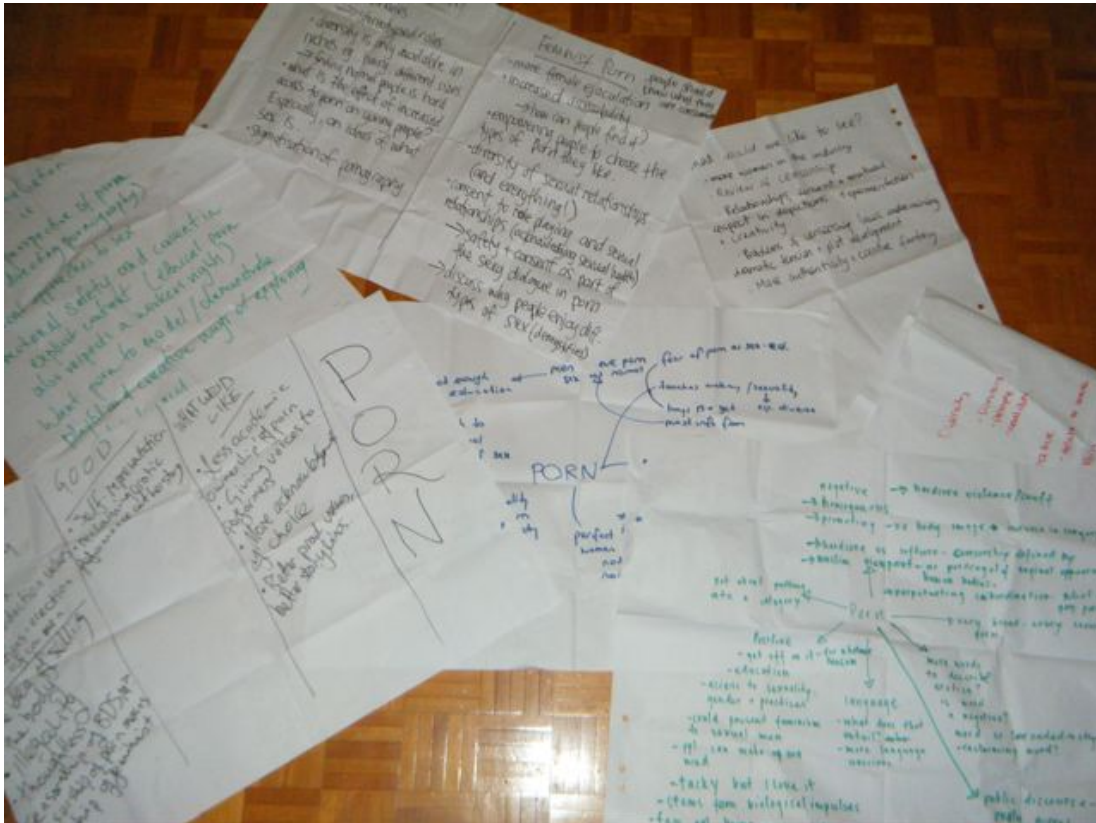


Porn at a Feminist Conference ?!!!!?

Written by fiona patten
Monday, 19 April 2010 17:39



Sometimes I whine about my work and the fact that 20 years on I am still fighting for the same old things. Well I had good reason to shut up at last week's F Conference.

It was attended by 500 women and a few men and children. It was the first feminist conference for 15 years and 40 years since the first one was held in Sydney in 1970. We were privileged to have a few of the women who attended that first conference there. They reminisced and lamented that the issues they were standing up for then, are sadly still on the agenda now. A woman's right to control her fertility, achieving economic independence and equality were among them. Sure some things are better. In 1984 a women earned 83 cents for every dollar men earned. Now we earn 84 cents... woohoo! The pill is certainly easier to come by but a young woman is facing jail in Queensland for the crime of procuring an abortion and abortion is still in the Crimes Act in NSW.

But there have been a lot of changes and they were highlighted at the conference. The first panel was a group of extraordinary aboriginal women who had been working for their communities since the 70's but in the 70's they didn't feel part of the women's movement - even though in retrospect they obviously were. In their campaigns against domestic violence for example, they brought the men with them. I loved their message. It was holistic in its simplicity and respect. Respect for family, for elders and for the land. Pretty easy really..

I went with some trepidation though and wondered whether the event would be filled with Sheila Jeffries and Melinda Tankard Reist types. I am sure that there were people who supported some of their theories but for the most part it was a very sex-positive event. In fact one of the panel speakers Dr Zora Simic described Melinda as the type of feminist Tony Abbott likes. Elena Jeffreys from Scarlet Alliance gave an impassioned plea to feminists to respect the

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autonomy of sex workers and her presentation nearly had the audience on their feet cheering.

It actually felt that nearly all of the missions that the Sex Party stands for were covered at the conference. Eva Cox, amongst others, spoke about the paternalistic nature of the intervention. Anne Summers and Elizabeth Broderick spoke about the appallingly few women in the public boards and parliaments of our country.

I attended a number of conference workshops, the highlight being the Feminism and Porn workshop. Most of the workshops that I attended had about 20-30 people but this one was packed and the room, which fitted 30 people comfortably, had nearly 60 people squeezed in, mainly women under 35. I was a little nervous as to how this topic would be received but knew we were in good hands with fabulous Sex Party candidate, Marianna Leishmann (AKA Zahra Stardust) and Katrina Byrne running the show. They started by providing two feminist arguments towards porn. The Sheila Jefferies and Andrea Dworkin model that all porn is bad and the other model that women in porn can be positively subversive and sexual expression is a good thing for women. We then broke into groups to discuss what we wanted to see in porn, if anything. With some angst I outed myself and as it turned out there were a number of women in the room who worked in and with the adult industry and others who wanted to. The overwhelming response from the people, not only in my group but in all groups (and I have the butcher's paper to prove it) was that they wanted to see more diversity, more fetish, more information about consent, more women directing, more dramatic content, more female ejaculation, less censorship and greater respect for the women who work in porn. I kid you not. It was fabulous and if only our politicians could have been there.