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New York Newsday - September 20, 1994

## **Put Porn Where It Belongs - at Home**

Two issues are sure to arouse the passions of New Yorkers: threats to their neighborhoods and assaults on their children. That's why topless bars and "adult video" shops, which have spread to middle- and working-class neighborhoods in all five boroughs, are generating community protests. In response to these complaints, the Department of City Planning has proposed regulations controlling the location of topless bars and porno shops, arguing that land-use controls are just as important as police in improving the "quality of life."

Unlike earlier fights over family values - such as the struggle over the Rainbow Curriculum - the conflict over sex shops is not driven by government action but by technological change. One no longer needs to travel to Times Square to see a pornographic movie, visit a striptease joint or surreptitiously buy a "dirty" magazine. "Adult" videos are available in neighborhood shops, and topless bars cater to an upscale and diverse clientele. According to the Department of City Planning, Manhattan still has most of the city's adult entertainment businesses, but the percentage in Queens has been rising rapidly, from 11 percent in 1976 to 25 percent in 1993.

In order to combat topless bars and adult video shops, the planning department is proposing to zone them in under-used manufacturing areas - far away from residential neighborhoods, not to mention their customers. Like many ideas that emanate from city planners, this proposal sounds good in theory, but ignores the fundamental forces of technology and marketing that influence the growth and location of businesses - especially sexual establishments - in cities.

Twenty-five years ago, when today's parents were just entering junior high school, information about sex was not easy to obtain and exposure to sexually provocative material was highly restricted. Today, children are exposed to all sorts of detailed information about sex from radio, television, music videos and magazines. In fact, there's not a subway car or bus that doesn't have a half-nude male or female model promoting the benefits of the latest perfume, underwear or athletic attire alongside a public service advertisement advocating the use of condoms.

In order to adapt to the growing acceptance of sexuality in public settings and over the airwaves, the entrepreneurs of sex have been forced to invent new ways to attract customers. Amateur black-and-white movies have given way to full-color videos with plots, lush settings and exotic sex - performed by porn "superstars." And sexual establishments now accommodate individuals of all genders and sexual persuasions. For example, "Man Alive" on Manhattan's East Side has male strippers for a female audience. At Webster Hall, "go-go" dancers wander through the halls and act out different sexual fantasies. On Wednesday evenings, one floor is devoted to gay males and another to lesbians. Even in the outer boroughs, topless dancing is often supplemented with oil-wrestling nights.

Using zoning regulations to control the diffusion of topless bars and adult video shops may work in a few places, but the best way to get sex out of the neighborhoods is to move it directly into the home, where every living room has a television set and sometimes even a parent. Renting pornographic videos from neighborhood shops will be unnecessary if the same material can be delivered directly through pay-TV, and virtual reality would allow anyone to participate in topless dancing. Rather than act as the censors of the sidewalk, city planners should recognize that emerging technologies are their most effective weapons in the fight against the triple-X video store next door.

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