

“I know It When I See It”

“Pornography” at GCC – Where do we draw the line(s)?

The History

During the Fall 2006 semester, a group of students, faculty and staff raised concerns that pornography, in the form of *Playboy* and other men’s magazines, was being sold in the Bookstore. In the weeks that followed, a variety of opinions surfaced about these materials and their availability on campus. What some called “pornography,” others called “erotica,” “adult materials,” or “artistic expression.” What some considered adult entertainment, others considered educational material. Some found the magazines to be in violation of our Principles of Education and Standards of Behavior, while others saw the availability of a broad range material expressing a variety of perspectives as embodying the Principles of Education. Participants in the discussion raised concerns about the exploitation and oppression of women, the exploitation of men, the violation of the values to which our community claims to subscribe, the undermining of freedom of speech, choice and expression, and the issue of censorship.

During the Spring 2007 semester, the Bookstore stopped selling all magazines because of the low profit margins and high labor costs involved. Though the removal of “pornography” from the Bookstore effectively ended debate on the issue, several members of the campus community see a need to continue, and broaden, the dialogue that began with a relatively small group of participants.

This exhibit, which will run throughout the Spring 2008 semester, is intended to re-open the discussion. The dialogue will continue with opportunities for moderated discussion that may lead to the development of a college-wide policy on how to handle objectionable material. During this process, companion materials including a Research Guide and list of reserve materials will be available in the Library and on the Library website.

The Exhibit

The definition of pornography has been hotly debated for generations by religious groups, feminists, the Supreme Court, academics, and many others. Some key issues in the debate include questions of morality, civil liberties, and the impact on women.

This exhibit is designed to raise questions and generate discussion about how we determine when an image or piece of text is offensive, and what course of action we take when we find images or text objectionable. The exhibit compels us to ask ourselves: to what degree does – or should – context inform our judgment of content? Here, images

and text are deliberately taken out of context from a variety of sources including both the editorial and advertising content of men's magazines, women's magazines, GLBT magazines, design journals, and art and photography books. How do we judge an image when we don't know its context, its intended audience, or the gender of the photographer?

Supreme Court Justice Stewart famously said about pornography in 1964, "I know it when I see it."¹ But do we know pornography when we see it? And if we do, do we all agree on what is pornographic, or otherwise objectionable? How should we navigate our disagreements about what images and text are appropriate for the GCC campus? Should our standards be applied across campus, or should different standards be applied to the Bookstore, the Library, the Art Gallery, the classroom, our own offices?

We² designed this exhibit to be interactive. All photos and text are numbered, and both an alphabetical list of sources and blank forms numbered 1 through 73 are provided, allowing the viewer to match images/text with sources. We will provide the correct matches before the end of the exhibit. We also encourage viewers' comments on the exhibit in the blank notebook we've provided.

We hope this exhibit will generate discussion in the notebook here as well as in a variety of forums across campus, including classes, department and division meetings, open forums, and informal conversations among students, staff, and faculty.

Thank you for *your* participation!

¹ *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 378 U.S. 184, 197 (STEWART, J., concurring)

² We are a group of staff members from the Library and Bookstore who created this exhibit at the request of President Pura. We received input along the way from a variety of faculty, administrators, and students.