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November 25, 2015

AFR 2612-D894

### **Erotic vs. Erotica**

“The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. But pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling.”

Audre Lorde, “Sister Outsider”

The term “Erotic” comes from the Greek word Eros which means “Love”. In Greek mythology Eros was the name of The God of Love, who eventually gave birth to the current symbol of love “Cupid”. Although the term Erotic has a history of meaning love, the term has been tarnished and turned into a symbol of sex. “The Erotic” is now defined as “of relating to or tending to arouse sexual desire or excitement”. Due to the fact that civilization is, and always has been heavily influenced by the male perspective, the main focus of “The Erotic” is sexual gratification, such as pornography. However Erotica i.e. the pornographic is one aspect of “The Erotic”. The true meaning of Erotic is a sense of deep satisfaction, that can be brought on by something as simple as smelling a rose, or as complex as finding true passion. “The Erotic” has in some way been confused with the term Erotica. “Erotica” is literature or art intended to arouse sexual desire. Although “The Erotic” and Erotica have similar spellings, these words have two very different meanings. In this essay I will address how the term “Erotic” has been misconstrued, and altered in order to fit into the male perspective. I will also explain the difference between “The Erotic” and “The Pornographic” i.e. Erotica, as well as how these two terms affect the lives of women in modern day society.

The Erotic was developed from many variations of the word Love. However Love has many different interpretations, depending on the how a person perceives the particular word. In some cases Love is seen as deep feelings between two people. In other cases love is seen as the act of making love, which can also develop very strong feelings. However as time has progressed the original meaning of “The Erotic” has altered from a deep sense of satisfaction in any context, to deep sexual gratification. In Western Civilization “The Erotic”, is socially classified as Adult, X-rated and forbidden to the under aged. During adolescence I was lead to believe that “The Erotic” was not only for adults, but it would be unbecoming of a young lady to be interested in. Being that “The Erotic” was always depicted as sexual, it was blasphemous for a young woman to even discuss the particular topic. Sexuality, and thoughts of a sexual nature are seen as an unspeakable subject, that isn’t freely discussed amongst young girls, as it is amongst boys. Since the early years women have been taught that their sexuality was, and still is a private matter. It is said, that a woman should only express herself sexually with one man, and that man should be her husband. The restrictions surrounded around female sexuality are so great, that women are ashamed to find what truly brings them deep satisfaction. Women are taught that it is shameful to explore their sexual preferences whether it’s with someone else, or by themselves. The Erotic is always centered around pleasuring the male, and not the female. For this reason, women rarely reach sexual gratification, or deep satisfaction if they ever actually experience the sensation.

As a female I have noticed that the way in which females are taught to view deep satisfaction, in any context, has impacted me greatly. There were so many experiences that I wanted to have, but I could not because I was afraid that this particular act would be seen as unlady like. As a young woman, I was taught that you must take pride in yourself, and any situation that compromises your virtue, is not a situation that I should be in. I was reprimanded countless

amounts of times for acting in ways that weren't suitable to being a young lady. In the back of my mind, I always wondered, who made the rules that determined whether or not a female was behaving the way a female should? Eventually as my mind began to develop, I realized that the "proper" way to behave as a female was being dictated by men. In the book "Sister Outsider" written by Audre Lorde, the author says: "As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and non-rational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world, which values this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but which fears this same depth too much to examine the possibilities of it within themselves." I completely agree with this quote because I feel it is extremely relevant to how women are still treated till this day. Men, who have always been the dominant species have always found a way to make the woman inferior. Women are groomed to feel ashamed of the power that they hold within. When young girls are taught at a young age to keep their deep sensations inside, they are afraid to step out of their "place". When a woman is afraid to express herself, because she prefers to conform to the pre-determined rules set out by society, she silences herself. By silencing herself she gives up any chance of obtaining the power she rightfully deserves. Unfortunately many women decide to keep their voices unheard, because they do not want to threaten the ego of the man.

Women have been subjected to hundreds of years of scrutiny and judgement because of the dominant male influence. One of the areas where women face the most judgement and scrutiny is in "erotica" and or the pornographic. Since its development in the early 1800s, the pornographic has been known as an illusion that creates deep sensation for its audience. The sensation can be created, but it is only a taste of what the true satisfaction can be. This is the main difference between The Erotic and Erotica. Erotica can only create a sensation, but the

contentment that comes after this sensation can never be fully obtained. Pornography opens up our deepest fantasies, and allows our imagination to take over. Although we are able to recreate our deepest and darkest desires in our mind, our body is being neglected of what it truly wants, the raw, natural feeling. Besides from lacking authenticity, pornography also requires women to follow certain rules, and regulations. Being that pornography is a visual stimulant, there are certain criteria that women must fit into, in order to be considered “sexy”. Women must always be dressed provocatively, or in a way to entice not only the man in the scene, but her audience as well. The woman is for the most part being handled by the man, in whatever way he deems fit. The man directs the woman into various positions, until he is ready to climax. Then when it’s finally time for the “money shot” the scene comes to an abrupt halt. The fact that the woman in the scene may not be satisfied is of no consequence. All cameras are turned to the man so that this “amazing” moment of pleasure, that the man “rightfully” deserves can be captured. Erotica is almost always from the point of view of the man in scene. The main focus in the majority of pornographic movies is the ejaculation of the man, not the woman. If a woman has an orgasm on camera, (a real orgasm, not a staged one) it’s usually a bonus. The intention of pornographic movies is to capture the essence of what sexual gratification is from a male perspective. How often is the woman’s true feelings toward the sexual act being depicted? On camera a woman isn’t allowed to say: STOP! You’re hurting me, or this is how I like it, and lastly I prefer the money shot not be on my face. A woman is only seen as sexy if she pleases her male counterpart in any way he sees fit. It doesn’t matter how cruel, nasty, painful or degrading the sexual act is.

A woman is rarely seen as sexy, if she expresses her true feelings in any aspect of life. Although women are heavily impacted by the views of the dominant species, some women play a role in the mistreatment of the female species. In some cases women have the choice to speak

out and make a change, but they choose to follow the rules and regulations that keep women inferior till this day. In the book "Sister Outsider" Audre Lorde also says that: "To refuse to be able that might seem, is to deny a large part of the experience, and to allow ourselves to be reduced to the pornographic, the abused, and the absurd." This quote goes hand in hand with the point that I'm trying to make. If women continuously allow themselves to be taken advantage of and abused, (physically, mentally and emotionally) then the views of women will never be respected. Women will never have a voice against their oppressors i.e. the male species. If women truly understood the power they possess within, they would realize that they are worth more than they are lead to believe. For example without a woman pornography would not be as appealing to watch. Without a woman to react to the man's actions, there would be no sensation. The way that the woman's body reacts to the man, or the faces she makes, or the way she cries out in "passion" is what really makes the pornographic a true spectacle. Women are necessary components in order to make the pornographic successful. Instead, women are treated as though they do not play a large role in the pornographic. The manner in which women are treated is not congruent to their true worth. Women are necessary in the illusion of sex which pornography creates. Without women the illusion could not be successfully accomplished.

The Erotic and Erotica are both based on stimulation, consciousness and fulfillment. The Erotic examines how we deeply we feel when we do something that brings us satisfaction. The Erotic is a moment of uninterrupted bliss, which drives people to do whatever is necessary, to grasp that feeling over and over. Being that The Erotic has been altered to seem sexual, many people assume sex is the most profound way to achieve pleasure. In actuality, a person can acquire that feeling from a variety of external stimuli. Sex is only one aspect of life that can bring a person satisfaction, if it's done correctly. Pleasure is not always promised for women in

particular while performing sexual acts. A man and woman may not be anatomically compatible, or the man may not be physically capable of pleasing the woman. On the other hand in order for a woman to reach an orgasm, she must be emotionally ready. A woman's mind, body and soul, all have to be connected in order to reach satisfaction, whereas a man can be pleased during almost every sexual encounter. Women are more complex which makes it difficult for them to reach a climax. What many people overlook is that "The Erotic" is satisfaction that can be brought about by a variety of forces of nature. Audre Lorde states that: "For the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing. Once we know the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion, we can then observe which of our various life endeavors bring us closest to that fullness." The Erotic can be described as the feeling a person gets after putting the finishing touches on a forty page paper. Or the release of endorphins that a person feels after eating a piece of chocolate. The deep passion that a person can feel while staring at a piece of art can also be considered Erotic. There are so many worldly examples of "The Erotic" that it should never have been reconstructed to mean one thing. The Erotic applies to all works of life, whether it's physical, mental or emotional. Although Western Civilization portrays "The Erotic" as sexual, "The Erotic" is much more complex. The Erotic is all things in life that brings us as people deep satisfaction, and allows us to feel completely at ease with ourselves.

The reconstruction of the word Erotic has allowed men to gain the upper hand in society. Men recreated a term that means love and satisfaction, and turned it into something vile. By making "The Erotic" sexual, men are able to control women into thinking that some of life's wonders that are pleasurable, are in some way distasteful. Women endure countless hours of

beautification daily, in order to fit into the idea of what's "sexy", but is this truly fair? If women continuously conform to the ancient rules of society, they are allowing themselves to be treated as a means to an end. A philosopher named Immanuel Kant developed a categorical imperative, which stated his view on how people should be treated. Although Kant's theory is very long, there was one major part that stood out to me. The passage says: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end." In modern day society women are treated merely as a means to an end. When a person is treated as simply a means to an end, they are used for a purpose that isn't beneficial to them. This quote relates to the unfair treatment of women because we are used and abused in order to satisfy the male species. Women aren't allowed to be free, outspoken, powerful, sexual beings because it isn't proper. Any behavior by a woman that threatens the sensitive male ego, is obscene and inappropriate. By altering the word Erotic to mean the pornographic, men have completely changed the dynamic in which satisfaction is viewed. Deep sensations such as satisfaction are only thought to be obtained sexually. For this reason television commercials, magazine ads, music videos, and various other advertisements are sexualized to make it more appealing. The only way that society's view on women will change, is if women stand up for themselves. Women have made progress in breaking down barriers, but there is still so much more room for improvement. In order for women to be treated properly, we have to stop playing into the hands of our oppressors. We have to stop living up to the expectations of men, and learn to define ourselves. When women finally take advantage of the power we possess, then we will have found deep fulfillment. We will have discovered the true meaning of "The Erotic".

