cuts between the conversation, posing and preparing, and flash-forwards to the sexual performance. The man arrives during the posing, the chatting ends, music replaces crew noise, and the sexual performance already glimpsed begins.

*Quebec's Little Angels #2* (French Title: *Les Petits Anges Pervers du Quebec*) (Steve 1999): This film is from the same company as *Quebec Perversity #5* and *Montreal Perversions #3*, and has the same director as the latter film. The opening shot is a partially nude woman masturbating on railroad tracks. She is a grassy area, with evergreens behind her. A man approaches with a large bag of dildos. She takes one and begins to use it, but the camera follows the man leaving. The next shot is the same man offering the dildos to a woman in an anonymous interior. She shows her breasts, then the film cuts to the first woman, still masturbating outdoors, but now in a gritty urban setting. A third woman is shown painting what appears to be a basement recreation room, followed by a cut to the second woman masturbating, then back to the third woman with a man watching. A shot of the first woman follows, then the third woman and the man begin a sexual performance that is cross cut with either the second woman or a fourth woman masturbating. As is apparent from this description of the film's opening, it has unusually complex editing. Most of the limited dialogue is French, with some English phrases.

*The Thief* (Maxine 2005): This an example of a Canadian made film which makes no claims of being Canadian. It is a fetish film, featuring extensive bondage, domination, and sadomasochism (BDSM). Unlike the other films, *Thief* tells a story, using characters and a plot, though the performers occasionally glance at the camera. One shot clearly shows a portable film lamp used to illuminate the set. The film begins with a man breaking into a woman's house while she is showering. She confronts him with a handgun, a response more American than Canadian. The next shot shows the man naked and secured in a large metal frame. She proceeds to administer various mild tortures such as gentle whipping. This is a curious response to an intruder, but the pornography genre dictates that sexual activity is the resolution to any problem (Williams 1999). At the halfway point of the film, the woman produces the gun again, and orders the man to treat her in a similar fashion. The film ends with mutually satisfying intercourse and finally kissing.

The mid-film change in role is unusual. Typically in BDSM films, one person (male or female) is the victim from start to finish, and the conclusion is humiliation, not mutual pleasure. *Thief* also has less verbal abuse than similar American films. These differences may be due to legal requirements. Canadian obscenity law is stricter than American concerning what might be considered harmful or degrading sexual activity, and requires consideration of the film as a whole. Using characters and a storyline rather than claiming reality, minimizing the degradation, switching roles, and presenting a happy ending for both characters reduces the chances of the film being considered obscene. It is also more enjoyable to watch.

Clarissa Smith notes, in her study of British soft-core magazines, that "regulation is not simply a repressive tool... it also forms a set of production imperatives with significant effects on the content..." (C. Smith 2005, p. 156). Canadian obscenity



law, intended to limit the content of pornographic films, might also be helping create a Canadian pornographic content that is still distinctly national in the absence of overt Canadian elements.

## Content Review

Apart from *Thief*, the films are not close to challenging Canadian obscenity law. The acts portrayed, the lack of character, and the lack of narrative, are similar to a great deal of American pornography. However, there are significant differences. One is the insistence on identifying and authenticating the location of the film. Whether through landmarks such as the Olympic stadium, public and recognizable spaces such as airports, malls, and streetscapes, or iconography such as flags and railroads, a portion of the content is dedicated to identifying space.<sup>3</sup> This is common in pornographic films that claim a nationality. For example, Brazilian pornographic films may include shots of Sugarloaf Mountain or the Christ the Redeemer statue. The use and appearance of French language or, more accurately, Québécois, present to some degree in all the films except *Thief*, is a more subtle and uniquely Canadian identifier of location.

Another difference is the variety in the editing and the choreography of the sex acts. *Quebec's Little Angels #2* is the most obvious example of this, but the four Canadian produced films are all more visually and sexually complex, and thus more interesting, than similar American films or the American produced films set in Canada. The reason for this may be a desire for market differentiation. As previously noted, the number of American releases is very high, and one way to stand out in the market is to be different. However, these films do not make claims of visual or sexual sophistication. For example, the back cover blurb for *Quebec Perversity #5* emphasizes differentiation through nationality, geography, and sexual enthusiasm, not sophistication:

Watch out!!! The Great White North is getting hot! These nasty Quebecians [sic] are doin' the dirty "thang" and things are heating up! (Maybe that's why the Polar Cap is melting!) It's an all-out, sex-fest as these cunt-crazed Northerners do the deep pussy slide. We're talking tick-stopping girl/girl, hot, wet cock-sucking, deep dick pussy-drilling and pink tunneled anal! Hell, these fine French-speaking fuckies do it nastier than their friends to the South!

Despite the marketing angle used, the sexual sophistication may be a planned difference on the part of the performers or the producers. The marketing vice-president of Real Productions, Ashley Corsiatto, explaining why there is a demand for Canadian porn, points out that "One flavour of everything grows repetitive and tiresome after a while.... I'm tired of seeing the Silicon Valley girls constantly. Different people like different things. You can't keep serving them (the) same thing over and over and expect them to swallow it" (qtd. in Noel 2008). The visual

<sup>3</sup> The newspaper image in *Fresh Faces #8* may serve to prove the performer is of age on the date of production, not prove location.

sophistication may come out of a similar desire, or it may reflect the skills of the crew.

It is not unusual for pornographic films to serve as a training ground or alternate income for trained technical talent. It may only be a coincidence that the largest centre of pornographic film production and distribution in Canada, Montreal, is also the home of the National Film Board, however the origins of the Canadian pornography film industry and the National Film Board are linked.

Director Denis Héroux made the first Canadian modern and legal “nudie” film, *Valerie*, in Montreal in 1968, using some funding from the Canadian Film Development Corporation. Its success inspired Claude Fournier, a director and script writer at the NFB, to make the even more successful *Deux Femmes en Or* in 1970. Both films emphasize their Canadian setting, including footage of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau at a football game in the latter. These films were part of trend identified as “Maple Syrup Porno” by the American trade magazine *Variety*.

Within a few years the rise of hardcore pornographic films in the United States, notably *Deep Throat* (1972), ended the trend, but a precedent had been set for Canadian mainstream and government employed film makers to dabble in exotica (“Maple Syrup Porn: The Secret History of Quebec Popular Cinema,” n.d.). The *National Post* quote at the beginning of this paper alludes to Canadian strength in documentary film making, and this strength is well suited to the low budget pseudo-realism of many adult sex films. The lack of credits and use of pseudonyms for technical talent in pornographic films makes it difficult to know if skilled film makers are contributing to the difference of Canadian pornographic films.

The two American produced films shot in Montreal, *Canadian Beaver #2* and *Bubble Cum*, do not have the visual and sexual sophistication of the Canadian made films, but *Canadian Beaver #2* makes the most use of obvious Canadian locations of any film considered, and is the only film to consistently integrate sex acts with Canadian settings. *Bubble Cum* references its Canadian location at the beginning, in the descriptions of several performers, and in the bilingual dialogue. The time shifting editing of each scene is an element of visual sophistication.

From the small sample of Canadian films considered, it is clear that Canadian pornographic films can be structurally or visually distinctive. This may be due to legal regulations or available technical talent. Emphasizing the Canadian location or performers also affects the look and structure of a film. Although the films may differ in more than one way from the dominant American product, the differentiation generally promoted is the location. This leads to the question of why is there a market for overtly Canadian pornography, or what is the meaning of these films for viewers, inside and outside Canada?

The owner of Real Productions, Shaun Donnelly, has a simple explanation: “I’ve always found there’s a real turn-on to watching and knowing it’s [sic] people you could run into in the grocery store” (qtd. in SurrIDGE 2008). Real Productions emphasizes amateur performers, encouraging people to live out their fantasy of being in a pornographic movie through their web site, so it is possible that your neighbours could be in a film. However, the blurb for *Quebec Perversity #5*, quoted above, emphasizes the sexual enthusiasm of Canadian performers, not their neighbourliness. It may be that producers of Canadian pornography are trying to sell

the films as exotica for the larger American market, and counting on geographic proximity for the Canadian market. Not everyone agrees that proximity is sufficient. A competitor of Donnelly acknowledges the market for Canadian porn, but asks, “Am I really going to want to pay to sit on my couch and watch my neighbours fuck?” (Lejtenyi 2008). For American viewers, Canadian pornography is an opportunity to avoid watching their neighbours.

Whether the performers are neighbours or other fellow Canadians, the dominant meaning for Canadian viewers, when the Canadianess of the performers is stressed, is that the performers are similar to the viewer through shared nationality and physical proximity. This may heighten identification and voyeuristic pleasure, as the performance may seem more authentic than staged. The lack of character or substantial narrative, and revealing aspects of the cinematic apparatus or showing scene preparation, all reinforce the apparent reality of the sexual acts. On the other hand, sophisticated or non-linear editing draws attention to the performance of sexuality, and how the performers are different from the viewer.

Another factor affecting reception is when the Canadian location is presented. In most of the films, location is only emphasized at the beginning. Unless the Canadian setting of the film is fully integrated into the sex acts, as it is in *Canadian Beaver #2*, the location imagery may be bypassed or missed. DVD and online viewing allows easy non-linear viewing. While the initial attraction to the film may have been the Canadian cast note on the cover, this may be forgotten in viewing. For viewers, the attraction of an obviously Canadian pornographic film may be a chance for greater identification and thus pleasure, but this reading is not certain.

An alternate possibility for the initial attraction, considering Laura Mulvey’s influential work on gaze, is that Canadian viewers, largely men, seek out Canadian films in order to see their female neighbours, co-workers, and people at the grocery store degraded and objectified as objects for scopophilic pleasure (Mulvey 1975). The language in titles, blurbs, and credits often has a decidedly misogynist tone that supports this interpretation. For example, the end credits of *Canadian Beaver #2* refer to the female performers, supplied by a Montreal escort agency, as “great whores.”

As previously noted, the introductory titles in *Bubble Cum* use homosocial locker room slang refer to the female performers. Each scene is introduced with degrading descriptions of the women:

- All Natural Jizz Junkie
- Part Asian, All Ass Gaping Slut
- Whoever Says Canadians Can’t Fuck, Meet This Blonde Slut
- Her Very First Time with Black Cock
- She Might Not Speak English, but check out the Fucking Rack
- Two First-Timers and a Strap-On [introducing a scene with two women]

Only one male is given a description, the complimentary “Canada’s Hardest Fucker.” The titles have significant misogyny, such as the use of the term slut, the patronizing and partialism regarding the large breasted non-English speaker, and the implication that lesbians require a penis substitute. The titles are not accurate in

describing the women or the upcoming scenes. Only the most naive viewer would believe claims of “first time,” and the woman described as not speaking English does in fact speak it (the Asian woman speaks English and French). The viewer of the titles, if in fact they are viewed, may accept, reject, or negotiate the misogyny, but it is present.

Another aspect of the titles is how the (French) Canadian performers are equated with markers of pornographic sexual difference or semi-taboo: interracial sex, natural breasts, anal display, and lesbianism. This could be read as reinforcing and naturalizing nationalist myths of diversity, inclusivity and equality. Canadian women are all equally sexual, regardless of their breast size, language, race, orientation, or preferences. Alternately, the descriptions could be read as allowing all Canadian women to be sexually objectified, regardless of their breast size, language, race, orientation, or preferences.

With many possible meanings of Canadian pornography, a more empirical approach would be required to determine why the market exists. This might involve surveys of consumers rather than listening to the producers, or reviewing online rental purchases, but there are significant ethical and logistical challenges in arranging to interview pornography users and obtain viewing data. More work is also required to determine if the market is different inside and outside Canada. Canadian viewers may act out of simple nationalism, wanting to patriotically support a Canadian product and supporting local sex performers out the same loyalty that leads one to support the hometown hockey team, or buy local produce. Out of country viewers may consider Canadian material exotic. Some American websites that sell or stream pornographic films list Canadian material in the “Foreign” category.

Another question worthy of further exploration is the significance of identifying specific cities and provinces in Canadian pornography. Of the six films identified as Canadian, four mention specific cities (Montreal three times, and Ottawa once), and the other two mention Quebec. Even the video featuring Ottawa women includes one woman from Montreal. The interest in Montreal and Quebec may reflect the perception that Quebecers are more sexually liberated than other Canadians, it may be a case of exoticizing and thus othering residents of Quebec, or it may be obscuring Quebec identity by reducing Quebecers to sex objects.

Links between pornography and the sex trade are frequently made when pornography is studied primarily as a social problem. An unfortunate consequence of the more textual approach of Porn Studies has been to disregard associations with the sex trade. Most pornographic films promote the web site of the distributor at a minimum. Visiting the web site can result in advertising of sexual services such as escorts, localized by the IP address of the viewer. Films of a specific location can promote local services. For example, *Canadian Beaver #2* includes a sex scene in a Montreal strip club. The name of the club is shown during the scene, and the club is named and thanked in the end credits, as is an escort agency. The limousine company is named and thanked in the special features. The *Fresh Faces #8* box advertises the offers the opportunity to “Meet and Date some of these Teen stars” online at a web site, and the main menu of the disc promotes another web site. The latter site sells memberships to view images, and provides a link to a site providing

information on local strip clubs, escorts, and massage parlours. The use of pornography to advertise the sex trade may be partly responsible for the emphasis on location and specific cities. On the other hand, particularly in the case of Montreal, the pornography may be taking advantage of the city's reputed active sex trade to lend cachet to the films.

## Porn Culture

The possible meanings of Canadian pornography have been considered within the context of pornography; however there is a larger cultural context. In *Zack and Miri Make a Porno* (K. Smith 2008), Zack claims pornography is part of mainstream culture. This is also the premise of the essay collection *Pop-Porn*. The essays consider generally pornography as overt sexuality (Hall and Bishop 2007). What is not clear in these essays is whether an increasing acceptance of pornography (the representation of explicit sex) has led to more overt sexuality, or if more overt sexuality has led to an increasing acceptance of pornography. Either way, an increase in overt sexuality does not mean pornography is an aspect of mainstream culture.

Adult sex films have been legal throughout Canada since the *Butler* decision of 1992, but their distribution remains tightly controlled and separate from mainstream film distribution. Viewing of pornography is generally a private matter. Pornography is considered unsuitable for discussion in most public areas and work places, and even in relatively open environments like the university classroom it must be discussed with caution. Yet as a product subject to the same Canadian content regulations as music and sports broadcasts, and discussed in newspapers, pornography is not entirely outside of the mainstream.

Before 1992, sexually explicit films in Canada were subversive representations of sexuality, prohibited by authority in the name of protecting public morality. In Gramsci's terms, the prohibition of pornography was one aspect of hegemonic control of sexual behaviour. With a changing social reality of increasing acceptance of sexuality, the state co-opted the subculture of pornography by a negotiated legalization of *some* forms.

The *Butler* decision legalized representations of explicit sex per se, but it also maintained the illegality of some representations, such as depictions of rape or sex involving participants appearing to be underage, regardless of the actual circumstances of production. As is typical in hegemonic control, the reason provided was moral authority: the protection of women and children. According to May Friedman's analysis of pornography regulations in Canada, the *Butler* decision was patriarchal and did not consider that women might enjoy violent sexual material. "The unfortunate outcome has therefore been the further suppression of women's sexuality" (Friedman 2002, p. 105). There is also the curious fact that a youth over 16 can engage in sexual activity, but possessing a recording of that activity is a criminal offense. This could be considered a suppression of youth sexuality, and has become problematic in recent cases of sexting. Representations of youth sexuality and violence against women remain in the subculture of illegal pornography.

The CRTC takes an active role in controlling representations of sexuality. The license issued to Northern Peaks includes the requirement that all shows follow these guidelines:

- Prior to airing, all programming must be proven [United States Code] 2257 compliant and have been approved by the appropriate Canadian film board.
- Content must adhere to Northern Peaks internal standards, which includes;
  - No depictions of sexual violence or degradation
  - No bondage with penetration
  - No showing of blood/strangulation
  - No rape (simulated or real)
  - No abduction (simulated or real)
  - No defecating/enema
  - No acts which are not deemed consensual
  - No voyeur fantasy unless all participants indicate an awareness of filming
- All actors/actresses must be 18 years of age or older at time of shooting and proof of age must be presented.
- Performers must be paid a competitive fee for the type of scene they appear in and the locale in which they shoot (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission 2007).<sup>4,5</sup>

The guidelines constitute prior restraint that effectively prevents challenging material from being made or shown, and then defended in court. The material need not be particularly challenging to be accused of violating the guidelines. The “voyeur fantasy” restriction is particularly broad, as film is by nature voyeuristic, voyeur fantasy implies no awareness of filming, and participant acknowledgement breaks the illusion of cinematic reality (notwithstanding that it can be effective in establishing sexual reality in pornographic films). By declaring some pornography legal, and then requiring Canadian content and other regulations to deliver it through the growing cable and satellite markets, including prior restraint of the provincial film boards, the state is able to exercise extra-legal control of the content (Lejtenyi 2008).

Hegemonic media supports the co-opting of the subculture of pornography by commodification, generating or encouraging mass interest in the superficial aspects of pornography. Examples include revealing and suggestive clothing, discussions of casual sex and sex toys on prime time television shows, films, newspaper articles,

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<sup>4</sup> No one opposed Northern Peaks’ application to the CRTC. The Canada Family Action Coalition subsequently criticized the decision, noting that the pornography industry is associated with “crime, diseases and drugs.” That organization also opposes abortion, homosexuality, and human rights commissions, effectively placing themselves outside mainstream Canadian ideals and devaluing their opposition to the CRTC decision. (CRTC Approves of Sexual Degradation Canadian Style 2008).

<sup>5</sup> The license was conditional on at least one cable or satellite service offering carriage. There is no information about the company since the 2008 CRTC decision, so it appears the service did not go ahead.

and documentaries about pornography, and the examples of overt sexuality discussed in *Pop-Porn*.

However, for the commodification to succeed, the subculture must continue to exist. The “Porn Star” t-shirt is only a daring rebellious statement of sexuality if it refers to a dangerous subculture. Legal pornography is not quite mainstream, but on the margins, closer to mainstream than the subculture of illegal pornography, and allows an exploration of taboos within government sanctioned limits. Those same limits define and preserve the subculture.

## Conclusion

Some Canadian pornography is made by American companies filming in Canada with Canadian locations and performers, and promoting that. Other Canadian pornography is made by Canadian companies, emphasizing their proximity to appeal to local viewers, and distinguish themselves in the market. Finally, some Canadian pornography is made by Canadian companies, but downplays or disguises its origins.

All three types have more visual and sexual sophistication than common American pornography. Films that emphasize the location and the nationality of the performers are influenced by that emphasis, regardless of whether they are marketing themselves as exotic or familiar. All pornography made in Canada is subject to the available technical, performer, and production talent, and the requirement to work within Canadian laws. If Canadian distributors want to take advantage of the market guaranteed by Canadian content regulations, they must also meet the extra-legal requirements of the CRTC.

The prior restraint of the film boards and the CRTC regulations can be considered an oppressive restriction on free speech, but they also ensure some of the ethical issues involved in the production of pornography are addressed. This is a possible benefit for viewers who seek out Canadian pornography, but like the greater visual sophistication, it is not promoted by the filmmakers.

For better or worse, Canadian pornography supports a modest film industry, and thrives on the internet. Numerous sites take advantage of national iconography and stereotypes to stand out in a crowded global marketplace, and some sites operate in a mutually beneficial relationship with regionally based filmmakers and independent performers.

The occasional media coverage of Canadian content regulations for adult sex content on television provokes tittering and condemnation. Both reactions ignore the reality of Canadian national pornography. Broad conclusions cannot be made from the small sample of films discussed in this paper, but their existence and their differences prove a distinct Canadian national pornography does exist.

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