

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 6 February 2007

Session 2

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

† 3rd Meeting 2007, Session 2

CONVENER

*Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD)

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*Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)

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Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab)

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Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP)

Mrs Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind)

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Dr Karen Boyle (University of Glasgow)

Avedon Carol (Feminists Against Censorship)

Professor Vincent Egan (Glasgow Caledonian University)

Ray Wyre (Ray Wyre Independent Consultancy)

Dr Marysia Zalewski (University of Aberdeen)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Zoé Tough

ASSISTANT CLERK

Roy McMahon

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

† 2nd Meeting 2007, Session 2—held in private.

Scottish Parliament

Equal Opportunities Committee

Tuesday 6 February 2007

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:23*]

Pornography

The Convener (Cathy Peattie): Good morning. Welcome to the third meeting in 2007 of the Equal Opportunities Committee. I remind all those present, including members, that mobile phones and BlackBerrys should be turned off completely, as they interfere with the sound system even when they are switched to silent mode. We have received apologies from Elaine Smith, John Swinburne, Margaret Smith and Marilyn Livingstone. Sandra White will be late.

The first item on our agenda is a round-table discussion on pornography. I am pleased to welcome all our witnesses. Because this evidence-taking session does not follow the usual format, I remind all those present of how we will proceed. I will begin by inviting our participants to introduce themselves briefly. We will then move to discuss the issues. The round-table format will allow participants to comment and to seek clarification from other participants. However, I remind everyone around the table to indicate to me when they wish to speak. For clarity, I ask each participant to use other people's full names when addressing them.

I invite participants to introduce themselves.

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): I am a member of the Scottish Parliament for North East Scotland.

Dr Karen Boyle (University of Glasgow): I am from the University of Glasgow.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am an MSP for Highlands and Islands region.

Ray Wyre (Ray Wyre Independent Consultancy): I am from Ray Wyre Independent Consultancy.

Professor Vincent Egan (Glasgow Caledonian University): I am from Glasgow Caledonian University.

Dr Marysia Zalewski (University of Aberdeen): I am from the centre for gender studies at the University of Aberdeen.

Carolyn Leckie (Central Scotland) (SSP): I am the Scottish Socialist Party MSP for Central Scotland.

Avedon Carol (Feminists Against Censorship): I am from Feminists Against Censorship.

The Convener: We will cover a number of themes. First, I invite participants to discuss what, in their opinion, pornography is.

Professor Egan: Pornography is technology that is designed to create sexual arousal. It can use any medium of which a human can conceive using art or technology, but the intention of the product is to create sexual arousal in men or women.

Dr Zalewski: Part of the problem is defining pornography. My expertise is in the area of different feminist perspectives on pornography. There is a wide range of views of what pornography is. Coming to a definition of pornography may not be the right approach. Whatever we think that pornography is, we need to look at what it does, what impact it has and what feminist scholars and people working in the industry, for example, think that it is.

Avedon Carol: Most of us have at some point been sidetracked into trying to define the difference between pornography, non-sexual representation, erotica and so on. It is useful to consider what people who make it think when they hear the word pornography, what people who buy it think when they hear that word and, most importantly for our purposes, what the police are likely to think it is okay for them to take. We can come up with a wonderful, beautiful, highly intellectual definition of pornography, but when the police go out there they will take sexual representations that are intended to arouse for recreational purposes—it will be stuff that contains sex that the police think people use to have fun. It does not matter whether we say that pornography is the sexist material, the violent material, the friendly material or the unfriendly material—the most important issue for us to discuss when defining something, the possession of which may be treated as a crime, is what the cops will take.

Professor Egan: I fully support Avedon Carol's view. The issue is the police's interpretation of what pornography is, irrespective of the subtle distinctions that people make. In addition, the prosecution in a court case is quite able to exaggerate anodyne idiosyncrasies into something that seems pathological. That can polarise debate.

Dr Boyle: I concur that we should not be asking how we define pornography. We could have that discussion for years without coming up with a definition, although I accept that it is important if legislation is to be considered. Rather than

thinking of pornography as one thing, perhaps we should think of different kinds of pornography. In feminist debates it is telling that often people who seem to be on different sides of the argument are writing about fundamentally different materials.

When we assess research evidence, it is important that we are aware of how the researchers have defined pornography. For example, sometimes accounts of pornography that celebrate its liberatory potential are based on written or drawn pornography, which raises rather different questions about its production context than audiovisual material raises. There are many variations that relate not simply to what is taking place on screen, as it were, in the representation, but to how the pornography is made and how it is understood by the people who consume it. It might be more helpful for us to focus on the question of what pornography does. We should think not only about the consumers of pornography but about the people who are involved in its production.

The Convener: We will get to that question.

10:30

Carolyn Leckie: I concur with Karen Boyle. I am not sure that the focus should be on how the police interpret pornography. My concerns about pornography stem from its impact on society and relationships as a whole rather than from a criminal perspective. Politics is involved, and a lot of the confusion lies between essentially right-wing libertarianism and a left-wing, feminist analysis of pornography.

We are all subject to an increasing pressure in society on those—particularly women—who express discomfort about pornographic images. It is about not just what is sold as adult images but the representations of women in mainstream society, in lads' magazines such as *FHM* and *Loaded*. Women feel uncomfortable raising questions about that, as there is an increasing pressure in society to make women feel that they are being prudish if they raise such concerns. I feel that pressure in here today, a wee bit.

I am a midwife. I do not have any issues with anatomy or physiology. The human body can be presented to me from any number of angles and I do not have any concerns about that. What I am concerned about is the presentation of women in a subjugated way as objects of sexual acts by men and the promotion of sexual satisfaction through overcoming the will of women.

The definition of pornography needs to be set in the context of how it has evolved in society. What was seen to be pornography—top-shelf stuff—when I was growing up as a child is now pretty much middle-shelf and lower-shelf stuff. The stuff that is harder to get but freely available can be

violent, involving multiple partners. Legal magazines such as *Barely Legal* present as erotic the abuse of younger, vulnerable women as virgins or in an ethnic context, and so on. All those things cause me great concern, and we need to talk about them.

Rather than focus on a narrow definition of pornography we should try to find the consensus on what is harmful—what crosses the line and what harms relationships—especially in the context of young girls getting completely different information from young boys about sex and relationships and where they get their information from. In defining pornography, we need to define the harm that it causes. We need to ask what the harm is in order to define pornography in terms of what we need to legislate for.

Marlyn Glen: This discussion is already showing why we need to take our inquiry slowly and go into it very carefully. That is what the committee wants to do—that is the idea behind the round-table discussion. We should persevere with the definition of pornography, although there are obviously lots of different opinions.

When I read the witnesses' written submissions, I noted Dr Boyle's comments about the differences between the kinds of material that we are talking about—whether it is drawn, written or audiovisual. That struck me as a basic issue. When we talk about the people who make pornography, an artist painting is quite different from someone directing—if it can be called that—a pornographic film and a woman in the film doing what she is directed to do and what is happening to her. There is lots there that we need to tease out.

The other thing that we need to be clear about is the terms that we are using. Carolyn Leckie talked about violence. As I understand it, we are not really talking about violent pornography, which is already illegal. We are talking about legal pornography, and legal pornography is not acceptable to many of us. There is huge feeling about that. Many people feel that the line should be drawn in a different place.

There are many questions already, and it would be interesting to go round the table again and let everybody give a little more detail.

Ray Wyre: There is no doubt that the criminal law was instrumental in defining what pornography was under the old "deprave and corrupt" legislation, whereby pornography was brought to the courts and more and more juries began to say that they did not feel that the material in question was likely to deprave or corrupt them. An awful lot of adult pornography would not now come under that legislation.

There was then a huge debate about the criminal law with regard to illegal and child

pornography, as we had to define what a child was and what material was illegal. We still have a few problems in that area. For instance, the British Board of Film Classification can give a licence for sex education videos that have naked children in them. Some naturist videos have been given licences. However, if someone viewed the same material—classified as level 1 on the combating paedophile information networks in Europe, or COPINE, scale—on the internet, they would be committing an offence. There are still issues and debates.

Recently, the British Government decided to consider making possession of sadistic pornography illegal. That will trigger a huge debate about how we define what is sadistic and what is harmful. I refer to some of the interesting debates around harm-based legislation in relation to pornography. We should also take into account rape sites, like rape-club.com, and other sites that appear to incite aggressive and abusive behaviour towards women. A debate is required on that. For example, there was a case of a Scottish rapist who, before he went out and raped, accessed rape-club.com and learned about how to avoid leaving forensic evidence. We must consider such cases.

It is obviously wrong to incite racial hatred on the internet—it is interesting that it is possible to incite sex with children on the internet. There are more than 56 paedophile websites that may be accessed and that nobody does anything about, because there is no illegal material on them. There are rape and other sites that incite behaviour that is clearly illegal. We do nothing about those sites yet, to me, any debate on pornography must include them, particularly if we are considering the harm-based end of the issue, which I am talking about now. If we move to the other end of the pornography issue and consider the more feminist side of the debate, it becomes much more complex.

As a person who has spent his life working with offenders, I know that I could never come here and prove a causal link. I have worked with offenders who have looked at sadistic pornography and written pornography about the rape of a mother and child, and have then gone and raped a mother and child, but we still cannot prove a causal link in such cases. That will always be a problem.

There is a correlation with pornography, however, in some cases. For me, that is a much more interesting debate. For instance, people who spend a great deal of time looking at pornography might see their own daughter in a different way if she were raped. We know that people who are into pornography would give shorter sentences to rapists. We know that if a jury were made up of

people who look at a lot of pornography, we might end up with a different verdict in rape trials. Those issues are much more subtle and difficult to understand or reach a consensus on. We know about the addiction-side models and the escalation type of model. We could debate all those things. However, I am not sure how we can pull the proverbial cart-horse back—in a sense, the horse has bolted.

People can go into hotels in England where restricted, or R-rated, hard-core pornographic videos are shown on television—I do not know about Scotland. In some ways, the internet is even more difficult to manage. The debate has, in a sense, reached a point from which I do not think that we can bring it back. There is no doubt that the criminal law in England is now seeking to deal with that—how it will do so will be interesting.

Dr Zalewski: I want to make a point about what Ray Wyre has just said and about what Carolyn Leckie said earlier. My interest is really in the persistence of gendered inequalities in society and, in this context, its relation to pornography.

We make a mistake when we think that the problems with pornography relate only to sexual violence. The radical feminist view—and the view of many other feminists—of the problem with pornography is not just that it does or does not lead to increased sexual violence, but that it is related to ordinary gendered violence in society. That could be domestic violence, inequalities or the boring ordinariness of gender discrimination.

I am saying not that sexual violence is unimportant, but that the issue is much wider. It is not a question of whether men who look at pornography have a greater propensity to rape or be sexually violent. There is obviously a lot of debate on the causal links, but the issue is not just about sexual violence; it is about everyday gender discrimination.

Dr Boyle: I echo that point and would like to correct some common misperceptions about anti-pornography feminism that I have noticed in a lot of published academic literature and some of the submissions. A lot of anti-pornography feminist research and writing has moved considerably beyond the question of causal links and, indeed, no longer uses the psychological research that has been so widely discredited—largely for its methodology rather than its findings. Such research does not ask the causal question of whether X causes Y for the good reason, as has just been discussed, that anti-pornography feminists have long been interested in how pornography relates to other gendered inequalities and gender-based violence. Also, if we focus on the question of cause, the issue of production becomes uninteresting. If we ask whether an image of rape causes a man to rape a woman, we

are not looking at the context of the production of that representation.

It is important to acknowledge that the debate has moved beyond that in the academic literature. Some of the questions that are now being asked about the consumers of pornography are far more nuanced than simply, "Does X cause Y?" Instead, as the Canadian feminist Susan Cole has written, people are asking, "Who are the people in pornography, how did they get there, and what is our relationship to them?"

Those are important questions, and from my teaching I am aware that they are radical questions for students to think about. Students are not usually presented with debates about pornography in that way, but when they are asked to consider what we are getting off on and who the people are, and when they are offered alternative ways of thinking about sexual representation, they often start to question their own unthinking acceptance of pornography. I advocate that that is where the debate needs to move. We need to find out what people in Scotland think, what pornography they are using and the extent to which they are aware of the evidence of harm.

I have one example, which is by no means scientific—it is just anecdotal. In a class last week, I had a discussion with students about a well-known porn film. Everyone in the class had heard of the film, but only two people in the class had heard the allegations that a woman in the film had been raped in its making. The idea that the story of the violence in pornography is everywhere and that everyone knows it is simply not true. We need to find out more about what people know about pornography.

Ms Sandra White (Glasgow) (SNP): I apologise for being late—it seems that we can land people on the moon but we cannot run our train services on time or even provide any heating on them.

I agree entirely with Dr Zalewski. Pornography is wide reaching—it is about not just sex or violence but gender inequality, as was said. I also agree that not just men but society generally perceives women as second-class citizens, and I can give the committee an example. When I was doing research into lap-dancing clubs and I had the privilege of going to some, I was amazed that the young men there were actually coerced to pay money, but they were saying things like, "This woman's a slag. It wouldn't be my sister or mother."

Pornography leads to a perception in a wider context and affects how women are treated throughout society. Dr Zalewski is right that we need to enter into a bigger debate regarding not just the violent acts that are based on pornography

but how it affects women in general life. I would also like to see research similar to what Dr Boyle suggested.

10:45

Avedon Carol: Sex crime was my starting point when I started looking into pornography. I began by considering the subject because, like many people, I started with an agenda. I was sexually assaulted when I was 10, at which time I knew nothing about sex. When I discovered that there was an entire field of study into pornography and sex crime, I became very interested.

When pornography became a focus of discussions on sexism and sex crime, I started looking into pornography. I found that most of the really repulsive attitudes towards women that I grew up with—though some of you are young enough not to remember some of those attitudes—were already in the atmosphere. We got them from our mothers, from our girlfriends and from all over the place, even when there was no pornography.

When I was assaulted, I was in a sequestered environment where there was no pornography. I was assaulted by other kids on a farm, where I was at school. There was nothing there, so those kids did not get their attitudes from *Playboy*, that is for sure. The attitudes that I have encountered are in Disney films—they are everywhere. When I say Disney films I am old enough to be talking about when that meant mostly cartoons. I have never seen as many pernicious, hideous attitudes in pornography as I see in mainstream life. In pornography, it is not assumed that it is okay to kill your wife if you catch her with another man—you would not see that in pornography—and it is not assumed that a woman who has sex with more than one man is a bad person who deserves whatever violence befalls her. Those are the kinds of attitudes that you find out in the world but not in pornography.

I was stunned by how little violence towards women and how few abusive attitudes I saw in pornography. I had expected to see much more sexism, much more violence, much more domination and many more assumptions of male superiority, but it does not exist to the extent that you see every single day in your ordinary life. You will see such attitudes in media that are assumed to be the most non-toxic, and even in stuff that is aimed at young people, but it is not in pornography—judgmental, odious attitudes about the way in which women's lives should be circumscribed just do not exist in pornography. I am therefore less worried about what our kids see in pornography than I am about what they see everywhere else. I feel strongly that focusing on pornography—and that is what the committee

wants to talk about—is a huge red herring and a total distraction.

When we consider the people with the worst attitudes, we find that they come from very sexually repressive backgrounds and from extreme religious backgrounds, and when we consider everyday casual sexism, we find that it is in the atmosphere and has been there for as long as we can remember.

When I was growing up, it became more acceptable for people, including women, to see pornography. It also became more acceptable for women to speak as experts on subjects in general, and on subjects related to sex in particular. I have said this before and I want to say it over and over until it gets through to people: when I was growing up, I lived in a world where the experts on pregnancy were all men, the experts on female sexuality were all men, the experts on lesbianism were all men—the experts on every single female experience were men. It was men who told us what women should feel like and should be like. That changed largely as a result of the environment beginning to be one in which it was okay for women to talk about sex—and a lot of that conversation was generated by a small mainstream incursion of pornography. Women were looking at pornography and talking about what they saw. We were talking about what we really felt about what was going on around us. I do not think that pornography was the harm; it was the foot in the door that allowed women to speak and be heard.

Professor Egan: I am gobsmacked by that. I thoroughly agree with Avedon Carol's views. We have to accept that there are individual differences. I realise that people have dismissed half a century's worth of empirical research in a few blithe generalisations—I can live with that—but maybe that has happened because people have not been thinking about the outcomes. In relation to sex and pornography, there are paradoxical effects and there is an infinite number of pathways through that. Perhaps people have been asking the wrong questions in the first place.

Some individuals are badly affected by pornography, but in other cases it is anodyne or it enhances people's lifestyles: in some cases, it is exploitative and in others it is not. It all depends on the context, so we have to consider pornography case by case if we are to avoid the kind of unhelpful polarised debate that has happened in the past and which we do not want to perpetuate. Everyone recognises that people have gone around in circles and that the situation has been ambiguous. Perhaps that is because the phenomenon is ambiguous and has a number of levels about which to think.

Ray Wyre: It is complex when someone says that pornography itself does not have within it attitudes that can be abusive. For quite a while, we knew that there were pornographic films in which, for example, a rape victim would change her mind after the rape and make comments such as, "Well, it wasn't that bad after all." With regard to pornographic magazines, we must remember that we are talking about not only the pictures but the words that go with them. For example, in one magazine, there was a letter from a reader that said that he had made holes in his toilet walls so that he could watch his relatives urinate and because he was interested in how they wiped their backsides. Another article said, "If he was any kind of man, he would have raped her to get back at her." There was another article offering men £5 to take pictures of women who were unaware of that. There is a voyeur market for up-skirt pictures and there are up-skirt websites where people can post their up-skirt shots. There was also an article that said that women who are being watched by peeping Toms exhibit themselves more.

People who are engaged in any of those activities could end up as my clients. However, because it is in the context of sex, I cannot ignore that and say that pornography has no part to play in their behaviour. Pornography does not come into a Shangri-La world; it comes into a world of rejection, abandonment and a range of other personal issues that affect how people see others. Going from social intercourse to sexual intercourse is not as easy as some people think—especially for people of my age.

I do not know how you can ignore some of the messages that I mentioned when they are sent out in a sexual, arousing and masturbatory context. I do not know whether what I have said is in direct opposition to what Avedon Carol said—

Avedon Carol: I am sure it is.

Dr Boyle: To pick up on what Avedon Carol and Ray Wyre have said, it is clear that, when we are talking about pornography in this general sense, we can use the word to mean absolutely anything. I could give examples that are the absolute opposite of what Avedon Carol suggested when she was talking about things that you do not find in pornography. Therefore, I encourage the committee to think extremely carefully about the need to find out what pornography is today in Scotland. What are we talking about? What are people actually engaging with? What is available on the internet—which is only one side of the equation—and elsewhere?

This debate runs the risk of being extremely ill informed. We can all think of examples of things that we have seen about which we do not have a clearly defined sense of the extent to which they are representative of what is generally available

and what people are engaging with. There is a need for some solid research in the Scottish context. Research has been done on the content of pornography in other contexts. In my submission, I briefly mentioned research from Australia. Robert Jensen and others in the United States of America have attempted to sample particular pornographic media and to describe their content. That work has shown that pornography is complex, but it has certainly not suggested that it is devoid of sexual violence, as has been suggested this morning.

The other point to pick up on in relation to Avedon Carol's comments is the sense that, because pornography is everywhere, it is difficult to do anything about it. In a sense, I agree with that, but just because the pornographisation—if that word is not entirely made up—of mainstream culture makes it extremely difficult to differentiate pornography from the main stream, that does not mean that we should not have an intelligent conversation about the meanings of pornography and sexually explicit representations, and about whether those meanings are acceptable in Scotland in 2007. That conversation should not be based on research about the content of pornography from 1970 or research about consumers of pornography in the US. We should examine where we are now, what is available now and what people in Scotland are doing with that material now.

Dr Zalewski: Avedon Carol made the interesting comment that dealing with pornography is a red herring. I will refer to some current feminist perspectives on pornography. For example, can we think about lesbian pornography in the same way? We seem always to assume that pornography is for heterosexual men. I will bring in another contemporary feminist perspective. The suggestion is not quite that concentration on pornography is a red herring—the question is what the effect is of concentrating on that rather than on unequal pay, for example. More structural post-modernist perspectives on pornography argue that overconcentration on such a hierarchised set of practices, in which men are generally dominant and women are generally available, tends inadvertently to reproduce gender hierarchy. We need to think about the concentration that constantly seems to reproduce women as victims. Contemporary feminists are concerned about that.

Carolyn Leckie: I agree with that perspective and that there is a need for more research into what young people and everybody else consume and into how that affects their attitudes, relationships and wider society. What are their perceptions of women in general? The compartmentalisation of women into slags, hoors and madonnas is apparent in culture. Double standards are present. Avedon Carol described

women being liberated through pornography, but I am afraid that that is not generally how men see it.

Avedon Carol: I did not say that women are liberated through pornography.

Carolyn Leckie: That was the impression that I formed from what you said.

To be honest, I think that it is right not to polarise the debate—it should be open and we should examine the facts and compare like with like, which we do not often do. I find incredible the suggestion that, in the context of gender inequality, pornography is benign in society. More work needs to be done to illustrate and explain the situation and to back it up with academic research, although I think that enough evidence exists—enough exists anecdotally in my life—to suggest that there is a relationship between pornography and harm.

The onus is always on those who claim harm to prove that it exists, and that research is questioned. However, I throw the responsibility back to people who suggest that pornography is not harmful to prove that it is benign. I do not accept that pornography can possibly have a benign influence on society as a whole.

Avedon Carol made a point about what is available. We do not need research to know what is available: we can walk into a newsagent's shop and see the *Daily Sport* and lads' mags, such as *FHM*; their front pages invariably carry the sort of pictures that Ray Wyre described and which make me, my daughters and my friends uncomfortable as women.

11:00

We know from sexual health research about the effect on young women's relationships with men that young women feel coerced into their first sexual experiences. They fear that they will lose the relationship if they do not comply with pressure to participate in various practices, such as anal sex. We have enough information from the sexual health field to make me concerned that the so-called educational information that young boys get through pornography—because we do not replace it with anything else—gives them almost a tick-box idea about sexuality. It tells them, "This is sexual experience: you should do this, this, this, this and this." It is not placed in a context of relationships, respect or understanding women and girls as people.

I am talking about heterosexual pornography, which is the mainstream of pornography, although I accept that there are other types. There is enough evidence to suggest that relationships between young people are being distorted by the increased prevalence of pornography—I do not

just mean what everybody might classify as pornography. We need to have the debate because pornography is being mainstreamed and because what would previously have been considered pornographic representations of relationships between women and men appear in media outlets such as MTV. There is massive pressure on young women because such representations provide their identity and they get their self-esteem by presenting themselves as porn stars. Scottish Women Against Pornography, for example, has previously gathered evidence of that, but SWAP is not giving evidence today.

I would like feedback on that.

Marlyn Glen: I will pick up on what has been said about research. If we are to have an informed debate, we need up-to-date research. I am struck by the fact that a lot of the research is out of date. The situation now is very different to what it used to be because of the changes in technology and society. Dr Boyle talked about Australian and US research. It would be good to have Scottish research—it would be interesting for the committee to consider—but are there no examples of United Kingdom research?

Dr Boyle: I did not mean to suggest that there is no UK research; rather, it is a case of considering what research is most up to date. I mention in my submission UK research on men's consumption of pornography. That research is not necessarily about what we are discussing under the term "pornography", but it examines young men's responses to, among other things, magazines such as *Loaded*. That research does not come from an anti-pornography perspective, but one of the interesting things about it is that it suggests that young men recognise and get off on the sense of sexual power over women that they get from pornography. It is a small-scale study, so I would be wary of generalising widely from it, but it suggests that young men are turned on by the inequality in pornography.

Australian research examines young people's exposure—a telling word in itself—to and engagement with pornography. It aims to find out the extent to which young people, male and female, have deliberately sought out pornography. To my knowledge—please correct me if I am wrong—there is no equivalent UK research. Much of the work on the harm that is caused in the production of pornography has come from the US, but it relates to pornography that is readily available in the UK.

I turn to Carolyn Leckie's point on harm and proving harm. My view is that we no longer need to prove harm because we have documented it extensively. As I say in my submission, it is interesting to note the extent to which celebratory accounts of the sex industry repeatedly

acknowledge harm, often in asides. I gave a couple of examples of that in my submission, but I could give you many, many more. Anyone who ever watches late-night programmes on Channel 4 or Channel 5, as I do purely for research purposes, will know that such examples are frequently and repeatedly given. A porn producer will say that such-and-such an actress really loves her job, unlike the majority of women with whom he deals. In saying that, the producer has tacitly acknowledged that the majority of women who go through the porn industry do not enjoy being there. If the committee wants to look at specific examples, I have them.

Other panel members can correct me if I am wrong, but I am not aware of research that has been done in the UK on harm in the production context. As I am sure the committee is well aware, we have research on women's experiences of prostitution and lap dancing in the UK and, specifically, in Scotland. That research suggests that women who are involved in the commercial sex industry are not necessarily doing it because they love it. Many of them have a background of sexual abuse—indeed, many experience regular harassment during their working life, if we can call it that, in the industry.

Although there is some evidence from Scotland, there is a need for more research. We are aware that the vast majority of the academic literature that has been published on pornography has been published in the US. Obviously, there are exceptions, such as the work of Catherine Itzin—unfortunately, she is not at committee today—that update the work in a British context, but much of that work is now about 10 or 15 years old. We need to keep updating it and to do so with a specific policy focus. In other words, we need to be saying, "When we know this, what should we do with that knowledge?" Much of the research tends to be circulated in academic contexts. We may argue with each other, but that does not really get us anywhere.

The Convener: We will move on to address the effects of pornography.

Mr McGrigor: We started off by talking about the definition of pornography and we seem to have moved on to harm. Carolyn Leckie made the interesting point that publications that used to be displayed on the top shelf have now come down to the second shelf. How many shelves do we have? Given that a previous generation considered such material to be harmful, is what has come down to the second shelf not harmful to people any more?

If we go back in time, the question arises whether previous cultures and generations considered carvings on Indian temples, pictures of Bacchanalian orgies and printed material such as the "Kama Sutra" to be harmful. Surely what is

considered beautiful in some cultures can also be considered harmful. The committee would like to hear the view of all the witnesses on whether pornography is harmful.

Ray Wyre: I suppose that I am biased. The problem with research comes when one is faced with individual cases. One example is the man who feels that he is addicted to pornography because he is staying up until 2 or 3 in the morning watching porn and his partner is thinking of leaving him because he does not come to bed. Another example is the woman who feels that her husband is having an affair because they spend most of their time watching pornography. Examples such as those suggest that, in those individual cases, there is a problem.

However, major problems arise when we try to extrapolate from those examples to the wider sphere. It is like the moral debate on young people being given the message that sex is public and commercial rather than being about love, commitment and relationship. What message should we be giving out? In a sense, there can be contrasting messages. That is not about research, but about the debates that we have as human beings about relationships and how we relate to each other in those relationships. Those debates include pornography, sex, the origins of boys' misogyny and why there is so much aggressive behaviour when relationships break down.

I am interested in such issues and I am not always sure that research takes us forward, because there will always be cases in which it is daft to ask whether harm has been caused. If a woman's husband asks to film her and, when the relationship ends, posts everything on the internet to get back at her, of course a great deal of harm is caused to that woman. That is where I always get stuck—part of me finds nothing wrong in our seeing a man and a woman having sex. The old laws on indecency were a problem because ultimately they just objectified women and parts of women. I think that that introduced a pornography that was worse than a couple making love on film. I am not talking about a couple making love on film, but for some people that is pornography.

That is why I think the committee's job is incredibly complex—and unachievable. There are paradoxes at every level and every solution to a problem will give you another problem. You must decide which problem you want—that is often what we are left with after such debates.

Professor Egan: Everything that people do is potentially harmful. Dieting is bad for you when it is taken to extremes—there are websites dedicated to anorexia and bulimia. However, some of us—myself included—might benefit from losing a bit of weight. Smoking can be bad for you. Eating too much can be bad for you. We have to

ask where the harm comes from, but the answer will depend on the context. At one time, pubic hair was regarded as being unspeakably obscene and oral sex has been regarded as incredibly obscene, but those things are not necessarily obscene.

We are talking about how human beings interact with each other. If we do not represent sex as part of the range of human pleasures, just as we represent all other human pleasures, it is left to people to take the most extreme perspective.

Dr Zalewski: It is obvious from all the research and discussions that have taken place that pornography can be harmful, but we need to examine how we think about that harm. Dr Boyle made a distinction between the production and consumption of pornography. It is clear that many women in the industry suffer great harm.

We must be quite clear in saying that pornography is not simply about sex—if it is about sex at all; that might be a bit of a red herring. Pornography is really about domination and hierarchy and gender inequalities; it is not about people making love—that is a simplistic perspective.

That raises another issue in respect of how we construct the important questions. For example, Ray Wyre asked where misogyny in boys comes from, but if we pursue that question we are led down a single path. Perhaps we should be asking where misogyny in girls comes from. We must be careful about what we think are the obvious questions to ask.

Dr Boyle: On whether pornography is harmful, the parallel with carvings in Indian temples is interesting, because it brings us back to the question about what pornography we are talking about. The key difference between a carving in an Indian temple and the audiovisual pornography that we have been talking about is that real people are involved in the production of audiovisual pornography, whereas real people were not necessarily involved in the production of the carvings. That is an important distinction.

The harm involved in the production of pornography is extremely well documented, as I said. As Ray Wyre said, there is an additional issue, because as audiovisual equipment becomes more available and affordable, there are many documented cases in which women—particularly, but not exclusively, women—have found images of themselves posted on the internet, although they did not consent to the distribution of those images. That needs to be addressed.

We are establishing in this discussion that representations show harm in the sense that they often—although we need to be careful about generalising—seem to work against ideas of social

equality. There is much anecdotal evidence on harm to consumers of pornography.

To get beyond that to something on which we might construct a policy, we have to ask a number of questions. To what extent are consumers of pornography aware of, but choose to ignore, evidence of harmful production practices? Perhaps that is just not known. To what extent do they understand the social inequality that is represented in pornography? Do they simply accept it as natural and do not question it or do they embrace it consciously?

11:15

We still need to ask an awful lot of questions. We can be in no doubt that in many cases the production of audiovisual pornography is harmful and that there are representations of harm within some pornographic texts—although we cannot generalise about all of them. On consumers of pornography, there is anecdotal evidence and evidence from practice, as Ray Wyre suggested, that pornography is harmful to specific individuals, although people on the other side of the debate will find evidence that it is not harmful to other individuals, who embrace it and use it in their fantasy lives. That is why referring to individual cases is not necessarily very helpful. I accept Ray Wyre's point that it is an extremely difficult area, but we need to ask the questions so that we can develop a contemporary local body of knowledge, which will allow us to consider what we do next.

Avedon Carol: I am kind of startled. Everyone keeps talking about what messages people are getting from pornography, but no one has said anything about sex education yet. You do not really have to worry much about what people learn from pornography if you have given them decent sex education, which is where we have really fallen down. We were moving in the direction of good comprehensive sex education back in the early 70s, but towards the mid-70s, the anti-pornography language started to pick up again. In Parliament in London, right-wing MPs were screaming about how only perverts wanted to teach children about sex, so there was suddenly a sex panic. People thought that we could not have sex education and that sex was bad. I worry, because the more we heard anti-pornography talk, the more we heard anti-sex-education talk. It is a real mistake to talk about pornography when we are not talking about sex education.

I remind people about all the things that we hear about pushy dates. We might want to think that pornography has something to do with the fact that boys are putting pressure on girls, but they were doing that before; they have always done that. If you read books from the 1940s you can see that they were doing it then. I certainly remember it

when I was growing up. It is not something that comes from pornography.

One thing I will say in favour of pornography—usually I am neutral about this—is that when I was a teenager it was considered embarrassing to even suggest that a guy should look at pornography instead of harassing you to have sex with him, so it is refreshing that you can now actually say to a guy, “Look. Here's some porn. Leave me alone.” You could not even say that to a guy in the 60s because pornography was just too unsavoury and people thought, “Only losers look at that.” I kind of like the idea that now you can tell an ordinary guy to look at porn and not mean, “You're a loser.”

Ray Wyre made a good point about how censorship of sexual material actually creates warped and objectifying pornography. I would like to get W H Smith on record sometime about why it considers it over the top to have a friendly couple together on the cover of a sex magazine, but considers it perfectly all right to show people uncovered to the same extent, as long as they are single. You can have what I regard as ugly, sexy-looking pictures on the cover of men's magazines in W H Smith, but you cannot see two people together—you cannot see people smiling at each other. It is as if the magazines have gone out of their way to say, “Sex is dirty. Sex isn't friendly. It isn't something you give to someone you love. It's something awful.” I would like to ask W H Smith on the record why it does that. I want to know what the magazine pornographers—the lads' magazines and the ordinary sex magazines that have been on the shelves in newsagents for as long as I have been in this country—have against sexual material that is more normal and is more about the way people have sex. Why do they seem to promote an icky attitude to sex? One might think that those magazines would be so much nicer and less offensive without the captions on the pictures. What is going on there?

If we consider the countries or the parts of countries, such as the USA, where there is the most suppression of pornography, we find that they are the areas where women do worst and where there is the most sex crime. In America, the Bible belt has the most sex crime, unwanted pregnancy and divorce. However, in countries in Europe that are very relaxed about porn laws, women seem to do much better and there seem to be far fewer problems such as those that we associate with sex. In Saudi Arabia and China, pornography is illegal, but they are places where it is not good to be a woman.

I repeat that suppression of pornography is a bad idea. The negative language that we use about pornography is really ultimately negative language about sex and women.

Carolyn Leckie: There was a lot in those comments, but I will concentrate on a couple of points. Your final point almost suggests that pornography is an influence for the betterment of women's lot in society, but I do not accept that. There are many variables in America, but there is no getting away from the fact that America is the porn capital of the world—it is a multibillion pound industry. Although there might be variations in state laws, pornography is prolific in America. The whole culture comes from there and it sets the agenda in our society.

I want to take up an assumption that some people make, although I am not saying that Avedon Carol does. To return to a point that I made earlier, there is a fear of expressing concerns and being called a prude or equated with people from the Bible belt. However, the people who raise concerns from a political and feminist perspective about pornography, violence against women and prostitution are more likely to argue for much more open sex education for children from the youngest possible age. That is certainly my view.

I have no problem with the representation of an equal sexual relationship. However, I would have a difficulty if a woman in such a picture, even though it portrayed an equal sexual relationship, had been groomed to go into the pornography industry and had a history of abuse. I would want to know the context, such as how she got there and why she was in that picture, no matter how the picture was presented. That is the crucial question, and it is also the crucial question with Indian temple carvings and the "Kama Sutra". We do not know what effect those had on women and society at the time, although we could speculate. My question is how those images affected women in society in general. We know that we have had a patriarchy and inequality of women for millennia.

The issue goes back to definitions. From my point of view, the issues are about representing inequality, power imbalance and the impact on gender relationships. Another issue is what pornography does to men, which is a question that needs to be considered more. It must be confusing for young men growing up with all the representations of sexuality showing how they are supposed to get their kicks and self-esteem. That must affect their ability to form equal and respectful relationships. Those are my questions.

I reiterate that I have no problem with pornography, including in the form of sex education in schools, as long as it does not involve exploitation, abuse or coercion and as long as it contains representations of equal and respectful sexual relationships that help people to form similar relationships with members of the opposite—or, for that matter, the same—sex. We

are not the same as those who do not want sex education in schools—

Avedon Carol: I did not make any personal remarks about you.

Carolyn Leckie: And I did not suggest that you did. I simply want to point out that we actually want better sex education. This debate is not the preserve either of right-wing libertarianism on the one hand or of right-wing religious intolerance on the other. The two issues can be related in a left-wing context; in fact, there is a debate to be had in the left on the matter, and I do not think that it is getting enough discourse in wider society. Even if we do nothing other than give people the confidence to have an open debate, we will start to get somewhere.

Dr Boyle: My point is very similar. I absolutely dispute Avedon Carol's comment that in the 1970s anti-porn debates were responsible for repressing sex education. When one makes that kind of statement, one must be very clear about which anti-porn debate one means. Radical feminist anti-porn debates were never anti-sex education.

Avedon Carol: I explicitly referred to Conservative MPs in Parliament.

Dr Boyle: Actually, you did not.

Avedon Carol: Yes, I did.

Mr McGrigor: You referred to right-wing MPs.

Dr Boyle: Moreover, the comment that negative language about pornography is negative language about sex takes us back to the catch-22 situation that Carolyn Leckie highlighted. People assume that if you try to speak out against pornography you are speaking out against sex. Indeed, critics in much of the literature in this area call the feminist anti-porn position an anti-sex position. That is simply inaccurate, and I do not want anyone to be under the misperception that feminist anti-porn work is in any way anti-sex.

However, the really important question for both men and women is whether we have the option not to engage with pornography. Much of the debate on legislating on and regulating pornography focuses on the right to see, to use or to get access to it. I am interested less in the legal options than in the social options for not consuming such material. As a number of people around the table have pointed out, in newsagents, these images are not even on the top shelf but right next to the newspapers.

It is important to emphasise that the point about the option not to consume applies not only to women. Recent research from the US has focused on young women's participation in the so-called raunch culture, in which they take on the identity of porn stars. One very obvious but interesting point

that was made was that when young women wear "Porn Star" tee-shirts, embrace *Playboy*, flash their breasts on late night television and so on they might well be expressing ideas of empowerment using the language of feminism, but they are hardly ever expressing their own sexual desire. We have reached an impasse in which everyday language has become sexualised to the extent that there is no easy way for young women—I keep talking about young women, but I do not mean them alone—to talk about their own sexual desire, not their desire to please men.

The point applies equally to young men, who can find it difficult to say, "You know what? I'm really not okay with this video being shown," or, "I don't appreciate that kind of pornographic or sexist humour." We have to assume that if we give young people—and, indeed, all people—information they might make different choices. In that respect, many people who are pro-pornography seem anxious about making information about the potential harm of pornography widely available. That information should be made available to let people make up their own minds. If people are going to consume pornography, we should at least ensure that they are informed consumers. Only then can we hold them accountable for their choices.

I sense that, at the moment, the consumption of pornography is the norm and that it is extremely difficult to resist and opt out of it. Of course, that is only a perception, and it needs to be anchored in more careful research into whether that is currently the case in Scotland.

11:30

Ray Wyre: I am interested in harm-focused legislation with regard to access to pornography. For example, we know that the pornography industry has probably meta-tagged about 35 children's toys. That means that if one uses search engines to find a children's toy, the search engines will prioritise pornographic sites. We could ask why the industry has done that.

I am interested in the link between adult pornography and the devastation caused in families when individual members are charged with possessing illegal material that has nothing to do with paedophilia or a sexual interest in children. There is a failure to understand how the moment that one moves off a commercial site one is laid open to obtaining illegal material very easily.

No doubt there are people on the sex offenders register today, or people who have lost their jobs and who cannot have contact with their children, whose gateway into that situation was pornography, not because they obtained illegal material on commercial sites, but because they

had an interest in the young—cheerleaders and school girls. The material that they viewed on commercial sites was not illegal; it featured young adult women pretending to be school girls. The problem is that although that material is legal, the moment that the man or woman leaves the commercial site and goes on to file-sharing sites or into newsgroups and other such places, if they use the same search engines they will end up with illegal material within about three clicks. We have not had a debate about that process—about how curiosity can be a driving force behind some of those actions or how, in a file-sharing network, people will see things about which they will be immediately curious and wonder what they mean. Clicking on such items can lead them to illegal material.

When we talk about harm, we cannot ignore the fact that we need to discuss that gateway because people do not understand how it works. People listening to this discussion, including people in the room, might not know how easy it is to go from pornography and its obsessions into other avenues that lead to illegal material. We do not excuse that behaviour—such people will still be sentenced and dealt with. However, what they have done has nothing to do with paedophilia, yet we still call them paedophiles. We have to deal with that issue because the effect on families in this country and on whether people keep their jobs is huge, and we are not doing anything about it.

Ms White: I will take up only a few minutes because I know that we have a lot to discuss. The question was whether pornography is harmful, which is similar to the questions that are asked about rape. Rape is not about sex or sexual relationships; it is about one person having control over another. In my mind, pornography is harmful because of the wider fear of how women are perceived.

People are trafficked to make pornographic and, sometimes, snuff movies. If that is not harmful to the people who are being trafficked, I do not know what is. I see Avedon Carol shaking her head, but pornography has nothing to do with sex. Even the definition of illegal pornography is a grey area. However, I believe that pornography is harmful to those who are forced into it, because they do not all have a choice, and to women more widely, because of the perception of what goes on in certain pornographic materials, whether on the internet or on film.

Professor Egan: I totally agree with everything that everyone is saying here, which is the whole point of such a debate. There is a question about perspective. It is true that we need better sex education and it would be nice to have a way of representing eroticism that did not involve exploitation. However, that would not necessarily

be perceived by everybody in the population as a good thing because some people might deem it harmful. Some people would say that the sight of an erect penis or pubic hair is obscene and offensive. Some people used to destroy erotic carvings. It very much depends on the individual—we keep coming back to that. That is one of the features of the circularity of these arguments.

All that we can do is try to steer the least problematic course through all the issues. That does not mean that we should not debate the subject, and education is certainly important, but we should not misplace our priorities in finding where the oppression comes from. If we want to see where women are really being oppressed, we might look at the fashion industry.

Dr Zalewski: I endorse the argument that was made earlier that people being against pornography—whether they are anti-pornography or even just critical of pornography—should not be equated with their being anti-sex. That is a problem.

I return briefly to the first question on the definition of pornography. One reason why having a tight definition of pornography is problematic is that it leads to, for example, limitations on sex education—especially in relation to safer-sex practices. Therefore, we must be careful about still looking for definitions.

In thinking about what research avenues people should be going down, as Avedon Carol rightly pointed out, the relationship between sex education and pornography is a massively important one to consider. My limited anecdotal experience dates back 10 years to when my daughters came home from school with sex education leaflets that I was outraged by. I do not know whether sex education still amounts to reproductive education and a very male-stream view of what sex is. However, according to those leaflets, it was about one particular act: sexual intercourse. I have never seen the word “clitoris” in a sex education leaflet, and I bet that it is still not in such leaflets, although I would like to be wrong.

The questions that we ask about sex education are extremely narrow, and we are quite limited in how far we can push them. I would really like any research in the area have a wider focus than just pornography. I would like it to cover the whole area of sexualisation—for example, push-up bras for eight-year-olds being sold in Dorothy Perkins.

Avedon Carol: Really?

Dr Zalewski: Maybe even for five-year-olds.

I make a plea for a wider set of research questions to come out of this meeting.

The Convener: I invite Carolyn Leckie to address the issue of violence against women.

Carolyn Leckie: We are moving on naturally to our next issue. The Executive's national group to address violence against women has already jumped ahead and defined pornography as violence against women. We are interested in panel members' approach to that issue—although I think that I can see how the discussion is going to shape up.

Before we get into that discussion, I want to respond to what was said about sex education. I agree completely with what was said about the difficulties, which are partly about trying to divorce anatomy from the discussion about pornography. For me, pornography is not about anatomy, and I have no difficulty with sex education involving erect penises or whatever. Education about clitorises would be absolutely brilliant. I am sure that a lot of people would benefit from that.

We must make it absolutely clear that the issue is not prudishness about anatomy. We must move the debate beyond that and differentiate pornography from anatomy. I think that, essentially, the issue is political and that there is a left-right divide. Perhaps the anatomy question will help to differentiate where people are coming from in trying to arrive at an agreed definition of pornography.

Anyway, is pornography violence against women? I think that it is.

Avedon Carol: That is a misleading approach. You talk about pornography, but then you say, “But we don't really mean sex. We mean violence against women.” I think that people hear the word “sex”—that is part of the danger of using that formulation.

You keep talking about left and right, but the word “exploitation” usually refers to somebody with power who uses economic coercion. It would be great if everyone had a minimum guaranteed income so that nobody had to worry about how to pay for food and a place to live or think, “I guess I'll have to go into the sex industry,” but we do not live in that world. I do not see a lot of people pushing for a guaranteed minimum income to eliminate the problem of, say, runaways who escape from a sexually oppressive home and do not have anywhere safe to go.

The argument is about economic coercion, class and economics. We talk about women who can go into respectable jobs that they hate or into pornography. It is all very well to say that women who go into pornography do not really like their jobs, but secretaries generally do not like their jobs. Coal miners do not do it for the view. There are lots of horrible jobs; some are dangerous and some are deadly. The argument is about class and economics. If you want to make a criticism of capitalism, that is great, but it strikes me as

dishonest to say that a job in pornography is a bad or exploitative job.

It is nice for middle-class people with college educations to say that a job in pornography is a bad job, but let us remember that even some people who are middle class and have good educations end up not getting good jobs. People who work in pornography are self-employed and do not have to put up with 40 hours a week of being treated like dirt in an office or a factory. Working in pornography might sound like a good job, and for some women it is. Some women make much better money and have much better conditions than they would if they were not in the sex industry.

It is dishonest to say that women are exploited and coerced in pornography—they are exploited and coerced all over the place and not just in pornography. Please let us not be dishonest; let us not pretend that pornography is the sole place where women—or anyone—get oppressed.

Carolyn Leckie: I did not say that.

Dr Boyle: I certainly would not say that it is only in pornography that women are oppressed. That is a common misperception and mischaracterisation that appears in public debate, journalism and even academic writings. It is suggested that the feminist anti-porn movement is not concerned with things such as unequal pay in other spheres, but that is simply inaccurate. The fact that other jobs are bad too does not mean that we should stop talking about why we think that the conditions in pornography are particularly exploitative.

As far as I am aware, none of the other examples that Avedon Carol gave is an occupation in which people's bodies are repeatedly sexually harmed through the repetitive performance of particular acts such that reparative surgery is required. There is something specific about pornography because the forms of exploitation are sexual. Whether we think that that exploitation is more or less significant than exploitation in the other contexts that Avedon Carol rightly mentioned, there is something specific about exploitation that is sexual.

It should be apparent from our discussion that it is difficult to make the blanket statement that pornography is violence against women if we include everything that we have talked about, from carvings on walls to sexually violent pornography. However, if I was asked whether commercially available pornography in its currently dominant forms is violence against women, I would say that it is in the majority of cases. As Marysia Zalewski said, it is violence in the form of perpetuating social inequality, which is not something that we want—it is certainly not what I want.

11:45

Mr McGrigor: Dr Boyle, in your written submission, you say:

"There are three main areas to consider in relation to pornography's relationship to harm:

- harmful production practices
- representations of harm within the pornographic text itself
- harm to the consumers of pornography".

In your opinion, which is the most important?

Dr Boyle: I am not often completely stumped for words, but I find it difficult to separate out the issues, because it depends on the context in which the question is asked. If we are talking about legislative remedy, the first issue—harmful production practices—is most important. It is imperative that women who are abused in the making of pornography should have redress, to ensure that that pornography is not distributed without their consent. That issue is underacknowledged, so it is legislatively important.

If we want to move forward the debate, it is important to find out how consumers use pornography. I am talking not about what they do with it—we know that, in most cases—but about how they understand what they do with it. We are only just beginning to have research that opens up that question. As I have indicated, research suggests that there are important areas to explore around the way in which young men, who are the main subject of the research, understand pornography as contributing to their dominance over women. When it comes to moving the debate forward, the third point is most important, but when it comes to dealing with the current legislative gaps, the first point is most important.

Ms White: A study that was carried out in schools indicated that young girls thought that it was all right for men to hit them if they refused to have sex. That, in a nutshell, is the answer to the question whether pornography is harmful to or constitutes violence against women.

We have spoken about pornography that is geared towards heterosexuals. I want to ask about pornography by women, for women, and male-male pornography. What are your views on such pornography?

Dr Zalewski: It is an interesting question with which the courts, for example, have difficulty dealing. Because the template for sexual relationships is so dominated by heterosexuality, when lesbians produce pornography, especially pornography that is deemed to be sado-masochistic, it is difficult to reach a conclusion on whether it is harmful, because the hierarchies are not necessarily the same. The issue complicates the debate and shows that simple definitions and

answers are impossible. The focus should not be on whether pornography is not harmful because it is lesbian or gay male. Rather, we should relate the issue to the wider gender inequalities in society. In some ways, it is a bit of a red herring.

Ray Wyre: If a ménage à trois is men's number 1 fantasy, most lesbian acts are part of the heterosexual continuum, in a sense. Lesbian acts have always been shown in pornography for adult men. Most men find them very sexually arousing and attractive, and they are still part of the mainstream pornography industry. Male-male pornography is different, but lesbianism has been part of male heterosexual pornography for years.

Dr Zalewski: I would like to clarify the point that I was making. Ray Wyre is referring not to lesbian acts, but to heterosexual men's perception of what lesbian acts might be.

Ray Wyre: I know that men find films that are made by lesbians for lesbians attractive.

Dr Zalewski: That is not my point. We must be very careful about what is counted as a so-called lesbian act.

Ray Wyre: S and M lesbianism makes for an interesting debate, because it is based on the cathartic experience of taking power back and is often different from S and M within homosexual practices, where there do not appear to be the same fantasy games. I am talking about an area that you might say was out of my sphere of expertise, but I have talked to lesbian women who have engaged in S and M, and they have seen it as cathartic—as taking power back within the sex game. It is a very interesting debate.

Dr Zalewski: Again, I would query your definitions when you talk about taking power back.

Ray Wyre: I was repeating what people have told me. When I have spoken to lesbian colleagues about S and M lesbianism, I have been given a theory that it is about catharsis and taking power back. That is the information that they gave me; I may be wrong about it, but that is what they told me.

Dr Zalewski: Okay, that is obviously an example, but we will leave it there.

Avedon Carol: The argument is interesting, and obviously I have heard discussions over whether lesbian SM stuff is transgressive, cathartic, a re-enactment of oppression, or whatever. When that kind of argument is going on, even among people who know what they are talking about, it is dangerous to allow the state to decide what is legal, what is not, and why. I get disturbed when I hear such arguments in a state environment in which we have been talking about what material we think may purvey sexist attitudes. Ultimately, you have to ask certain questions. Who do you

want to go to jail? Who gets busted for thought crime? How much money are you willing to spend on making somebody miserable because they made something that—for all I know—they may consider to be art, was aimed at satisfying somebody's fantasies and may be totally harmless? From all the evidence, it is probably not harmful at all.

Marlyn Glen: I wanted to ask about a subject that we seem to be getting on to anyway—the regulation of pornography. Do the witnesses feel that the current regulation of pornography in the UK is sufficient? I was interested in the earlier discussion on harmful production practices. I had thought that that was a narrow subject, but I now realise that it has wider significance.

To respond to Avedon Carol's point, I do not think that the question is about how we decide who should be in jail. We are trying to improve society for the general public—for women and children and for men.

Avedon Carol: But people end up going to jail.

Marlyn Glen: Yes, they do—but we are legislators and legislation can encourage changes. We do not legislate merely to put people in jail; we legislate to improve society.

I repeat my question, which—although this is the Scottish Parliament—was about the regulation of pornography in the UK.

Avedon Carol: In the Parliament in London an issue was discussed that I think is very important for women—whether forced marriage would be treated as a serious crime. The powers that be lost their bottle: they did not want to confront what they regarded as a religiously delicate issue. It was an issue of real violence against women—involving forced sex; trafficking, if we are honest; and forced marriage. The powers that be lost it, and started instead to talk about making what they called violent pornography illegal.

The Convener: This is the Scottish Parliament and we have an opportunity to work in a different way.

Avedon Carol: I know, but I am just pointing out what can happen. I cannot see one advantage to women from the new law that the UK Parliament created instead of protecting women.

If you make a law, you are going to put people in jail. You have to ask, "Does the law actually benefit the people it is supposed to benefit?"

The Convener: Absolutely. I think that that is how we would work.

Dr Zalewski: The short answer to the question that is being considered is no, we should not have more legislation. Our energies should be directed elsewhere and into asking the questions that we

have all raised during this discussion. The existing legislation, particularly on production, should be properly implemented and closely monitored.

Professor Egan: The state should keep out of people's bedrooms and sex lives, because it does not have a good history of showing a subtle understanding of human variation. However, we need more research. Perhaps we also need health warnings on sexuality—such as, "You might put your back out"—[*Laughter.*]

Avedon Carol: I was just trying to picture what a health warning might say.

Dr Boyle: I agree with what has been said about regulation. Regulation is a red herring if it is regarded as an answer to the problems that we have discussed, because the minute that it becomes the subject of public debate, the issue becomes a person's right to see particular material and what will and will not be restricted, which means that genuinely important questions about sexual inequality, sex education and the harm that is done to women—but not just women—in the production of pornography get completely lost. I encourage the committee not to assume that its consideration of pornography means that it must think about regulation. There are other ways of moving forward an important public debate. We should not say, "All we can do is decide whether or not to regulate."

Ray Wyre: I know what people can access on the internet. If we are not considering legislation, what are we going to do about rape sites and pornography that clearly tries to show rape? What about other sites? I do not want to talk about all the other sites that are available, but there are sites on everything from necrophilia to the size of dogs' penises and the ejaculate that dogs produce when you have sex with them. People argue that we should not get involved in discussing such material and there should be no legislative powers to deal with it, but I know where we will end up—we are heading down a road and we have completely lost control.

That material has an impact on people. It has an impact on me in my job. For example, I might find out that someone who is a foster carer is going to a dog party to have sex with dogs—and I am asked to assess the risk that that man presents to children. Other panel members have said that we should not legislate, but I am afraid that in my job I deal with people who breach boundaries in sex in huge and different ways. For example, I get involved with people who allow children to see adult pornography and many other things that children should not see. I get involved when social workers find that someone takes part in bizarre sexual practices but do not know what that means in relation to their child care practices. There are people who eat excrement—there is a whole area

on coprophilia on the internet. What does that mean if someone is caring for a baby? There is infantilism. For me, this is not academic. Every day, I get involved with people who are involved in such practices, because someone else says, "We do not know what risk they present." Other witnesses have said that we should not regulate—but we are already doing that, albeit unofficially.

Mr McGrigor: Professor Egan, you said in your submission:

"I do not support the introduction of further laws restricting material that could be accommodated within existing legislation".

However, earlier in your submission you said that "loopholes should be closed". Can you give an example of a loophole that should be closed?

Professor Egan: One example is paedophiliac pornography. People can write fantasies about children, which are not regulated in the same way as created photographic images are.

Ray Wyre: It goes much further than that. Again, I do not want to go into the sites that are available, but there is a site on the emancipation of children, which is about the rights of children to be sexual with whoever they want—that is the debate. Connected to that site are 56 other sites, which all support sex with children. We do not do anything about the site, because there is no pornography on it. It claims to be about the rights of children, whereas it is actually about the right of adults to have sex with children. That is all part of the same problem.

I have always been interested in why we have legislation, in relation to the internet and everywhere else, that does not allow incitement to racial hatred whereas we do nothing about incitement to abuse and rape women, or to have sex with children. Is that any less of an issue?

12:00

The Convener: So do you advocate legislation?

Ray Wyre: I just find it amazing that the general public do not seem to know. A lot of young people know about steakandcheese.com and rotten.com. Kids are sharing those sites. They can go there and watch a man masturbating on toast and eating it, and we do nothing about it. That is the reality. Let us stop pretending. Young people go to such sites behind their parents' backs. They know which sites to go to. They talk about that in the playgrounds, but it is not even part of this debate because we would not necessarily class it as pornography. They go to decapitation sites for gross violence; they know where to go and we do nothing about it.

Mr McGrigor: You are saying that, in some ways, children are better educated in how to find

things than the people who are sitting in this room or in Parliament.

Ray Wyre: Yes. Secrets and corruption are part of abuse. The cleverest offenders bring children into the world of secrets. Interestingly, the majority of men who met children offline, having met them online, did not pretend that they were children. They said who they were and how old they were, and the 13-year-old still met them, went with them to a hotel, and was abused by them. We know these things and yet we still spend our time looking at safeguards that imagine that young people and children want to be protected when they are being corrupted by people who use the fact that young people like to do things behind our backs. That is the reality and I do not think that we take that into consideration when we start to help adults to protect children.

Adults are putting software on their computers that destroys the history bar so that we cannot tell what sites they have been to, rather than installing software that shows where the young people and children go to on the internet. They do the opposite to what we want. That is what is so funny about the whole debate.

Remember that I am biased. My experience is as a practitioner having to work with individual cases that have emerged from this situation. Perhaps that is not a good legislative tool; the Parliament cannot legislate based on my experience of having to pick up the different individual pieces.

Dr Boyle: That raises a question. I share Ray Wyre's abhorrence of the material that he has described, but two issues emerge. One is that extreme cases do not generally make good policy. The other is how to legislate for material that is available on the internet. We end up caught in a trap if we assume that the only way of dealing with such material responsibly is to regulate access to the technologies rather than intervening in social policy debates, which is partly what Ray Wyre seems to be calling for.

I return to the need for positive sex education that allows people to think about the option of not engaging with such material. We can acknowledge that we know that such material is being shared by young people in the playground and start to engage by asking them why that is happening and what they get out of it. We can ask how can we intervene and change young people's attitudes towards sex and sexual relationships and, as it has been the focus of today's discussion, towards sexual inequality. It is a mistake to assume that censorship is the only way of dealing with the issue. We can consider the social policy implications and make interventions through sex education, which several people have talked about. That would be a positive way of allowing

people to make positive and different choices about their consumption of pornography.

Carolyn Leckie: This is a difficult debate. However, the fact that we do not have all the answers does not mean that we should not strive to find those answers. I agree that specific legislative change would not be the right way in which to approach the matter just now. However, that does not mean that it should not be the end point. We need to have a much more in-depth and wide debate in society and we must not run away from the issue. If young children are able to access the material that Ray Wyre described, what we are offering them in schools and in the home in terms of sex education is just silly. We are not countering any of that. Of course, the examples that Ray Wyre presented were extreme. Perhaps I am indulging in wishful thinking but I would hope that not all children in all playgrounds are accessing such material.

Ray Wyre: If I may—

Carolyn Leckie: I would like to move on.

It is quite frustrating that, when we are trying to discuss the particular issue of pornography—which is what is on our agenda today—other issues of inequality are counterposed, as if people are saying, "That's worse than that, so why aren't you dealing with that?" People will know that I have a strong track record in dealing with all sorts of inequalities—the Equal Opportunities Committee is probably bored with me talking about equal pay—and, to give the Parliament credit, it has tackled issues such as female genital mutilation, through the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (Scotland) Act 2005. It is not fair to suggest that we are discussing pornography because it is an easier target. In fact, it is a difficult target and I think that the Parliament is being quite brave by trying to open up the debate on it.

I am interested in the current legislative framework, about which there are some misunderstandings. Marlyn Glen said that we have dealt with the issue of extreme violence. However, we have not done so, because, as far as I am aware, the portrayal of gang rape, for example, is not illegal and neither are the magazines called things like "Barely Teens". The glorification and celebration of rape have not been made illegal. Bestiality and things like that have been made illegal but the legislation that Marlyn Glen had in mind did not specifically tackle gender inequality in relation to the portrayal of women.

Do we just say that the issue is too big and terrible to tackle or do we try to find a way of challenging it? I am not suggesting that legislation is the solution to the problem, but it can sometimes act as a tool to encourage the social debate that we would want to have. I am posing

that question because I have not yet made up my mind on the subject. However, if we do not have a proposal around which to focus a debate and give it momentum, we will simply not have the debate and the issues will get lost.

Is there room around the legislation on extreme pornography that could take in some wider issues? I appreciate the difficulties that are involved but I think that we should confront them and try to get some kind of consensus. There is lots of room for that around the issue of the production of pornography. If we seriously, consciously and strategically dealt with the abuse that is involved in the production of pornography—which might be a bit of an idealistic goal—we could drastically reduce the number of women who are involved in it, which would reduce the prevalence of it in society and send a strong message about the use of it and where it comes from. Further, it would engage people in the debate and make them think about what they are using, what they are looking at and who has been involved in it.

Instead of putting loads of people in jail—I am opposed to putting people in jail and I think that we have too many people there already—I would like to see the big business interests made accountable and responsible, because that is where the increase is coming from. There is a massive, multibillion pound interest involved, so this is about capitalism and the most extreme form of the inequality that is perpetuated by capitalism. Who is benefiting? I do not think that women, children or even men are benefiting in society, but big business is benefiting. Is there a legislative framework for that?

The Convener: Given that the majority of legislation that regulates pornography is reserved to Westminster, what action can we in the Scottish Parliament take? I hear what Ray Wyre said, and I agree that we need to do something. It is not enough to say that it is difficult, and if we want to protect children, we need to find ways of doing that. What can we do in the Scottish Parliament to move down that road?

Dr Boyle: A number of things could be done. Going back to the question of whether debates about legislation help to pose a broader debate, I think that if the debates are about regulating material, they will pose a debate about regulating material and will not allow us to have the debate that we have had today.

On what the Parliament can do, as I have said a number of times, there is a need to find out concrete information about the current position in Scotland. I do not know to what extent the material that Ray Wyre has discussed today is what most children think about when they think about pornography. If it is, there are issues that we need

to deal with, but it would be a mistake to make generalisations based on a small number, as Ray has acknowledged.

The Parliament could consider revising sex education to take into account the fact that young people often first encounter sex through pornography. I have not seen the materials yet, but I am aware that Womankind Worldwide has been developing material on pornography as part of a pack for schools that is on violence generally. I have not managed to find out more about it—I just saw it mentioned in *The Guardian* last week in an article precisely about the concern that children are learning about sex through pornography.

That is how we can go forward in a positive way, so that it is not about being seen as a censor but about allowing a public debate on what kind of world we want to live in. That debate can genuinely move things forward, because there is a danger that when the debate becomes about censorship it becomes stultifying and nothing changes for the people whom we are most concerned about. I do not believe that you can do this anyway, but I would caution against increasing the regulation of material. There is arguably a debate to be had about where such material is available, but that should not be the only debate.

Ray Wyre: When allegations of abuse were made in the past and we did not know whether the children were telling the truth, often we would ask, “How would they know if it hadn’t happened to them?” Now, however, we have had to change our practice because the advertising for pornography, especially through the internet as pop-ups and pop-under, can be incredibly graphic. Those video clips show oral, anal and penetrative sex—many people here may have seen those adverts even though they did not ask for them.

That has meant that we have had to change to using taste and smell in working with children to find out whether what they are saying is genuine. There is no way yet through pornography that they can taste and smell. We have had to move on in our understanding because of how many young people access and see pornographic images. It is in that area that we have had to change some of our clinical practice.

It frightens me how young some people are when they see those pop-up and pop-under adverts. We know that many do not make total sense of them, but if they are then in an abusive situation or context, such adverts take on a different significance. That is the problem. I do not believe that most people are adversely affected by pornography or violent images, but such images take on a different significance for the group of people for whom intimacy and empathy development is hit in childhood. The question is whether we have a responsibility to that subgroup.

We know that there is an impact, and that is where the debate should be.

Even just the debate is important. Talking about the issues, having schools more informed and having children talk about the things that they know are going on is important. I have not yet said thank you for it, but that is why I welcome this opportunity. I wish that a similar debate had taken place in England before it was suddenly decided to make sadistic adult pornography a crime there, as we will have a hell of a hard time trying to define what that crime is and what should be done with people who commit it. Obviously, people in Scotland will consider that matter carefully before going down that road.

12:15

Professor Egan: The legal issues north and south of the border are not different. Creating a disparity in approaches would mean creating a difference that people might try to exploit. However, it is important to do something about the secondary effects of pornography. Scotland has a venerable tradition of education, a slightly different social philosophy than people south of the border have, and, of course, a fine history of health. People here can therefore inoculate children from the excesses of pornography and provide a greater perspective.

Dr Zalewski: I agree with the three previous speakers. We should welcome more debate on the subject. Thinking back to the supposedly permissive 1960s, when everybody talked about everything, is bizarre. Forty years on, there is still much that we do not know about, that we still do not want to talk about and that we find it difficult to talk about. More open debate and research on all the issues that we have discussed should be encouraged.

I am still wary of the legislative route, although such a route may not be possible here. A lot of legislation has been passed on many things—on gender inequality, for example. The gender equality duty is being introduced, which is not irrelevant to our discussion. The legislation in question is another document that portrays women as victims and men as predators, and I am not sure how far such a portrayal will increase gender equality. I have difficulties with such issues being framed solely in a legislative fashion. I urge caution in that respect.

Avedon Carol: I concur with the call for better sex education. Education is the way to go. We cannot arm kids better than by telling them what to look out for, what is going on and what is and is not real. We cannot do anything to protect children if we send them out ignorant. It does not matter how many laws we pass or how many people we

arrest—we will not be able to do anything to protect them if we have not given them the arms that they need in the form of knowledge.

Dr Boyle: We have talked about children's sex education, which is important, but the public debate must be broader than simply on engaging with children. We should not assume that adults' views of pornography are necessarily thoughtful or engaged. Once we have relevant research evidence, we may decide that there is a case for developing sensible public education campaigns that are broader than campaigns that target children. A debate about targeting children is a specific debate that does not necessarily reflect the concerns of people around this table.

Ms White: We have legislation on the matter, which is quite a grey area. I refer to what Ray Wyre said. Bestiality and necrophilia are against the law, but unfortunately, there has been no proper legislation on or monitoring of such things, as the internet is such a sophisticated tool. I have innocently gone into sites in which something pornographic has popped up—everybody has probably had the same experience. People can be clever. The internet must be looked at throughout the world, not only in Britain or Scotland. However, it has been said that certain matters are reserved.

It has been seen today that we can discuss pornography in the Scottish Parliament. As Avedon Carol said, we should consider sex education in schools. Knowledge is power, and kids should know what is going on. Perhaps that would prevent them from going down a road that we do not want them to go down.

Perhaps this cannot be done today or next week, but we should consider the Equal Opportunities Committee's legacy paper. There could be a wide-ranging debate in which people from all sides of the issue give evidence. Plenty of people have spoken about pornography not being harmful, but we never hear people saying that they do not want to see pornography on newsagents' shelves. We must have a debate on that. I hope that the matter will be included in a legacy paper.

We can surely do something now about magazines on bottom shelves, for example. SWAP and others have demonstrated outside newsagents. I find it offensive to walk into a newsagent's in which there is a young boy of 14 or 15 and there are lads' mags, or whatever you might want to call them, right above the Mars bars. I am a member of society and have rights, as others do. It is about time that our rights as well as those of others were aired. The clerk will probably keep me right about whether we can make a suggestion to the Scottish Parliament about newsagents selling such mags, where those mags are placed and so on.

The Convener: Obviously, this debate is the start of a discussion that will be mentioned in our legacy paper for the next committee, following the election.

I thank all the witnesses for attending the meeting and participating in the debate. Discussing pornography is sometimes difficult, but we should not shy away from doing so, particularly when children are at risk. Politicians and members of communities have a responsibility for dealing with the matter.

I suspend the meeting for five minutes to allow for a changeover of witnesses and a comfort break.

12:21

Meeting suspended.

12:30

On resuming—

The Convener: Our second agenda item concerns witness expenses. Are members content to delegate to me responsibility for arranging payment of any witness expenses that arise during our consideration of the impact of pornography?

Members indicated agreement.

Prostitution (Public Places) (Scotland) Bill

12:31

The Convener: I welcome Margo MacDonald to the committee. It is nice to see her here. She is welcome at any time, of course.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Thank you.

The Convener: Agenda item 3 is consideration of the Prostitution (Public Places) (Scotland) Bill. Do members have any general comments on the paper that we have on the bill?

Marlyn Glen: In light of our previous discussions and the concerns on which we were trying to concentrate, I am content with what has happened. Although the bill will be only another small step, I am glad that the stage 1 consideration led to a commitment from the Executive to change the bill considerably. The pressure that the Equal Opportunities Committee put on the Executive was useful. The Local Government and Transport Committee did a good job, too.

Ms White: I concur with what Marlyn Glen said. We had concerns about the bill. Prostitution is a big area for the Equal Opportunities Committee, but we were examining the specifics of the bill. From the paper and the stage 1 debate, I see that the Executive has accepted the need for amendments on every issue the committee raised. I am more than pleased that the Executive has taken those matters on board and am happy with the paper.

The Convener: The committee felt that the bill was the tip of the iceberg and that there needed to be a much wider discussion on prostitution. We were able to say that in the stage 1 debate and we might want to say it in future or expect a future Equal Opportunities Committee to say it.

Margo MacDonald: I appreciate the sincerity of the members who have spoken, but they are placing far too much hope in the recast bill that is likely to be presented to the Parliament at stage 3, and relying far too much on it. The bill's utility depends entirely on one's objective. The objective might be to eliminate prostitution, but that will not happen if we adopt the measures for which the committee has called. We already have proof that they do not eliminate prostitution. English experience has shown that if the proposed amendments on kerb crawling are adopted, the red light areas will move around the cities, being chased by the police. Liverpool City Council considered having tolerance zones in different parts of the city for, I think, six month periods, to

share the misery. Middlesbrough Council and others have tough policies but have not reduced street prostitution.

If reducing street prostitution is the objective, the proposed amendments have failed the test already. We do not need to go in for crystal ball gazing, because there is a history book to read. If we seek to eliminate prostitution by making it impossible to purchase sex, practical experience has proved that that is not possible. Much more would be needed than a small bill such as the Prostitution (Public Places) (Scotland) Bill.

The experience in Sweden is frequently cited by people who have not checked up on what happened there: the sex services trade went underground in the first year after the purchase of sex was made illegal. That resulted in an increase in trafficking and prostitutes' support workers reported that they could not reach them. Sex is now being sold on the streets again and the situation is a great deal worse.

If the objective of the measures that have been proposed, and which may well be adopted in good faith, is to eliminate prostitution, they will not succeed. If the objective is to minimise the physical and emotional harm that is done to prostitutes, I doubt very much whether they will be successful from that point of view, either. The adoption of the proposed measures will mean that prostitutes will not operate in a known red light zone that can be serviced by the local authority, the health authority, the police and the voluntary support agencies, so it will not be possible for contact to be made with women with a view to helping them to exit prostitution when they are ready to do so. I think that the proposals will mean that we end up with a worse situation than we have at present.

Carolyn Leckie: Margo MacDonald has done a good job of enticing us into the debate about the subject, but I will resist the temptation because I am supposed to be at another meeting. She has made a number of points that I fully agree with. There is no way that the bill is a panacea; it will probably not even scratch the surface. For me, the issue is whether it will advance how the abuse of women in society through prostitution is tackled—in other words, whether it will be progressive or regressive. Are tolerance zones a progressive or a regressive measure? That is where the debate lies. I have come down on the side of believing that the bill is progressive, even in just a tiny way. My view is that toleration would be regressive for women in society in general, as well as for the women involved—although I know that that is a matter of debate.

Our view of the situation in Sweden depends on which research we read, which academics we speak to and whose experience we listen to. I

think that the Equal Opportunities Committee needs to examine the issue for itself. In our legacy paper, we should suggest that at some point after the election our successor committee should investigate at first hand what is happening in Sweden, rather than have opinions filtered through different sources. My understanding is that trafficking has gone down rather than up. I noticed that when the Local Government and Transport Committee took evidence on the Swedish model, it heard from only one witness, who gave a negative picture. It did not seek to take a wider view to balance things up, nor did it speak directly to anyone from Sweden.

Margo MacDonald: We did.

Carolyn Leckie: If it did, I missed that. I think that our successor committee should take evidence directly on the direction in which we should go in the future.

The bill is not a panacea, but I do not think that anyone ever claimed it was or that it would eradicate prostitution. We have not yet come to a conclusion in the debate about whether it would be beneficial to eradicate prostitution. Many people still do not understand that it is a problem or that it is even possible to introduce measures to eradicate it. I think it is unfortunate that that debate has still to be concluded.

Ms White: I take on board everything Margo MacDonald said. I was a member of the Local Government Committee when she introduced her Prostitution Tolerance Zones (Scotland) Bill a few years ago. For me, the safety of prostitutes, their health and welfare and the support they receive are paramount, but I do not think that prostitution tolerance zones would give prostitutes the protection Margo MacDonald seems to think they would.

When the Local Government Committee took evidence on Margo MacDonald's bill, I was perturbed by the description that we were given of what a prostitution tolerance zone would be. It was not even a street, necessarily. It was just an area, perhaps out of town, where there were buildings such as sheds, or an industrial site, where men could come round in cars to pick up prostitutes. I just could not support such a proposal.

I understand what Margo MacDonald is saying about prostitution going underground, but in certain areas—Edinburgh, for instance, with the Scottish prostitutes education project, and Glasgow—there is a good network of support for the women. I do not think that that support will disappear if there are no tolerance zones. My big fear is that establishing a tolerance zone will mean that we tolerate prostitution, and I cannot condone or tolerate prostitution.

Although I would like to pursue the matter further, I agree with Carolyn Leckie that we should put it into our legacy paper so that it can be considered properly. We have moved on and the bill is the best we are going to get at the moment, despite its narrow focus. I would certainly like to return to the issue, but I cannot support tolerance zones for the reasons that I have just given, which I also gave in 2002.

The Convener: We are not going to get into a discussion of tolerance zones.

Margo MacDonald: I was not proposing that.

The Convener: I know you were not.

As I said at the start of the debate, the committee feels strongly that the bill should at least be amended, but that what it addresses is just the tip of the iceberg. There is a lot of work to be done and a discussion to be had before we can even start to think about eradicating prostitution. We must think about how we can protect the women, what we can deal with now rather than in the long term, and how we can move towards the long term. That requires a much wider discussion. I hope that we can include something about that in our legacy paper, so that a future Equal Opportunities Committee can consider how we can move forward and have that wider debate. On the day of the stage 1 debate, there was some frustration that that wider discussion had not taken place. Nevertheless, as other members have said, the bill is a step in the right direction. It is all we can do at this stage. Members will obviously be free to participate in any future debate on the matter in the chamber.

Marlyn Glen: I found it helpful that we had discussed the matter in the committee. I really appreciated the work that the clerks—particularly Zoé Tough—had done. When members are busy, it is difficult for us to look at legislation that has been scrutinised by other committees, so that was really helpful.

The Convener: Likewise. It is not the practice of this committee to police everyone else, but when there are equalities issues that we feel strongly about, it is appropriate for us to comment on them—and we did.

I remind members that the committee's equalities review event will take place in the chamber on Friday 23 February. I would be grateful if members could ensure that that is in their diaries. The event will consider equalities issues from 1999 to now and will bring together all the equalities organisations. It should be a very good debate in the chamber.

Meeting closed at 12:42.

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