



A Pornography of Birth: Crossing Moral Boundaries

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to illustrate that the moral boundary between what is considered 'normal' and what is considered 'perverse' is constantly struggled over and is spatially specific. In order to illustrate this point I offer a critical reading of approximately 20 media reports published in October and November 2002 after a New Zealand *60 Minutes* television documentary featured a pregnant woman, known as Nikki, who planned to be filmed giving birth for a pornographic movie. The article is informed by recent work on 'moral geographies', and Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection. The article concludes that Nikki troubles the purity and naturalness of birth by constructing the space of the birthing ward as explicitly sexual. By not complying with 'taken for granted', 'common-sense' understandings of birth and motherhood Nikki opens up for question what counts as moral and shows how this is infused with geographical notions of space, place, access and boundaries.

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I. Introduction

Birth, in ‘the West’,² has long been represented as a critical time in a woman’s life when she needs to be introspective, focused completely on the labour process and on ensuring her baby’s safe passage into the world. Birth is also widely considered to be a private affair. Although health and medical professionals are sometimes present to assist, the only other people who usually share the birth process with mothers are their nearest and dearest. Occasionally friends (usually women) are involved but birth is not considered to be a ‘spectator sport’. Birthing women have long been expected to ‘perform’ (Butler, 1990) birth in particular ways in particular contexts. The regulatory gender, social and cultural practices that surround birth are established through repeated performances of expected behaviors. Birth is widely understood to be an intimate and profound event. Shelia Kitzinger (1989: 7), a well-known pregnancy and childbirth educator, writes of birth “it is exciting, awe-inspiring and deeply satisfying”.

This article relays a story about a pregnant woman in Hamilton, New Zealand,³ who is known by the media only as Nikki (her screen-name). Nikki wanted her birth to be “exciting, awe-inspiring and deeply satisfying” but one expects not quite in the manner imagined by Kitzinger. Nikki wanted be filmed giving birth as a prompt for strangers’ sexual excitement and gratification - she wanted the birth to be included in a pornographic movie. The story of Nikki aired in July 2002 when a New Zealand *60 Minutes* television documentary featured her explaining that she planned to be filmed giving birth for a movie entitled *Ripe*. The film is about a woman’s – Nikki’s – sex life during pregnancy and the final scene, her giving birth, was to be the ‘climactic moment’. Immediately following the television documentary a media furore erupted.

² The phrase ‘the West’ is in quotation marks to problematise the cohesiveness or presumed singularity of ‘the West’. ‘The West’ and ‘the East’ are not binary terms but often exist one within the other.

³ Hamilton, located in the central North Island in New Zealand, has a population of 166 128 (Statistics New Zealand, 2003). It is New Zealand’s fourth largest city and contains the Waikato Hospital which is a specialized 600 bed base hospital. The hospital has a staff of approximately 2500. It contains birthing facilities. Approximately 3000 women give birth at Waikato Hospital each year (<http://www.waikatodhb.govt.nz/WDHB/default.asp?content=9>). Women in Hamilton can also chose to give birth at the Waterford Birth Centre, a publicly funded, privately operated Birth Centre for low risk births, or at home.

The aim of this article is to draw on the story of Nikki and pornographic film maker Steve Crow's⁴ quest to have a birth filmed for a pornographic movie to illustrate that certain sexual acts rouse anxieties and even disgust (see Church Gibson, 2004 and Rodgerson and Wilson, 1991 on pornography, gender, and feminism). The moral boundary between what is considered 'normal' and what is considered 'perverse' is constantly struggled over and is temporally and spatially specific. This pornography of birth shows that what counts as moral is tied up with issues of gender, sexuality, class, race and so on, but also with "geographical objects of space, place, landscape, territory, boundary and movement" (Cresswell, 2005, 128). Tim Cresswell (2005, 128) explains "a moral geography, simply put, is the idea that certain people, things and practices belong in certain spaces, places and landscapes and not in others". This article shows how Nikki, through media discourse, was constructed as a person who belonged in certain places and spaces (brothels, strip clubs) but not in others (hospital birthing wards). The media represented Nikki as immoral but this morality turns out to be based on a very contingent set of societal rules and expectations.

The article is divided into five sections. The first section reviews briefly recent research on moral geographies. My reading of this research on moral geographies is filtered through a specific interest in Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection and a more general interest in feminist poststructuralist theorizing on bodies. Second, the methodological process undertaken to conduct the research, namely collecting and critically reading media reports, is discussed. In the third section readers are introduced to Nikki and film-maker Steve Crow, then provided with information about the unfolding of events surrounding the filming of the birth of Nikki's baby for inclusion in a pornographic film. Fourth, a critical reading of media reports on Nikki and Crow's plans to film is presented in order to argue that the moral boundary between what is as considered 'normal' and what is considered 'perverse' is constantly struggled over. Unwritten rules and regulations govern what is deemed (in)appropriate behavior for particular bodies in particular spaces producing 'a changing sexual landscape' (Weeks, 1995; 2003) and constantly shifting 'moral geographies' (Smith, 2000). The article concludes that Nikki parodies the purity and naturalness of pregnancy, birth, and child-rearing by constructing the space of the birthing ward as explicitly sexual. It is important to open up to question what counts as moral and immoral and to show how morality is infused with geographical notions of space, place, access and boundaries.

⁴ Crow is director of Vixen Direct, New Zealand's largest pornography distribution company, based in Auckland, New Zealand.

II 'Moral geographies'

Philip Hubbard (2000, 198), drawing on the work of David Smith (1997), explains that the term 'moral geographies' has emerged over the past decade to describe empirical research into those aspects of sociospatial ordering which "invite a moral reading" (Smith, 1997, 587). (See Smith, 1997 for a useful review of the emergence of 'geography and ethics' and 'moral geographies'. Also see Matless, 1994; Smith, 2000; Setton, 2004.) Smith (1997, 587) argues an important role for geographers is to "take up where most philosophers leave off: to examine the contextual thickening of moral concepts in the particular (local) circumstances of differentiated human being[s]".

A good example of this kind of research, and one that is particularly relevant to this article, is Hubbard's (1998) examination of a red-light district in Birmingham, UK (also see Hart, 1995). Focusing on community protests against prostitution in Birmingham, Hubbard highlights "the way that moral narratives and discourses were deployed by protestors in their attempt to construct an idea of community predicated on the exclusion of 'immoral' sex workers" (Hubbard, 1998, 55; also see Hubbard, 1997). Hubbard's work usefully illustrates that understanding sexualized acts and spaces is multifaceted and contradictory since (hetero)sexuality does not stand alone but is entangled with gender, race, ethnicity, social class, age and so on. Nikki is not a prostitute but she is involved in the sex industry and does therefore, inhabit particular 'moral landscapes' (Setton, 2004) in which a range of moral discourses about 'appropriate' gender, sexual, and class behaviors apply.

Tim Cresswell (2005, 128) suggests that Felix Driver (1988) was the first to use the term 'moral geographies' but its lineage can be traced through the work of people such as Chris Philo (1987), David Sibley (1981; 1995) and indeed Cresswell himself (1996; 1997). These works pay attention to the various ways in which some people become constructed as outsiders and as 'out of place'. Cresswell (2005, 128) notes "They are out of place because they do not fit into an already established (even if only temporarily) set of expectations about the link between geographical ordering and behaviour." People such as the disabled (Kitchin 1998), children (Philo 1992; Valentine 1997), young people (Skelton and Valentine 1998), gays, lesbians and bisexuals (Bell and Valentine 1995, Brown 2000), the homeless (Daly, 1996), gypsies (Sibley, 1992), fat people (Longhurst, 2005), prostitutes (Hubbard, 1998) and many Others are constituted as having no place within 'normal' society.

Cresswell (2005) notes that the aforementioned geographical works on moral boundaries, outsiders, and Others have often been variously informed by Erving Goffman's contributions on stigma (Goffman, 1968), Michel Foucault's research on ordering and discipline (Foucault, 1977; 1980), Pierre Bourdieu's investigations on 'doxa' and 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1990), the Chicago School sociologists' earlier and later works on 'moral orders' and 'deviance' (Park and Burgess, 1925) and psychoanalysts' work on 'object relations' theory (Klein, 1990).

My reading of, and drawing on, contributions on 'moral geographies' has been informed mainly by object relations theory which explores "relationships between the self and the social and material world" (Sibley, 1995, 7). I've been especially influenced by Julia Kristeva's work on abjection (Kristeva, 1982), a particular branch of object relations theory, which has helped further my understanding of some of the anxieties surrounding the boundaries between the pure self and defiled other (see Sibley's, 1995, 5-11 account of object relations theory and abjection).

I have discussed the notion of abjection elsewhere (see Longhurst, 2001, 28-32; also see Sibley, 1995, 8-9) but in short, abjection can be defined as meaning "to expel, to cast out or away" (McClintock, 1995, 72). Kristeva uses the notion of abjection in her book *Powers of Horror* (1982) to illustrate the significance of various personalized bodily horrors for subjects (as they exist within particular cultures) in relation to the boundaries and orifices of the body. Kristeva examines the conditions under which the clean, decent, proper body is demarcated. The cost of this body emerging is what she calls abjection.

Abjection is the affect or feeling of anxiety, loathing and disgust that the subject has in encountering certain matter, images and fantasies – the horrible – to which it can respond only with aversion, nausea and distraction. Kristeva argues that the abject provokes fear and disgust because it exposes the border between self and other (Longhurst, 2001, 28; see also Grosz, 1994, 192).

Many of these insights on abjection are anchored by Mary Douglas' work on boundary rituals and dirt. Her now famous dictum that dirt is essentially disorder, it is "matter out of place" (Douglas, 1966, 25) illustrates that nothing in itself is dirty, rather dirt is that which does not belong. "The idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity" (Douglas, 1966, 35). Nikki, as is illustrated in the remainder of this article, is constructed through discourse as dirty, impure, and dangerous. Her actions prompted, for some, feelings of fear and disgust and abjection. One newspaper article is entitled 'Repulsive sleaze' (*The Press*, 21

October 2002). The idea of filming Nikki's birthing body engendered in doctors, midwives, health board officials, Members of Parliament including the Minister of Health, journalists, and the general public feelings of anxiety, loathing and disgust. Consequently, there were numerous attempts by these people to reinstate Nikki's maternal body as clean and proper (this is discussed in more detail later in the article).

Moral geographies, and "heretical or immoral geographies" (Cresswell, 2005, 129), that is, geographies concerned with social exclusion, 'outsiders', Others, transgression and people who are said to be 'out of place', can be read alongside social and cultural feminist work on embodiment, and in particular on abjection. This work has informed the research. As I go on to illustrate, notions of disgust, disorder, impurity and dirt are useful for thinking through Nikki's 'social geography of birth'.

III A note on methods

I have been engaged in research on pregnancy for more than a decade. During that time I have collected a small library of academic and 'popular' materials on pregnancy but also on birth. These include stories in lifestyle, health, and women's magazines, but also representation of birth on television, in documentaries and film. I have not drawn specifically on these data in this article but they did provide a broader context for the research.

The main data presented in this article are from two *60 Minutes* television documentaries on Nikki and newspaper articles. The first television documentary screened in July 2002, the second (after the birth of Nikki's daughter) on 14 November 2002. Copies of these programmes were requested and received from New Zealand TV3 so that I could watch them a number of times. During this period July – November 2002 I located 20 newspaper articles which appeared in *The Press*, *The Dominion Post*, *The New Zealand Herald* and especially the *Waikato Times* (the local newspaper in Hamilton, where Nikki was residing at the time). Many of the articles were tracked through the website 'nzoom.com news'. In addition to watching the video and reading newspaper articles, I listened to several talkback radio stations including Newstalk ZB to gauge the public's reaction to the story as it unfolded. While I do not draw specifically in the article on these data from talkback radio, it was useful for gauging reactions to the story from at least some members of the public.

I considered supplementing the data outlined above with data from interviews. I wondered if it might be useful to talk to Nikki and/or Steve Crow, director of Vixen Direct. However, both Nikki and Crow were claiming in media

reports that they had been plagued by reporters. “Crow says he’s tired of all the media attention” (*Waikato Times*, October 2002, 19). In the same newspaper article the reporter writes:

The Times attempted to talk to Nikki at Waikato Hospital. She covered her face with her hands when she saw a photographer and reporter in the reception of ward 55 requesting a meeting. ‘I’m not allowed to give any interviews,’ she said as she was led away by a nurse (Holt, 19 October 2002).

Under the circumstances it seemed unlikely that I would be successful in gaining an interview with either Nikki or Crow, nor did I want to add to the current difficulties they were facing so I decided against attempting to interview them. Also, in the final instance, I am most interested in the way in which Nikki and Crow are discursively constructed through the media and the power relations inherent within these constructions. I was not concerned with attempting to secure *the* truth of the matter from the *real* people involved in the saga.

In analyzing the data I focused on issues on power, regimes of truth, and on how moral narratives and discourses are deployed by various individuals and institutions to (re)present certain images of women, birth and pornography. Stuart Aitken’s (2005) work on textual analysis, especially on poststructural readings of texts (248-49), is informative. Aitken argues that poststructural text analysis involves treating texts (in this case, television and newspaper reports) as social products and recognizing that each text refers in some way to another text. He concludes:

At the level of textual representation, a post-structural perspective questions not only what is known, but also how it comes to be known. It is based upon the simple perspective that nothing in the world is fixed or immutable, that things are grounded on moving foundations. And perhaps most importantly, post-structuralism questions the basis of any method that assumes a structure of signification and understanding that is not politically based (Aitken, 2005, 248-49).

I took this approach to analyzing the data looking for the emergence of particular themes in the *re*-presentations. One theme that emerged was moral outrage. I also looked for complexities and complications that contradicted and problematised this theme of moral outrage. I was interested in interrogating the story-telling, but also audience responses, and my own responses to the stories.

IV Birth rites: introducing Nikki

Tristan Taormino (2002) in New York's *The Village Voice* comments on pregnant Hollywood celebrities who she describes as 'Hot Mamas':

Did you see all the big bellies on TV a few weeks ago? Watching this year's Emmy Awards, I was struck by the number of gorgeous pregnant women on the red carpet. From *Malcolm in the Middle's* Jane Kaczmarek to *Sex and the City's* Cynthia Nixon, Hollywood mummies-to-be were stunning and sultry. Not –oh-you're glowing-like-the Virgin Mary goddesses, but really hot-to-trot vixens. (Taormino, 2002).

Taormino continues that positive portrayals of pregnant women as sexual is "a good thing" because for too long, many people have treated pregnant women as "utterly asexual, as fragile, [and] in 'a delicate condition'". While pregnancy in 'the West' has undergone something of a make-over in the past decade (Longhurst, 2005) it seems that birthing has not. While some pregnant women are adopting fashionable and sometimes revealing styles of dress as a way of resisting constructions of the pregnant subject as modest, respectable, domestic, asexual, and private *re-presentations* of birthing women do not seem to have changed as radically.

Birth, still for the most part, tends to be seen as a special time in a woman's life when she needs to be focused wholly on the new life that she is about to bring into the world. Birth is widely considered to be a personal journey. Although midwives and medical practitioners may be present to assist the mother and baby the only other people who tend to be present or involved are the birthing woman's nearest and dearest. There are societal expectations that birthing will be enacted in particular ways. Regardless of whether it be a 'natural' birth, a pain-assisted birth, a forceps delivery or a caesarean section the expectation is still that birthing women ought to behave in culturally and gendered 'appropriate' ways. Nikki's plan to be filmed giving birth for a pornographic movie was not seen by most as an 'appropriate' way to birth.

Nikki worked 'on and off' as a stripper for several years (Holt, 24 October 2002). Her family lives in Northland, located in the upper North Island of New Zealand, although Nikki is reported to be a former Huntly College student (Holt, 24 October 2002). Huntly is a small working class town with a population of approximately 7,000 residents. It is located on State Highway 1, 35 kilometers North of Hamilton. The landscape is dominated by a massive coal fired power station (<http://www.huntly.net.nz/>). In the United States Nikki might disparagingly be referred to as 'white trash' – she is an Other.

Only one newspaper, the *Waikato Times*, in an extended weekend feature, offered any background information on Steve Crow. He is described as holding an honours degree in marine biology from Auckland University. Crow says:

he fell into the industry 'quite by accident'. He was running a computer company and, while on a business trip to Taiwan in 1993, saw an opening to import porn-based computer games to New Zealand. 'It all went from there' (Holt, 19 October 2002, 19).

The article on the saga includes a large (22cm x 25cm) colour photo of Crow (from the waist up). He is standing, stern-faced, arms folded, in a room walled with pornographic videos. Crow is wearing a brown collarless sweat shirt, an earring in his left ear. He is of stocky build and has a bald/shaven head (Holt, 19 October 2002, 19). The caption under the photograph reads "STEVE CROW: 'There was two hours of talkback this morning. They want me shot. Eveyone's missing the point. It's a civil liberty issue'".

A smaller (7cm x 6cm), head and shoulder photo of Nikki is included in the same article. She has long brown hair, thin penciled eyebrows, dark eye-liner, dark lip-liner, and is smiling. Her shoulders are bare except for a thin pink strap of a halter-neck top. The caption under the photograph reads "CENTRE of attention, Nikki".

Nikki's sexual/employment practices (making pornographic movies) cannot be regarded simply as an explanatory variable for the moral outrage that ensued during the salacious media frenzy about her birth plans. Her social class, the way she speaks, her comportment, her 'look', her age (22 years), her and her family's place of residence, are also factors in the way her corporeality is read by the media and the public. Notions of maternal morality can be seen to intersect with factors such as gender, age, and social class.

After the documentary about Nikki screened the media promptly began to debate appropriate behaviors for pregnant women and the rights of unborn children. Nikki was dubbed the 'porn mum' by the media. Questions were raised as to whether it was lawful to film the birth for a pornographic film. The case was taken by Child, Youth and Family (CYF), a government department, to the High Court. CYF's sought to ascertain whether they should be given guardianship of the unborn child and whether Nikki could be filmed giving birth for *Ripe*. Justice Heath declined CYF's application for wardship and instead appointed Nikki an agent of the court. The filming could proceed but it was ruled that the film maker could not use any scans of the unborn baby, or images of the newly born baby, in the movie. This would breach the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (which has been

signed by New Zealand). Nor were any shots of hospital staff, patients, or visitors to be included.

At this point, many individuals and institutions urged Nikki, for the sake of her child, to abandon her plan for filming but she was adamant she wanted to proceed. Government Health Minister Annette King entered the debate and used her statutory powers to ban the filming on District Health Board Premises. King directed the Waikato Board to say no to the filming. The Board had initially refused to allow any filming, but changed its mind after the court ruling that filming was lawful. Crow and Nikki began to talk to private health providers in an effort to circumvent a ban on him using public hospitals for filming pornography. Nikki was angry about the ban on cameras in the delivery suite saying this was unfair because many other women take videos and photos of their birth for sentimental reasons and to show family and friends. Nikki too claimed that she wanted to show photos of the birth of the first grandchild to family who lived in Northland.

During this period of legal battles, 35 week pregnant Nikki was admitted to hospital with complications that possibly required the birth to take place in a hospital with facilities for an emergency caesarean section. Crow announced on 30 October 2002 that “he was pulling out of the deal to film the birth” (*Waikato Times*, 30 October 2002, 1) on account of Nikki’s health problems (it looked likely that she would deliver by caesarian section). Crow’s decision to pull out may also have been on account of the ongoing public outcry about the proposed movie. On 30 October various newspapers across the country announced “It’s a girl! Porn actress now a mum” (Holt, 30 October 2002, 1). Following the birth of Nikki’s daughter who was named Brianna, the media frenzy died down.

V Moral outrage: sullied spaces

At stake in the making and screening of pornographic films about pregnancy and birth are questions about the conceptualization of pregnant, birthing, and babies’ bodies. When birthing the borders of a woman’s body change rapidly - they are not fixed – but rather have volatility (see Grosz, 1994, 79 on the ways in which zones surrounding bodies change). Zones between bodies and spaces are indeterminate both outside of bodies and inside bodies. Pregnant and birthing bodies destabilize binaries between mother and infant, one and two, inside and outside, self and other. Iris Young (1990, 163) explains “Pregnancy challenges the integration of my body experience by rendering fluid the boundary between what is within, myself, and what is outside, separate. I experience my insides as the space of another, yet my own body.” Julia Kristeva (1981, 31 cited in Young 1990, 162)

notes “Pregnancy seems to be experienced as the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject; redoubling up of the body, separation and coexistence of the self and an other, of nature and consciousness, of physiology and speech.”

‘Coupling’ pregnancy and especially birth with sexual gratification challenges mainstream notions of pregnant and birthing women as modest, ‘motherly’, and focused completely on their infant. Becoming mothers’ must not ‘flaunt’ their sexuality even though (or maybe, because) the pregnant, and especially the birthing body is a body that is [assumed to be] clearly marked as having participated in sexual intercourse (Longhurst, 2000, 463). Nikki’s transgression, therefore, prompted something of a moral panic.

An editorial in the Christchurch newspaper *The Press* claims: “Views on censorship and pornography vary widely in our society, but this project should be universally condemned as beyond the pale” (21 October 2002). Adjectives used to describe the ‘porn birth’ in 20 articles that were analyzed include ‘outrage’, ‘anger’, ‘an affront to other mothers’, ‘an insult to health professionals’, ‘degradation’, ‘bizarre saga’, ‘repulsive sleaze’, ‘sordid commercialism’, ‘distasteful’, ‘abhorrent’ and ‘repugnant’ (see newspaper articles and internet sources listed).

There are very few public expressions of support for Nikki’s actions in the media. Rather ironically, in one newspaper article (*Waikato Times*, 19 October 2002, 19) even film-maker Crow is reported as saying “personally, I don’t agree with it” referring to Nikki’s decision to star in the film. However, Nikki comments that Crow has been “absolutely wonderful” and that she “couldn’t ask for better support” (Holt, 26 October 2002, 3). In the same article Nikki also praises the Waikato Hospital staff who she said had really looked after her. One journalist, while not supporting Nikki’s decision, did at least allow for the possibility that Nikki might be a ‘good’ person: “She [Nikki] aspires to be a good mum and despite the unpromising start, who’s to say she won’t get there?” (*New Zealand Herald*, 16 October 2002). Clearly there are people who support the making of this film (after all, according to Crow hundreds of copies of the film were pre-sold), but these people did not voice their support publicly.

For the most part, as reported in the media, the actions of Nikki and Crow crossed a moral boundary and feelings of abjection ran high (see Kristeva, 1982 and Sibley, 1995, 8-9 on abjection). ‘Good’ sex (read: ‘normal, natural, healthy, holy’ (Rubin, 1989 cited in Hubbard, 2000, 197) sex for procreation) is seen to be turned into ‘bad’ sex (read: deviant and perverted sex and for financial gain). What constitutes good and bad, although highly complex, tends to be constructed as ‘common sense’. Cresswell (2005, 128) notes “The word ‘moral’ indicates a fairly contingent set of rules and expectations dressed up as though it were common

sense.” After Health Minister Annette King stepped in and banned the filming of Nikki giving birth, King commented that she had felt it imperative that she exercised her “moral judgement” (National News, 15 October 2002). Eleven days later when Crow pulled out of the deal, King announced “I am pleased common sense has prevailed. I wish Nikki and baby all the best” (Holt, 26 October 2002, 3).

In examining moral judgments as to whether birthing women ought to be engaged in invoking sexual feelings for commercial gain it is imperative to consider the relationship between bodies and spaces, in this case, a delivery suite in a public hospital. Seeking a court order to stop the filming of the birth of Nikki’s baby could be read as an attempt to reinstate the purity of the delivery suite – a space where mother and child meet, bond, and establish a positive and loving relationship. When it was proposed that the delivery suite would become the site of a pornographic movie, lines between purity and perversity (see Weeks, 2003, 69-90 on perversity) became blurred. While viewing and shooting pornography might be ‘tolerated’ at sites that are seen to be deviant such as sex shops, clubs, strip joints, warehouses, porn studios, private homes, it was not ‘tolerated’ in a hospital birthing ward. One journalist wrote “it defies belief that anyone could imagine that the real-life birth of a child in a hospital delivery theatre should be thrown open to skin-flick makers – and their subsequent audiences” (*The Press*, 21 October 2002). The journalist continued, “operating theatres” should not be allowed to become “free porn studios” (*The Press*, 21 October 2002). Filming a pornographic film in a delivery suite hugely disrupted the prevailing moral order. A delivery suite maybe an intensely sensuous space, imbued with feelings of heightened pain, emotion, joy and sorrow, but sexual feelings are usually repressed or ignored in this setting. Another journalist wrote “The idea of a porn movie crew hanging around the local maternity ward, theoretically poised to film someone else’s cervical dilation, would distress me utterly” (*Waikato Times*, 23 October 2002). Later in the same article the journalist continues:

He [Crow] and his crew have no place in a hospital, no place around women suffering in labour, no place near newborn babies. As far as I’m concerned it would be an affront to mothers forced to use the same hospital that their families should be near him, and an insult to health professionals to have to tolerate his presence (*Waikato Times*, 23 October 2002).

One possible reading of this quote is that it expresses a fear of contagion. Both Nikki and the film crew would be ‘out of place’ in the maternity ward. Furthermore their very presence presents a risk of sullyng other mothers and their families in the vicinity. The hospital delivery suite is widely considered to be a space in which health, medical, and surgical care is offered. As such, although hospitals are sites of ‘real’ flesh and blood bodies, they are imbued with discourses

of science and rationality. They are spaces that must be kept as free as possible from all kinds of pollutants and impurities (bacterial and moral). Filming a birth to include in a porn movie was seen by many, including journalists, midwives, nurses, doctors, social workers, Commissioner for Children, Minister of Health, and talk-back radio callers, to most certainly defile the space. Professor Jane Ritchie, an expert in Psychology and Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Waikato, describes the prospect of filming the birth for a porn movie as 'repugnant'. Ritchie claims "It is not like she is doing it in New York. This is a small country. That child will face stigma for life" (*Waikato Times*, 19 October 2002, 19). Chief social worker Shannon Pakura also mistrusted Nikki and sought to award guardianship of Nikki's baby to the Child, Youth and Family Services Department.

Like the move towards pregnancy chic, Nikki and Crow's desire to make a pornographic film about pregnancy and birth was driven at least in part by monetary gain (described by one journalist as "sordid commercialism" (*The Press*, 21 October 2002)). Advertisers and retailers are always on the look-out for new products and new markets. In the 1980s marketers began selling the idea of beauty, fitness, and health to young men (Miller et al., 1998; Mort, 1996). In the 1990s marketers began seeing pregnant women as offering commercial possibilities, especially white, middle-class, fashion conscious, pregnant women (Longhurst, 2005). In the 2000s Crow identified a gap in the pornographic film industry. Although pornography involving pregnant women is nothing new,⁵ Crow claimed that to the best of his knowledge no one in the world had ever before filmed a birth for inclusion in a commercial pornographic movie (*60 Minutes*).⁶ Crow comments the porn industry in New Zealand is growing. He offers 16 new titles a month to New Zealand's 480 video libraries. Crow received hundreds of pre-orders for *Ripe*, which will cost NZ\$69.95 to purchase (Holt, 2002, 19). Porn actors, he says, make around NZ\$30,000-40,000 a month. It is perhaps worth noting, however, that Crow spent NZ\$15-20,000 on legal fees and so in the final instance maybe stood to make less money from the film, unless publicity boosted sales. Crow vowed to give all profits from *Ripe* to Nikki's unborn child (Holt, 19 October 2002, 19).

⁵ Even without Crow's video there is still plenty of pornography featuring pregnant women (but not births). "A quick survey of current print, video, and online pornography proves that pregnant chicks are actually a pretty popular fetish. Nearly every other issue of *Hustler's Taboo* ... the hardcore fetish magazine from Larry Flynt's company, features a pictorial of a pregnant pin-up" (Taormino, 2002, 1). A sexual fetish for pregnant women and birth is known as *maiesiophilia*.

⁶ Nikki and Crow both seemed to assume, at the early stages of the unfolding of events at least, that Nikki would give birth vaginally. Discussions about how birth by caesarian section might or might not 'work' in the film were absent in media reports.

And yet filming Nikki's labour and the birth of her baby was not just about financial gain. It was about morality, difference and human rights. Crow says "It's a civil liberty issue ... it's not something I would want my daughter or wife to do, but it is Nikki's right to do it. I think sticking a cigarette in your mouth is disgusting, but I don't tell people not to smoke" (Holt, 19 October 2002, 19). Crow mentions his rights and the rights of Nikki but it is also about the rights of Nikki's unborn child, the midwife, hospital staff, members of the District Health Board, Child, Youth and Family (CYF), the High Court, the Commissioner for Children, the Health Minister and 'the public'. Many individuals, organisations and institutions felt they had some kind of stake in this issue.

VI Conclusion

The aim of this article was to examine actor Nikki and pornographic film maker Steve Crow's desire to have a birth filmed for inclusion in a pornographic movie to order to illustrate that the moral boundary between what is considered 'normal' and what is considered 'perverse' is constantly struggled over and is spatially constituted. This pornography of birth shows that certain sexual acts rouse anxieties, and even abjection and disgust, and that what counts as moral is tied up with issues of class, race, gender, sexuality and so on, but also with space, place, territory, and boundaries. By not complying with 'taken for granted', 'common-sense' understandings of motherhood Nikki parodies the purity and naturalness of pregnancy, birth, and child rearing and constructs the space of the birthing ward as explicitly sexual. In doing this she crosses a moral boundary. Nikki is thought to risk not only her own moral reputation but also the reputation of her baby. What is more Nikki's behaviour is seen to pose a risk to the sanctity of the birthing ward and to put the other mothers and their families at risk of being sullied.

Pornography might be 'tolerated' by some and embraced by others, in spaces such as the internet, private bedrooms or lounges, clubs and other sites of erotic entertainment, but not in hospital birthing wards. Birthing wards are widely considered to be 'moral' spaces. Nikki parodies the purity and naturalness of pregnancy, birth, and child rearing by constructing the space of the birthing ward as explicitly sexual. In doing so she crosses a moral boundary and is thought to risk not only her own moral reputation but also her baby's reputation. To borrow Taormino's (2004) phrase, Nikki is a 'hot mama', but she is a 'mama' who is 'too hot' for most.

Birthing and pornography are both cultural performances - performances that tend to be held apart even though sex is the cornerstone of both. In bringing together birthing and pornography there emerged for some a fear of mixing unlike

categories. Nikki transgressed boundaries and various people including a High Court Judge, the Commissioner for Children, the Minister of Health, a Professor in Psychology, a senior social worker, journalists and members of the public drew on moral narratives and discourses to discipline her in an attempt to restore respectability and the sanctity of the hospital birthing ward. Nikki was constructed as a threat to 'proper', 'decent', and 'respectable' mothers.

David Smith (2000, 1) notes:

Human beings have moral values ... ideas about what is right or wrong, good or bad, better or worse, in connection with important aspects of life. These values guide our actions, helping us to decide what we should or should not do, how we ought to live; and they provide a basis for evaluation of the conduct of others. They can vary among individuals and groups, and hence from place to place, as part of our world of difference.

Geographies of morality, identity and difference are useful in furthering understanding of people's relationship with places, especially when sex is involved. Sexual performances are constituted within different contexts of moral regulation. The boundary between what is as considered 'normal' and what is considered 'disgusting' or 'sick' is constantly struggled over. Particular kinds of sexual practices and sexual identities are deemed appropriate in some spaces but not in others. Different constructions and representations of sexed bodies can provoke feelings of both desire and disgust – abjection - depending on the ways in which these bodies perform in different social and spatial contexts.

Philip Hubbard (2000, 197), drawing on the work of Rubin (1989), argues that issues of morality are:

never far away when sex is discussed, serving to naturalize the idea that sex must involve a *meaningful* material and emotional exchange based on procreative sexual intercourse, branding those who indulge in different forms of heterosex as immoral and deviant (or 'perverted') (italics in original).

There already exists in geography, prompted in part by queer theory, a rich literature on sex and sexuality as salient parts of people's subjectivity and on how spaces are powerfully imbued with normative versions of sexuality.⁷ Sexual

⁷ See Binnie and Valentine (1999) for a review of 'geographies of sexualities' – also see Bell and Valentine (1995), Brown and Knopp (2003), Elder (1999) and Nast (1998).

dissidents have challenged normative constructions of heterosexist space and carved out other spaces where it is possible to perform queer sexual identities (e.g. Davis, 1995; Johnston, 2005; Johnston and Valentine, 1995; Valentine, 1996).

There is room, however, for much more work that challenges normative heterosexuality, not just work on queer identities, but also on the relationship between constructions of queer and straight (e.g. Cream, 1995; McDowell, 1995). There is potential for research on queerness, bisexuality, heterosexuality, pregnancy, birth, romance, passion, desire, disgust, pornography, prostitution and so on in relation to the ways in which (im)moralities are constituted within particular spaces. I look forward to a further opening up of discussion around what counts as moral and immoral and how morality is infused with geographical notions of space, place, access and boundaries.

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