An Objectivist denies pornography results in harassment of women

To the Editor:

In my mailbox on the morning of Jan. 28 I found, much to my dismay, a copy of a letter from K. K. Skiffington to The Tech which later appeared in print on Feb. 8. What was disturbing about this letter was not the irrelevant arguments presented, but the vicious libel accusing me of no less than male chauvinism and rape.

I must endeavor to clarify my position on these issues.

I am a firm believer in the philosophy of Objectivism as presented in the writings of Ayn Rand. The term has negative connotations due to the fact that most individuals form opinions on the basis of a selected portion of the available information. Once formed, any data to the contrary is rationalized away.

An Objectivist, however, considers all available information on an equal basis, and his opinions are subject to change if he discovers conflicting facts.

On the basis of interviews with female producers and actresses, I concluded that participation in pornographic films is voluntary, and that no rights are violated in production. After reading Linda Lovelace's Order, however, I realize that this is not necessarily true and I must retract that statement.

I certainly do not believe that women enjoy such exploitation; the actresses committed in the making of Deep Throat are impossible to rationalize away. The individuals responsible for violations of this nature should be subject to the maximum penalty of the law.

Nevertheless, I still maintain that sexually explicit films made with the consent of everyone involved do not violate any civil rights. In an attempt to demonstrate the irrelevance of the claim that "pornographic movies result in increased sexual harassment," I stated that I have never committed an act of violence against a woman after watching one of these movies. This is not only my opinion, it is a fact. As Objectivist I do not perform an action which violates the use of physical force against another individual. Chauvinism, harassment, and certainly date rape are completely inconsistent with my nature. My statement does not imply that others conduct themselves in the same manner.

It could as well be argued that men must be forbidden from any activity which results in an increase in the level of androgens (male hormones) because it is a physiological fact that higher levels of testosterone cause increased aggressiveness in rats. Fortunately, humans can control emotions through the use of reason.

I suggest two courses of action for Skiffington: (1) read Ayn Rand's essay "Censorship: Local and Express" in Philosophy: Who Needs It (1942, pp. 172-183); (2) think about whether or not she has ever wished that others be prohibited from some activity simply because she is offended by the idea.

It is a sad state of affairs indeed when an individual must resort to personal attacks and character defamation to express her views in place on rational argument.

Russell Karberg '87

Ulterior motives behind American involvement in Central America

To the Editor:

The Reagan Administration argues that we must carry out the removal of all foreign forces from Central America. The US blocked passage of this treaty — "trumping" Nicaragua's 1979 agreement with the US to cut off all foreign forces from Central America.

Last week, during 37 hours of meetings between Fidel Castro and three US congressmen, Castro stated his desire to negotiate with the United States concerning the withdrawal of Cuban forces from Central America.

He also stated he would accept the Administration's requirement of procedures to verify an accurate reading arms flow to the region.

This offer was quickly rebuffed by Administration officials who said they did not take Mr. Castro's comments seriously. If Reagan really thinks — as he has frequently asserted — that Cuba is a "source" of violence in Central America, surely he should leap at this chance to negotiate the withdrawal of Cuban personnel from the region.

Last weekend Nicaragua was surprised and embarrassed by the State Department by agreeing to sign the Contadora treaty which called for removal of all foreign forces from Central America.

As the time, Castro conveyed to the Contadora countries his willingness to withdraw any or all personnel in Nicaragua under any treaty to eliminate external aggression. The US blocked passage of this treaty — "trumping" Nicaragua's 1979 agreement with the US to cut off all foreign forces from Central America.

One possible explanation is that Cuba's role in Central American politics has simply been exaggerated to justify the US military build-up there. This justification does not hold up under scrutiny, and we are led to wonder is there another reason for our military involvement in Central America?

Nancy Kanwisher '88

Mature discussion is needed on porn issue

To the Editor:

The latest round of controversy following the showing of Net A Love Story has been most enlightening. Enlightening, but also quite worrying.

What worries me in particular is the very public undercurrent of the statements, mostly by women, in reply to statements made by members of the Lecture Series Committee or other male members of the MIT community.

First, I'd like to address Ruth Perry's reply to Gordon Strong's letter to The Tech and to various deans, as reported by The Tech ("ODSA knew," Feb. 5). I'm honestly upset by Perry's conclusion that Gordon's aims were harassment, and not an attempt to point out the absurdity of the Dean's Office's recent behavior in carrying out its own policies.

I know Strong personally and I find it really hard to believe that he'd want to harass young (or old) women.

To me, Perry sounds as though she is the one who feels threatened. What worries me now is that people like Perry will interpret any male's attempt to comment on the matter as harassment if they don't agree with what he says.

The other person who has me worried is Kerry Skiffington. In her letter ("Kalberg's reasoning," Feb. 8), she indicates that men cannot know what women's opinions are, and in particular reference to Russell Karberg's statement in a letter of his that he had never committed an act of violence against women.

She then brings up the subject of the date rape, and suggests that "this young man" (Russell) is a prime candidate for committing it. Why? Because, it seems, he doesn't think he's ever committed violence against women. Because he thinks he's sensitive to women, Skiffington accuses him of rank insensitivity.

Something about her reasoning seems a little flawed. She later also suggests that there's something wrong with a woman at a woman. I am well aware that her actual words were "staring at a woman," but anyone who stares at any one else deserves a stare in return.

What Skiffington has done has caused a lot of women to become really offensive, particularly in regards to men. The point is, men are not the ones that are being victimized in these situations, women are the ones being victimized. The real problem is the lack of understanding on the part of the male population.

The end result, folks, is as that a man, I feel threatened. Because I have written this letter, and defended Russell and Gordon to some small degree, I'll probably be accused of harassment. If I look at a woman because I find her attractive, I'll be branded a potential rapist.

When I told you I'm a member of LSC (which I happen to be) you'd decide I must be a biased being, incapable of sensitivity or insight. If what I just said pleases some women on this campus, then I feel a little sorry for them. I wish all of MIT would just grow up a little. I wish the Dean's Office would try to talk to LSC and other organizations on the level, rather than devising ridiculous and bully upheld policies.

I wish women's groups would try to speak to people before attacking them. I didn't have to write letters like this, but maybe I'm just not man enough not to feel threatened. And something to keep in mind, how many of you are going to say something unpleasant about my last name?

Kerry Skiffington

The Tech

THINGS WERE GOING GREAT UNTIL LEY LUTHOR HIT ME WITH A TEN MILLION DOLLAR VIGILANTE SUIT...

David Sisson '86