Pornography is produced and consumed largely by men. Many of us women have little idea of what our brothers, male friends, lovers, husbands or boyfriends may be consuming, what images of ourselves are portrayed in pornographic photos and videos.

In order to enable more women to participate in the debate of a new law on pornography, Sister will present a series of articles on this controversial topic. In this issue, Liz Frank looks at the current debate in Namibia.

In following issues, we will present the situation and debate in some other countries, and invite women to view and discuss pornographic materials available in Namibia.

The debate on pornography involves the following questions: What is pornography? What are the effects of pornography? Should the production, distribution and consumption of pornography be controlled in any way? If so, how and by whom? Is the regulation of pornography compatible with the right to freedom of expression guaranteed in the Constitution?

The public debate on pornography was officially launched in 1991 by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. At the invitation of the ministry, people from the media, legislators, educators, lawyers, community activists, church members, police and customs officials came together for a one-day seminar. They discussed recommendations to the ministry on the best way to deal with publications and audio-visual material containing sex and violence.

At the seminar, Deputy Minister Dan Tjongarero outlined the current laws regulating pornography in Namibia. These laws are found in the Constitution of Namibia and in South African statutes which officially still apply to Namibia until replaced by new laws.

Article 21 of the Constitution lists fundamental freedoms, including freedom of speech and expression, freedom of the press and other media. However, the same article provides that these freedoms may be restricted in the interests of, amongst other things, "decency or morality".

Under the South African Publications Act of 1974, committees are appointed to censor and prohibit the distribution of books and other writings, pictures, objects and
"Pornography is propaganda against the dignity of women. It is a political threat, not simply an issue of public decency."

Films which the committees find undesirable. This act can no longer be enforced in Namibia because the censorship committees and the Publications Appeals Board are in South Africa.

The South African Indecent or Obscene Photographic Matter Act of 1967 prohibits the possession of photographic matter, including videos, which show sexual intercourse, licentiousness, lust, homosexuality, leshanism, masturbation, sexual assault, rape, sodomy, masochism, sadism, sexual bestiality, or anything of like nature.

A person convicted in terms of this act may be fined up to N$1 000 and/or sentenced to a maximum of one year in prison. However, this law is obviously no longer strictly applied. Films such as Basic Instinct, which shows explicit sexual intercourse, and Philadelphia, whose main character is gay, have recently been screened in the cinema (even though some censorship may still have taken place).

Obviously the social climate has changed in many ways since independence. At the same time pressure from private and business interests is mounting to liberalise the current laws and open Namibia to the international market of pornographic materials.

Customs officials and police are presently using their discretion and focussing on "hard core pornography" when seizing photographs and videos from private homes or from people coming into the country. At the seminar in 1991 they expressed the need for a revision of the law to clarify their duties in this field.

What is pornography? According to the definition given by Tjongararo at the seminar, pornography is "the representation of erotic behaviours in books, pictures or films intended to cause sexual excitement, that which in general, offends decency, is obscene".

He said that pornography is controlled by law in many countries for the reasons that it corrupts the morals of youth and adults, leads to violence and sexual crimes, and contributes to a sexist climate in society. He added that the gender-dimension of pornography is now being recognised, because it often portrays the violent subjugation of women by men.

In order to overcome the special discrimination women in Namibia have suffered for so long, to promote human dignity and to combat violence against women, Tjongararo suggested that pornography should perhaps be controlled on the basis of the harm it causes to women as a group and to society in general.

Professor Annemarie Heywood, another main speaker at the seminar, took up the issue of women and pornography from a feminist perspective. She argued that pornography is made by men, representing a male view of what is erotic, sexually arousing.

In the multi-million dollar pornography industry that has developed over the past 20 years, sex is increasingly linked with violence. Women and children are assaulted, tortured, raped, even dismembered and murdered in front of the rolling cameras for the sexual pleasure of male viewers.

Heywood claimed that pornography is propaganda
against the equal dignity of women, that it incites abuse and violence and is therefore a political threat, not simply an issue of public decency.

The seminar discussed the questions of what is acceptable/not acceptable with regard to limitations of pornography and violence, what should not be imported into Namibia, and what forms of import control should be established, bearing in mind the freedom provisions of the Constitution.

A number of recommendations emerged. There was general agreement that children need special protection from pornography and violence, that government must play some role in setting standards of what is permissible, that commercialisation of sex should be prohibited (e.g., sex shops, peep shows, sex-by telephone) and that a commission should be established to help control and screen pornographic material, based on a law which clearly defines what is permissible and what is not.

At the same time it was recommended that sex education should be promoted, and that the viewing of soft porn should be allowed in private by adults.

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has stated that further seminars should be held before a new law is drafted. We welcome this approach and continue our discussion in the next issue.

---

**competition!**

Do you want to be the winner of a compact instamatic camera?

Just answer the question below correctly and you will be considered in a lucky draw

Question: Name three places where the Sister Namibia magazine can be purchased. It's easy. Name the shop or person from where you bought your copy as the first, and then you only have to find out the names of two more shops or persons that sell the magazine.

† Send your answers to our address on page 2.
† Remember to include your name and address on your entry.
† The competition is only for people residing in Namibia.
† Members and staff of *Sister* are not allowed to enter, nor their relatives.