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# The Politics of Mediating Female Sexual Subjectivity: Feminist Pornography and the Production of Cultural Variation

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THE POLITICS OF MEDIATING FEMALE SEXUAL SUBJECTIVITY:  
FEMINIST PORNOGRAPHY AND THE PRODUCTION OF  
CULTURAL VARIATION

by

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A thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
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This thesis entitled:  
The Politics of Mediating Female Sexual Subjectivity:  
Feminist Pornography and the Production of Cultural Variation  
written by Rachael Anne Liberman  
has been approved for Journalism and Mass Communication

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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## ABSTRACT

Liberman, Rachael (Ph.D., Communication, Journalism and Mass Communication)

The Politics of Mediating Female Sexual Subjectivity: Feminist Pornography and the Production of Cultural Variation

Over the last thirty years, feminist pornography has steadily grown as a filmic genre that stands in opposition to the formulaic sexual discourse produced by the mainstream pornography industry. This emergent genre, known for its resistive interest in constructing diverse portrayals of female sexuality, operates at various controversial intersections—including feminism and pornography—and is slowly beginning to penetrate popular culture. This dissertation aims to account for a descriptive gap in porn studies and feminist media studies literature, and most importantly, works to theorize the cultural impact of this genre as a discursive attempt to mediate female sexuality within conventional constraints. Using a feminist/critical cultural studies framework, this qualitative study investigates negotiation and nuance through interviews with feminist directors of feminist pornography, interviews with female performers that work with both feminist and mainstream pornography directors, and focus groups with self-selected consumers in New York City and San Francisco. In general, this data reveals modes of developed spectatorship and media accounts that point toward normative viewing practices (i.e., online viewing) and negotiated reading patterns. Orientations toward feminism—as individually negotiated on the production set and during consumption—proved to be the driving force behind the praxis and pleasure situated within this genre. The enactment of consent, communication, and safety works as the core of this project, and sex positivity and third wave feminist discourse dictate the majority of performance and meaning. This dissertation concludes with a theoretical reflection on the cultural contribution of feminist pornography, and argues that production and consumption processes form a feminist performative heterotopia that offers a space for the negotiation of female sexual subjectivity.

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Rachael Liberman  
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## INTRODUCTION

On November 12, 2011, I witnessed a pornography<sup>1</sup> shoot for the first time. In theory, this shouldn't have been an issue; I'd been researching the nuances of the pornography industry for several years and had become well acquainted with what to expect. By that time, I had recently conducted interviews with feminist pornography directors as part of my dissertation fieldwork and had gained a significant amount of awareness around the production process. But when I arrived at the location—a nondescript mini-Victorian in San Francisco—I felt a wave of anxiety: Will they detect that I've never been to a pornography shoot before? How casual should I act? How much staring is too much staring? Will they trust me although I'm a researcher? I knocked on the door and Shine Louise Houston, the only feminist pornography director that agreed to let me witness the production process<sup>2</sup>, greeted me with tired eyes. I announced who I was, she smiled, and then showed me to the kitchen, where I found coffee, hummus and pita chips, strawberries, cookies, and water bottles. Her co-director, Fiona<sup>3</sup>, was there, along with Houston's production assistant, Vivienne<sup>4</sup>. I sat down and introduced myself, and after

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<sup>1</sup> In order to differentiate “pornography” from the subjective term, “pornographic,” this dissertation defines pornography as those texts that are produced and distributed by the pornography industry.

<sup>2</sup> After initial email correspondence with Shine Louise Houston, I was invited to attend a shoot and was offered several date options. After I agreed on November 12, 2011, I received an email on October 24, 2011 from Houston's assistant that explained the format of the shoot and included information for performers. In the “helpful notes” section of that email, it states that: “The shoot is quick and fun with 3-4 friendly queer/women on set. Filming starts with dialog/set-up, then sex, then a break and finishes with an informal post-scene interview between co-stars.”

<sup>3</sup> I did not receive permission to use Houston's co-director's given name, so this is pseudonym.

<sup>4</sup> I did not receive permission to use Houston's production assistant's given name, so this is a pseudonym.

exchanging handshakes and light conversation, I noted that Fiona was suspicious of my presence.

Meanwhile, Houston let me know that they had some “setting up” to take care of, which consisted of putting new sheets on the bed, organizing paperwork for the performers, setting up cameras and lighting, and reviewing the day’s production timeline. There were going to be two scenes shot that day, with a lunch break in between. After about an hour, circa 10 a.m., two female performers arrived: Juliette March and Teyshas. They came to the kitchen, introduced themselves, and waited for instructions from Houston. While sitting at the kitchen table, they filled out legal paperwork, Houston photocopied their drivers’ licenses (to make sure they were of the legal age) and they reviewed their standard compensation (\$300 each for performing in one scene). While they waited for their turn to enter the “set,” or the bedroom adjacent to the kitchen, one of the performers sat on the other’s lap. While they flirted, kissed, and massaged each other, I made a mental note that they were “getting into character,” or, working to surface their sexual energy and chemistry with one another. Later in the day, I was told that it was one of the performer’s first erotic shoot, so an additional reason for their intimate interaction could have been for relaxation, or calming nerves. In the final minutes before Houston’s cue to begin filming, they visited the bathroom to prepare their bodies for the camera, which consisted of relieving themselves and cleaning their genitals.

Before the scene officially began, I asked the performers whether or not they minded if I was in the room during the shoot. This was Houston’s idea; she wanted to make sure her performers were comfortable with my presence. After I explained my dissertation project, they nonchalantly granted permission. Once Houston and Fiona were ready, we were asked to come inside the bedroom to join them. Vivienne was already in the bedroom, setting up a live feed that would stream for “Level Three” members of Houston’s website, Pink and White Productions.

Once inside, Vivienne explained to me that she<sup>5</sup> was also in charge of maintaining their Twitter handle, and was poised, phone in hand, to tweet during the shoot. In addition to the tweets, Vivienne was also in charge of real-time photography; the live shots would be posted on the website. Once everyone was settled, Houston reminded the performers that they were in complete control of their sexual activity and that everyone else was simply there to operate the cameras and capture *their* encounter. I stood next to Vivienne and was instructed to follow her movement so that I didn't accidentally enter the shot. It was then explained to me that Houston and Fiona had developed a filming system that involved quick movements and hand signals, and in a small bedroom, it would have been very easy to disrupt the flow.

After practicing the entrance a couple times—this shoot was for Houston's *Crash Pad* series, which is based on the narrative of couples finding a secret room in San Francisco to engage in sexual activity—the cameras started rolling and did not stop for either second takes nor camera angle negotiations for the next thirty minutes. At one point, a vibrator chord got in the way of a close-up shot, and after moments of confusion, Vivienne moved it away. Although Houston and Fiona exchanged glances about this disruption, they did not stop filming. While the sexual activity was unfolding—the performers used multiple sex toys, engaged in light spanking and choking, and repeatedly checked up on each other with questions such as, “More lube? Does that feel good? What would you like me to do to you?”—I was standing one foot away from the bed, fixed between Houston and Vivienne, and trying to remain calm and professional. I focused on observing camera movement, Houston's strategies, and the sexual performance in front of me.

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<sup>5</sup> Both Tristan and Alexa symbolically registered as genderqueer due to their appearance, but I did not feel comfortable asking how they identified. I have decided to use female pronouns for this account, as a default, because they appeared to be biologically female. For future research, pronoun preference will be included in interview schedules.

For the first ten minutes, I was extremely uncomfortable (Houston calls this “popping your porn cherry”), but after I consciously switched over to ethnographic mode, I was able to mitigate my personal anxieties around watching live, unscripted sexual activity and was able to focus on context, space, and negotiation. By the end of the scene, the performers had experienced multiple orgasms, were fully naked, and were noticeably covered in sweat. Multiple sex toys were strewn on the bed and the sheets were in disarray and moist. After inspecting the bed, one of the performers exclaimed, “We didn’t get blood on the bed this time, yeah!” Once things settled down, Houston instructed the two performers to sit on the bed for a post-scene interview. She gave them a list of questions to ask one another (What did you like about the scene? What was challenging? Why do you do porn?), and let them know that she was going to turn her camera back on and help them remember the questions if they forgot. The performers discussed their emotional and physical sexual connections they felt during the shoot, the apprehension felt because it was a new experience for one partner, and the enjoyment they find as participating in the pornography industry. As they did so, they looked at each other and at times, held hands and embraced one another.

Once they completed the interview, Vivienne informed the performers that a viewer (member) of the live feed tweeted that the two models “looked good together.” In acknowledgement of the viewer and his/her tweet, the performers waved at the camera and smiled. After the performers were paid (via check) and left, Houston and Fiona immediately put on rubber gloves and changed the bed sheets. Vivienne asked us for our lunch orders and while we waited, I asked Houston and Fiona pornography industry-related questions and they asked me about my project. Once Vivienne returned and we began eating, our discussion relaxed to relationships and dating.

Toward the end of the lunch break, two more performers arrived: Juliette Stray and Rain DeGrey. This time, the couple included a female and transgender female who identified as monogamous. They immediately seemed more comfortable than the first performance couple, and began “getting into wardrobe” in the kitchen, in front of us. As they walked around in various states of undress, I noticed that the transgender female performer still had a penis. During their wardrobe and make-up application, they frequently visited the bathroom for preparatory purposes. They were also asked to fill out paperwork and provide identification to Houston. After this exchange, the couple began discussing the details of their scene with Houston, and let her know that they were interested in rough play, specifically, that they enjoy choking and passing out as sexual play.

After Houston heard this, she told them that, for legal reasons, they could not pass out (this legal restraint is explained in chapter six). She explained that choking was permissible, however, as long as consent and communication were explicitly depicted during the scene. For this particular scene, I was not invited inside the room, but was able to watch the live feed from my computer in the adjacent kitchen. I could hear aggressive movement, moaning and yelling coming from the bedroom, which added a helpful contextual layer, despite my limited access. This performance was noticeably more aggressive than the first, but like the first scene, the performers communicated with one another. Knowing that they were a real-life couple assuaged my concern during the more aggressive parts and I felt confident that they had, most likely, previously engaged in and enjoyed these culturally abject sexual practices. After all, they had no direction from Houston and were put in complete charge of their sexual performance.

At one point, everything stopped and the door swung open. The transgender female performer ran to the bathroom and Vivienne explained to me that she had a “botched enema,” resulting in the emission of a moderate amount of water on the floor and the bed. Houston

decided to stop the scene after that (they already filmed for 30 minutes) and I was allowed to watch the post-scene interview from the doorway. Similar to the *dénouement* of the previous scene, the bed was in an expected state of disorganization. However, because of the increased amount of choking in this scene, there were traces of vomit on the bed this time. After the post-scene interview, Houston, Fiona, and Vivienne each put a new set of rubber gloves, began changing the sheets, and started joking about the “glamorous life of porn.”

When they finished cleaning up, I asked the Houston, Fiona, and Vivienne supplemental questions, off-the-record, and rescheduled a phone interview with Houston for the following week. We were scheduled to do an interview after the second scene was shot, but she was noticeably exhausted and had already exceeded my expectations by allowing me to attend the entire production shoot. I let everyone know that I was calling a cab and they immediately stopped me and informed me of Homobiles, a cab service that serves the LGBTQIA<sup>6</sup> community. Vivienne placed the call for me and I let everyone know that I’d wait outside while they finished up. After exchanging “thank yous” and “goodbyes” to Houston, Fiona, and Vivienne, I exited the house and waited for the Homobile vehicle to arrive. I was told that the drivers use their own vehicles, so to not expect the iconic yellow cab. Instead, a blue pick-up truck arrived and the driver leaned out of the window and asked if I was Rachael. I nodded my head and got into the front seat of the car.

During the ride home, we discussed everything from politics to the dance community to the experiences of identifying as queer in San Francisco. It turned out that my driver, who identified as a queer woman, was a dance instructor. After I shared that my sister is a Tisch

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<sup>6</sup> This acronym has evolved with emerging language, but at this time, according to the University of Colorado GLBTQ Resource Center website, this identity-preference acronym stands for: Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Allied (<http://www.colorado.edu/glbtrc/>, accessed on November 10, 2012).

School of the Arts-trained dancer-turned-lawyer, she told me all about her life as a dancer and theater instructor. By the time we arrived at my destination, we were still engaged in conversation. After I paid her and left the truck, I was symbolically leaving one cultural space and prepared to return back to my “normal” life. I reflected on the first time I had heard of feminist pornography, which was during the fall semester of my second year as a graduate student, and how I never thought that someday I’d witness an actual shoot in San Francisco. Before I knocked on my friend’s door, I looked around at the people walking their dogs, the retail shops with expensive clothing, and the joggers weaving around pedestrians. Do they know about feminist pornography? Would they believe it if I told them? Why did it feel like what I just experienced was so far from “reality?”

Aside from the fact that I was still in shock from watching people have sexual intercourse right in front of me, the other part of this immediate impulse was directly connected to my understanding of the contemporary theoretical currents within the feminist media studies paradigm, and its contemporary reflections on sexuality, objectification, and “enlightened sexism” (Douglas 2010). I was confused because I had just witnessed pleasure-in-self-sexualization and it truly didn’t feel like anyone was a victim of consumer culture. On the other hand, an invisible, or non-existent, victimhood is exactly what I should have expected, according to this current wave of theory. In this particular conceptualization within feminist media studies, the combination of feminist third-wave individualistic, empowerment discourse (Snyder 2008) and neo-liberal discourses of consumer culture leads to a condition whereby women take pleasure in the consumption of images and products that self-sexualize (Gill 2009). In other words, whereas second wave feminist theorists would argue against the pleasure of reading an advertisement that exploits a woman’s body parts and then using the rhetoric of feminist empowerment to justify purchasing that product, third wave discourse supports the notion of “choice” sexuality; therefore,

this self-sexualization is filed under “liberation” rather than hegemony (Snyder 2008). Rosalind Gill (2007) terms this condition “postfeminist media culture,” and unpacks it in the following way:

This new notion emphasizes the contradictory nature of postfeminist discourses and the entanglement of both feminist and anti-feminist themes within them. It also points to a number of other relatively stable features that comprise or constitute a postfeminist discourse. These include the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; a resurgence in ideas of natural sexual difference; a marked sexualisation of culture; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference (150).

Elsewhere, Gill (2009) notes, “Increasingly, young women are presented not as passive sex objects, but as active, desiring sexual subjects, who seem to participate enthusiastically in the practices and forms of self-presentation that earlier generations of feminists regarded as connected to subordination” (97). In addition, historical and social patterns have also had a direct influence on this politicized consumption behavior. Because women have been increasingly hailed into individualized consumption, as opposed to focusing on purchasing for the family, women have adopted consumer culture as a way to express their individuality and sexual empowerment (Attwood, 2005). Based on this contemporary development, Angela McRobbie (2008) argues that consumer culture has become a “critical place in the formation of the categories of youthful femininity” (p. 532). And as a result of this revered relationship, she argues, women are beginning to accept the cues of consumer culture, including the myths of sexism used to sell products, as guide for their gender and sexual performances (McRobbie 2008, 546).

In her book, *Enlightened Sexism*, Susan Douglas (2010) explains how this process operates in media culture,

Here’s the twist that emerged. Some young women wanted sexual equity with men: that’s a claim for equal power. They didn’t want to be mere sex objects, they wanted to be active sexual agents. But while true and total sexual equality



between men and women is still too threatening, it has nonetheless proved lucrative to flatter women that they have it. So the media began to highlight this message: it's through sex and sexual display that women really have the power to get what they want. And because the true path to power comes from being an object of desire, girls and women should now actively choose—even celebrate and embrace—being sex objects. That's the mark of a truly confident, can-do girl: one whose objectification isn't imposed from without, but comes from within (156).

Citing the “pornification of culture” thesis<sup>7</sup> (Attwood, 2006; Mayer, 2005; Paul, 2005; McNair, 1996, 2002), Douglas elaborates on her conceptualization of “enlightened sexism” by describing the emergence of the “sexpert” in media, a woman that “knows a lot about sex, is comfortable with sex, initiates and enjoys sex on an equal footing with men, and talks a lot about sex with her girlfriends” (156). Douglas argues that the sexpert is the “hybrid of empowerment and objectification” (157), citing *Sex and the City*, hip-hop artists such as Foxy Brown, and *Cosmopolitan* as examples. Gail Dines, an outspoken radical feminist and anti-pornography activist, also condemns this “hypersexual culture” (117) and its negative impacts as a socializing agent:

But inundating girls and women with the message that their most worthy attribute is their sexual hotness and crowding out other messages, pop culture is grooming them just like and individual perpetrator would. It is slowly chipping away at their self-esteem, stripping them of a sense of themselves as whole human beings, and providing them with an identity that emphasizes sex and de-emphasizes every other human attribute (118).

Later in her anti-pornography polemic, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked our Sexuality* (2010), Dines argues that this cultural condition celebrates “a sexuality that has its roots in porn and is now so mainstream that it is fast becoming normalized” (119). For Dines, the result of pop culture, and pornography in particular, “sexualizing” women is that women become willing participants in

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<sup>7</sup> The “pornification of culture” thesis is based on Brian McNair’s term, “pornographication.” He (2009) writes that, “The term refers to the cross-over of pornography from the private to the public sphere – what Linda Williams portrayed as a journey from the ob/scene of the back room, men-only stag reel to the on-scene of commercialized, industrialized porn made for every taste and perversion and consumed by women as well as man, gay as well as straight (Williams, 1989). It describes the fascination with pornography that emerged, from the late 1980s especially, in the worlds of high art and popular culture, in Hollywood cinema and literature, advertising and fashion, in journalism and scholarly outputs of the academy” (55).

their exploitation, which is similar to the “choice” and “consumption”-based arguments made by Rosalind Gill (2009) and Angela McRobbie (2008). For these feminist media scholars, media often becomes a site for false sexual agency; women are exercising their third wave feminist right to “choose” their means of sexual expression, but corporations, the pornography industry, and popular culture have already arranged this heteronormative menu for them. But what if this power dynamic shifted and *feminists* were the ones mediating female sexuality? If pornography has “hijacked our sexuality” as Gail Dines argues, what if feminists “hijacked” it back?

After my experience on a feminist pornography production set with Shine Louise Houston, it became clear that this form of feminist praxis couldn’t be classified in dichotomies: exploitation or empowerment; agency or structure; activism or commodification, and so on. And further, assigning “empowerment” or “exploitation” to this project would obscure its larger cultural contribution. Although this current stream of thought within feminist media studies is a valuable epistemological contribution, it doesn’t quite explain the cultural contribution of feminist pornography. Figuring out that contribution, and analyzing what that means for the mediation of female sexuality, is the focus of this dissertation.

At this point in pornography scholarship, or Porn Studies (Williams 2004; Attwood 2010), little is known about the cultural dynamism of feminist pornography. Most detailed definitions have come from directors themselves, from documentarians including Becky Goldberg (2003), or from the submission guidelines and media coverage from the Toronto-based annual Feminist Porn Awards. For example, the following is a definition of feminist pornography from Tristan Taormino (2005), one of the feminist pornography directors involved in this study:

Feminist porn is porn that empowers women and men: it gives them information and ideas about sex. It teaches. It inspires fantasy and adventure. It validates viewers when they see themselves or a part of their sexuality represented. It presents sex as joyful, fun, safe, and satisfying. It counteracts the other messages we get from society: sex is shameful, naughty, dirty, scary, dangerous, or it’s the domain of men, where theirs

are the only desires and fantasies that get fulfilled. And yes, it arouses, but even if that's all it does, that's a good thing. Our sexuality is part of who we are, and pleasure has value (96).

In addition to this audience reception-based account, Taormino adds that feminist pornography has a unique relationship to the production process, and that “there is absolute consent and no coercion of any kind” (94). She goes on to state that,

Women and men [performers] are given choices: they choose who they will have sex with, they choose the positions they want to be in, they choose the toys they want to play with, all based on what feels good to them, all based on their actual sexuality, not a fabricated script. The movie is a collaboration between director and performer, with the actor's input and their ideas about how they want to be represented. This puts a new spin on the notion of objectification—What happens when the so-called powerless object willingly and enthusiastically participates in the creation of his or her own image? I think it is possible to create sexual images without stripping away someone's entire identity (96).

On the one hand, Taormino's definition highlights egalitarianism, participation, labor empowerment, and healthy sexual practice. On the other hand, this definition prompts more questions than answers. Further, without the availability of audience reception research, how do we know that feminist pornography audiences feel “validated,” or empowered, or that they truly feel that “they see themselves or part of their sexuality represented.” In the end, this is Taormino's personal vision and interpretation of her work, but it provides little data on the *lived* reality of feminist pornography—for directors, performers, or consumers. Considering both the “sexualization of media” allegations from some feminist media studies scholars and the tumultuous history between feminism and the pornography industry, an analysis of feminist pornography needs to address nuance, description, and process.

This dissertation aims to fill in these practical and theoretical gaps surrounding the practices of feminist pornography. In order to offer a corrective to traditional one-directional research on pornography—attention given only to effects, or content, or behavior—this study offers a dynamic account of relationships between performers and directors, directors and the

production process, texts and audiences, audiences and the production process, and the role of feminism throughout. This relational approach effectively exposes meanings, myths, and discourses that are otherwise overlooked when researchers focus on only one aspect of media culture. This focus on dynamism, especially for a highly controversial and popular media text, is a direct result of the British Cultural Studies paradigm, and its deconstruction of high/low (mass) culture, as well as its intent on analyzing texts *and* audiences (Leavis 1930; Brantlinger 1983; Schulman, 1993; Gunster, 2004; Hoggart 1957; Williams 1961). In his article “Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms,” Stuart Hall (1980) reminds us that “British Cultural Studies is an interdisciplinary project that seeks to understand the complex relationships between elements of a whole way of life, which includes analyses of structure, power, determination, and agency” (67). Because feminist pornography embodies the intersection of various *complex relationships*, including feminism, media, sexuality, pornography, and the commodification of bodies, it follows that an interdisciplinary, holistic approach is the most appropriate.

Further, the cultural studies framework has had a direct influence on historical developments within feminist media studies, the scholarly domain that was mentioned earlier in this introduction. In her analysis of the analytical evolution of feminist media studies, Liesbet van Zoonen (1994) explains that early researchers initiated the domain by identifying stereotyped representations and then supported a transmission model for the explanation of effects, or socialization. This early group of researchers argued that the depiction of a sexualized woman in a film, for example, would directly impact the socialization of a passive audience member, leading them to believe that the representation on screen is a reflection of “reality” (30). An example of work from this theoretical orientation includes the seminal work of Gaye Tuchman (1978) and her evaluation of the representations of women in magazines, televisions and newspapers.

van Zoonen argues that conclusions such as Tuchman's—that rely on an evaluation of representations, analyze them against “dominant values and attitudes,” then argue that those representations will effectively socialize audiences—fail to take into account the notion that representations in media are part of a *complex* production process, and that audience reception includes a decoding process, or polysemic readings (Hall 2001, 41). In the end, van Zoonen argues that the project of feminist media studies should analyze the construction of *meanings* and *values* as they inform cultural life rather than the analysis of distorted representations and how they have a direct impact on socialization (see Radway 1984; Ang 1985; Brunsdon 1997). Overall, feminist media studies scholars that have adopted the cultural studies framework would argue that sexualized or objectified representations of women in media work to maintain *ideologies*, rather than impose *direct effects*, about women as sexual beings through the meaning and value placed on these images. This increased attention toward the maintenance of ideologies has resulted in both a working research framework and a critical eye toward the intersection of patriarchy and capitalism as they operate in media culture. This contemporary moment within feminist media studies directly informs this dissertation's methodology, yet also works as a skeptical stumbling block that my data collection works to overcome.

In order to capture Hall's “a whole way of life,” this dissertation aims to combine the foundations of British cultural studies and feminist media studies through the utilization of “critical” cultural studies as described by Douglas Kellner (2003). Rather than focus on one component of media culture, critical cultural studies includes a contextual, comprehensive approach that refuses to privilege texts, audiences, or political economy. According to Kellner (2003), “At its strongest, cultural studies contains a threefold project of analyzing the production and political economy of culture, cultural texts, and the audience reception of those texts and their effects” (12). Due to cultural studies' inherently critical and political dimension—including

the contemplation of historical context and influence, hierarchies among social relations, hegemony and theories of social production and reproduction—it would follow that a research project built on this paradigm would be inherently political (as opposed to objectivist and apolitical), transformative and empowering as well (Kellner 2003; Kellner & Share 2007). The adoption of a *feminist/critical cultural studies framework* offers a unique and comprehensive approach to my research questions about the practices surrounding the production and consumption of feminist pornography, which will be explored in greater length in the methodology chapter.

Aside from questions prompted by the feminist media studies and critical cultural studies paradigms, this dissertation draws from fundamental feminist inquiries about gender, sexual practice and identification, media representation, sexual violence, sexual subjectivity, and feminist praxis. My initial interest in feminist pornography led me to write my master's thesis, titled "Feminist Pornography as an Extension of the Third Wave," but as I've deepened my comprehension of feminist theory, postmodern theory, critical theory, queer theory, social theory, and media theory, "understanding" feminist pornography is much more than situating it historically as an outgrowth of third wave discourse. Rather, the existence of feminist pornography raises important questions about the definition of feminism itself, as well as our categorization of mediated sexual violence. The canon of feminist theory involves many philosophers and researchers that argue for a reversal of power; if women are in control of their sexuality—the naming, the enactment, the choice of partner, etc.—and the reign of heteronormativity lost its hegemonic power, then we could truly experience equality, freedom, and acceptance (Millet 1990; Rich 1980; Irigaray 1985). Feminist pornography stands as the material enactment of this reversal; it directly addresses commodified sexuality, from a feminist perspective, and most importantly, women are in control of the production process. However, it

is important to remember that they operate within the constraints of media culture and pornography industry conventions. This, theoretically, complicates matters.

The first part of this dissertation offers a literature review through which I establish a context for the emergence and field of feminist pornography. Chapter one tracks the feminist treatment of pornography through the lens of sexual subjectivity—beginning with the Porn Wars in the 1980s—in order to set the cultural and historical stage for the emergence of feminist pornography. Here, the relationship between feminist theory and pornography practice is explored. Next, chapter two examines the field of feminist pornography directors in an effort to explore both the content and diversity within the genre. Profiles of both US- and non-US feminist pornography directors and textual analyses of selected scenes are offered in an effort to offer a practical understanding.

The second part of this dissertation reveals of my research findings based on: (1) interviews with feminist pornography directors; (2) interviews with performers who have worked for both feminist and mainstream pornography directors; and (3) focus groups with female-identified pornography consumers in New York City and San Francisco. The three data chapters are based on my feminist/critical cultural studies methodology: chapter four is dedicated to production and political economy; chapter five is dedicated to audience reception; and chapter six is dedicated to the treatment of feminism within the feminist pornography media text. In the final chapter, the conclusion, I consider the cultural contribution of feminist pornography as a reverse sexual discourse of the female body. Whereas the traditional theoretical impulse is to situate sexual discourses as disciplinary, I argue that this media practice constructs a feminist, heterotopic space for individuals to experience a meaningful confrontation with the structure of the pornography industry, their individual sexual identities and performances, and the state of sexual practice in US culture.

## CHAPTER ONE

On the conceptual surface, “feminist pornography” could be categorized as a paradox. Considering the mediation and subsequent public awareness of the feminist anti-pornography movement during the 1980s (Bronstein 2011), coupled with the feminist anti-sexual violence campaign that began in the 1970s (Bevacqua 2000), it follows, philosophically, that a feminist-based production of pornography would be antithetical to the women’s movement. Although this mainstreamed agenda, shared by both radical and liberal feminists, has been historically transformative, it offers a myopic view of the dynamic relationship between feminism and pornography; although some feminists have certainly protested this industry, many others have worked to raise awareness of the potential benefits of support and participation (see Strossen 2000; Nagle 1997; Milne 2005). Upon further investigation, it appears that both “camps”—and feminists in between—share a common interest: *the protection of female sexual subjectivity*. Although interpreted through situational and political prisms, the goal of allowing women to practice agentic sexuality is ultimately shared by the entire feminist movement.

Sociologist Deborah Tolman (2002) defines sexual subjectivity as “a person’s experience of herself as a sexual being, who feels entitled to sexual pleasure and sexual safety, who makes active sexual choices, and who has an identity as a sexual being” (6). This state of being is directly related to the practice of sexual agency, although it is more specific in its description of practice<sup>1</sup>. On the one hand, anti-pornography feminists feel that pornography limits and exploits sexual subjectivity (Dworkin 1981; MacKinnon 1993, Russell 1993); and on the other, anti-censorship and sex positive feminists argue that pornography is a much-needed expression of sexual

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<sup>1</sup> The term “agency” is used throughout this dissertation as the state or outcome of an agent’s choice and/or action within his/her/their historical and cultural conditions (Butler 1990, Childers and Hentzi 1995, Emirbayer and Mische 1998). Sexual subjectivity, on the other hand, embodies the theoretical impulses of “agency,” yet is specifically tailored to sexual action and practice, therefore offering a development beyond an abstract notion of “sexual agency.”



subjectivity (McElroy, 1995; Califa, 1994, Bright, 1997; Strossen, 1995). In the end, it is an argument over media and pornography in particular—and their capacity for symbolic violence<sup>2</sup> (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) vis-à-vis sexuality and gender.

The following chapter tracks the feminist treatment of pornography through the lens of sexual subjectivity—beginning with the porn wars in the 1980s to the philosophies of the third wave—in order to set the cultural and historical stage for the emergence of feminist pornography. The choice to present this genealogy through the lens of *sexual subjectivity* was a theoretical development based on conclusions drawn after a review of representative feminist literature on sexuality and desire. At the base of these theories is the struggle over definitions over how to acquire and enact healthy female sexuality, or, female sexual subjectivity. As several sociologists have found, through qualitative research, the struggle over sexual subjectivity begins in early adolescence. As psychologist Michelle Fine (1988) points out in her seminal article on “the missing discourse of desire,” “Young women continue to be taught to fear and defend in isolation from exploring desire, and in this context there is little possibility on their developing a critique of gender or sexual arrangements” (31). And when women are “taught to fear and defend in isolation from exploring desire,” they disconnect, or become disembodied, leaving their understanding of sexuality subjectivity vulnerable to ideology (Tolman 2002). Both Fine and

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<sup>2</sup> The definition that Bourdieu offers in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (1992) is the following: “Symbolic violence, to put it as tersely and simply as possible, is the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (167). In the context of feminist theory and pornography, symbolic violence represents what is at stake when women either decide to reject pornography completely (not committing symbolic violence) or, decide to support the circulation of pornography and its treatment of women. In the latter case, those feminists (anti-censorship, sex positive) are complicit in the theoretical mistreatment of women, according to anti-pornography feminists. Anti-censorship feminists, on the other hand, believe that the wholesale rejection of sexual expression perpetuates sexual and gendered symbolic violence; if women cannot express themselves sexually, they are complicit in the silencing of female desire.

Tolman<sup>3</sup> point out that the discourse of female sexual subjectivity has been “missing” (Fine 1988) or experiencing a “dilemma” (Tolman 2002) due to the social hierarchy of heterosexual and patriarchal norms. For example, Tolman points out that the master narrative of romance is one way in which female sexuality becomes a “dilemma” for young women:

The template for gender relations under the institution of heterosexuality is the master narrative of romance, which is premised on female passivity and male aggression and dominance, denoting appropriate feminine and masculine behavior in relation to the opposite sex. Romance provides a script not only for how males and female interact but also for expectations about female and male sexuality, including that resilient distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ girls, as defined by the absence or presence, respectively, of sexual desire ... In this organization of heterosexual romantic relationships, patriarchal constructions of femininity are key (81).

Because female sexual subjectivity has been *managed* by institutions and their supporting discourses (including but not limited to, the State, religion, and education), feminists have historically fought for their right to *reclaim* their sexual subjectivity through praxis and empowerment measures. However, as mentioned earlier, the “right” reclamation approach has been interpreted differently within the women’s movement and feminist theory. While most feminists can agree that there are institutions—both material and ideological—that sexualize rather than empower women, there has been a lack of agreement over which institutions needed the most reform. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the issue of pornography became highly politicized within this diverse group of feminists who were attempting to rectify the absence of female management over their own sexuality.

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<sup>3</sup> Both Fine (1988) and Tolman (2002) situate their research in the context of adolescent development and the issues facing young women as they negotiate their own desires and the expectations formed under patriarchy. Both scholars have conducted qualitative research in educational institutions and based on their data, argue for sexual education reform that promotes female sexual reflection and empowerment.

Before exploring this highly influential debate over pornography, an examination of the feminist interpretation of the social sexualization of women will situate the various stances and arguments that emerged during these porn wars of the 1980s. A review of sociological and feminist theories that *culturally situate* women as *sexualized subjects* will provide the necessary background for the theoretical frameworks behind the porn wars and ultimately, will contextualize the impetus for feminists to begin *producing* pornography. The next section will begin with a brief layout of the female sexualized condition through an exploration of compulsory heterosexuality, the sexual division of labor, the female body, and violence against women. Next, the feminist response to sexualization vis-à-vis pornography will be outlined, via the porn wars of the 1980s. Finally, this chapter will evaluate post-porn wars, or third wave, feminist discourses surrounding sexual subjectivity and pornography, including the adoption of queer studies, sex work discourse, and ultimately, the enactment of feminist praxis via feminist pornography.

#### *The Social Sexualization of Women in the United States Context*

Fueled by myths—propagated by patriarchal and sexist ideology—that women are inherently sexualized co-stars to the male gender, feminists have actively worked to reverse this essentialized assumption. This foundational work has been historically attributed to radical feminism within the second wave (Snyder 2008; Jaggar 2008), and was later questioned by poststructural, postmodern, queer, and third wave feminists for its focus on difference rather than fluidity and deconstruction. In an effort to nuance sexual experiences away from grand narratives, and largely in reaction to Sigmund Freud’s deterministic psychoanalytic assessment of the development of female sexuality, feminists within the wake of the second wave adopted versions of the construction paradigm to formulate gender and sexuality as a culturally contingent *processes* rather than the result of ahistorical psychic development (Ridgeway 2011; West and Zimmerman,

1987; Gerson and Piess, 1985; Vance, 1984). Although theories of difference and marginalization were acknowledged, feminists were determined to explore inequality in operation.

In their work, *Sexual scripts: The social construction of female sexuality*, sociologists Judith Long Laws and Pepper Schwartz (1977) propose that the incorporation of “actual experience” offers more insight into the formations of sexual identity than scientific models or paradigms (1). For Laws and Schwartz, a woman’s lived experience as a sexual subject is shaped by the evolving internalization of culturally constructed “sexual scripts,” which include the meanings, rules, expectations, and sanctions that govern female sexuality. These authors suggest that individual, healthy female sexual identity is in direct tension with the experience of adopting of these scripts. Further, due to internalization practices during socialization, women become more aware and vulnerable to these scripts. They write,

The evolution of sexual identity thus involves the individual’s attempt to match her own experience with the available sexual scripts. She learns not only the language that is applied to sexual feelings and events, but also society’s expectations for a person of her age and sex. She learns the reciprocal behaviors, attitudes, and demeanors expected of someone of the ‘opposite sex’ as well. In this way she becomes prepared to enact the sexual scripts which are acceptable in her culture” (10).

Laws and Schwartz identify the “heterosexual/monogamous/married” script as the most dominant, a narrative that reflects the influences of various cultural institutions, including the family, the church, and the State. As all scripts are “age-graded,” or, manifested differently in various biological stages of a woman’s life, the adoption of this dominant script has a direct impact on a woman’s understanding and orientation toward her own sexuality.

In particular, the script of heterosexual marriage results in the redirection of female sexuality toward body display and male attention rather than personal discovery or the exploration of other women as sexual partners. This ideological condition contributes to what Deborah Tolman (2002) terms the “construction of sexual desire” (13). She writes, “These

organizing cultural stories or ‘master narratives’ are so compelling that most of us come only to tell them but to live them and feel them to be the ‘truth’ of experience” (14). However, while sexual scripts remain dominant in US culture, Laws and Schwartz also point to the rise of alternative sexual scripts that come to represent the paradox of choice and inconsistency inherent in the social construction of female sexuality (12).

In her work, *Paradoxes of Gender*, sociologist Judith Lorber (1994) situates sexuality as an outgrowth of the social institution of gender: “One of the major ways that human beings organize their lives” (15). The relationship between gender and sexuality has become a significant poststructural theme for feminist theorists, who have worked to organize these concepts as analytically separate, yet culturally inextricably linked (Halberstam, 2012; Butler, 1990; Vance, 1984). For Lorber, gender construction has a direct influence on sexual construction, which begins with sex assignment and continues with parents gendering their child, which imposes a direct influence on sexual awareness once puberty arrives. By that time, according to Lorber, parents and the education system have effectively socialized gendered norms and expectations, leading to a direct imposition on sexual feelings, desires, and practices (14). Lorber calls this end result a “gendered sexual status,” which reflects the practice of categorizing and assigning sexuality as it relates to a specific gender: heterosexual woman, heterosexual man, lesbian, and gay man (59). She writes,

Gendered sexual statuses are such powerful political, legal, and ideological constraints on individual’s sexuality and emotional relationships that alternative statuses are almost unthinkable ... Every culture has hegemonic or morally dominant forms of sexuality that are considered right and proper for children, for young and adolescent girls, and for adult men and women ... Whoever has power in the community will be influential in determining what sexualities will have moral hegemony” (79).

In both theories of the construction of female sexuality offered by Laws and Schwartz, and Long, the development, or construction, of sexual identity is ultimately shaped by the dialectic between

individual traits (biological and personality) and social norms. Female sexuality, then, is neither essentially Freudian nor institutionally determined. However, as these authors point out, adherence to “sexual scripts” and the adoption of “gender sexual statuses” points to a particular lack of agency in sexual development and sexual subjectivity, which, for feminists, is fundamentally problematic. Within feminist canon, the reality that social institutions actively construct the meanings surrounding female sexuality becomes a *political* issue. From this theoretical perspective, women are not the ones managing their own bodies, and this is a central concern.

In her argument for a “radical theory of sex,” anthropologist Gayle Rubin (1984), points to the need to incorporate language of “erotic injustice” and “sexual oppression” in social construction frameworks in order to illustrate how this system has politically marginalized women (275). According to Rubin, not only does the sexual system—which includes the adoption of sexual scripts and gender sexual statuses—organize sexuality, it actively oppresses women. For Rubin, “sex is a vector of oppression” (293). She writes,

Like gender, sexuality is political. It is organized into systems of power which reward and encourage some individuals and activities, while punishing and suppressing others. Like the capitalist organization of labor and its distribution of rewards and powers, the modern sexual system has been the object of political struggle since it emerged and as it has evolved. But if the disputes between labor and capital are mystified, sexual conflicts are completely camouflaged” (309).

Following the logic that sexuality is inherently political, Rubin points to the additional influences of political movements and moral panics on social construction of sexuality. Pointing toward the moral and historically situated reactions to white slavery, homosexuality, and pornography, she argues that political discourse has shaped constructions of sexual norms. In a move related to the Foucauldian (1990) notion that sexual discourse is generative rather than repressive, Rubin argues that debates over appropriate sexual behavior in the legal, political, and activist

communities have had a direct impact on the terms, deployment, and maintenance of constructed versions of sexuality (276).

Although they offer varying theoretical perspectives, each of these authors responds to ahistorical arguments about female sexuality by illustrating that social institutions play a socializing role in sexual identity development. In addition to the theoretical argument that female sexuality is constructed, feminists have also argued that one consequence of this unique social marginalization involves the conflation between “woman” and “sexuality.” As de Beauvoir (1989) notes, “And she is simply what man decrees; thus she is called ‘the sex’, by which is meant that she appears essential to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex – absolute sex, no less” (xxii). The construction of woman as “sex,” or sexualized, remains a dominant theme in feminist theory due to its political consequences. If a woman becomes synonymous with her sexuality, she becomes instrumental and one-dimensional. The following sections focus on literature that situates woman as “sexualized” by offering varying perspectives within the canon of feminist theory.

#### *Woman as Other/sexual subject*

As a social and political process, the social sexualization of women is directly related to the construction of women as occupying a marginalized status in the social and sexual hierarchy. In order to reduce an individual into an abstraction, it becomes necessary to categorize her/him as lacking socially meaningful qualities, or in this case, the possession of male genitalia. Because male genitalia, and the corresponding enactment of masculinity, have been privileged in patriarchal and capitalist cultures, it follows that this “lack” translates into a marginalized status. Some radical feminists<sup>4</sup> argue that this marginalized status is accompanied by an absolute

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<sup>4</sup> The theoretical interest in sexualization and patriarchy is typically attributed to radical feminists, who “were characterized by insistence that women’s oppression was universal, that

sexualized status; women are reduced to their instrumental ability to reproduce or please men sexually.

Simone de Beauvoir (1989) argues that the construction of women as the “Other”—and men as “the Subject”—works to situate women as inferior, sexualized beings (xxii). Using an analysis informed by the combination of biology, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism, de Beauvoir argues that the meaning attached to the male physical condition (genitalia, strength), has worked to devalue woman’s body as the “negative” of man. Because women do not possess the socially meaningful and productive body, they are reduced to the female-sexed body and what that body can produce—children and sexual pleasure. Further, de Beauvoir argues that constant interaction with this condition of sexual difference is internalized and ultimately results in an acceptance of hegemonic femininity. She writes, “When she had become aware of how weak she really was, she lost most of her assurance; this began her evolution toward femininity, in which she assumed her passivity and accepted dependency” (332). Here, not only are women sexualized, they are also socialized to accept and reproduce that condition.

For Kate Millett (1990), “sex” becomes a woman’s status category due to the social condition of patriarchy (55). She explains that through the patriarchal system, in which men hold a socially superior position, “women are more of a sexual subject than a person” (54). In her deconstruction of the ways that patriarchy directly contributes to sexual politics, Millett argues that this political repositioning of woman is supported by the psychological condition of “guilt” when women entertain the notion of sexual liberation. Therefore because women do not hold meaningful social positions, they are not only reduced to a sexual status, they also suffer

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‘patriarchy’ was marked by cross-cultural similarities ...” (Jaggar 2008, 193). While other feminist orientations, including liberal feminists, acknowledge gender and sexual inequalities, they gravitate away from absolutism and incorporate contextual features in their theorizations.



psychological guilt if they don't adequately perform that status. For Millett, the sexual status that has been constructed for women has a direct impact on sexual self-evaluation.

Both theoretical positions held by Millett and de Beauvoir are reflected in what Monique Wittig (1997) calls a material feminist approach, where women are identified and analyzed as an oppressed "class" rather than a mythic "natural group" (265). This process whereby women eventually possess a sexualized status that has been constructed for them is directly related to Judith Butler's (1993) conceptualization of "sex" as a qualification for cultural intelligibility. She writes, "Sex, thus, is not simply what one has, or a static description of what one is: it will be one of the norms by which the 'one' becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility" (2). For Butler, the adequate performance—the repetition of cultural norms—of an individual's sexuality determines whether or not that she will become culturally intelligible, or socially recognizable. And if those cultural norms are dictated by patriarchy, as Millett suggests, or a complex combination of biological, historical, and psychological forces, as de Beauvoir suggests, then it follows that the performance of female sexuality becomes the direct result of the conflation between woman and sexuality.

### *Compulsory heterosexuality*

Within the social construction of women as sexualized beings, the condition of compulsory heterosexuality, as an extension of patriarchy, works to maintain the status of female sexuality as determined by the actualization of marriage and reproduction. Feminist theories on compulsory heterosexuality argue that a woman's sexual preference has been determined by heterosexual social norms and that through this process of limiting sexual preference, female sexuality has been constructed vis-à-vis its utility in the preservation and reproduction of heterosexuality. This compulsory social condition whereby women feel obligated to participate in heterosexual relationships has contributed to the notion that women are not in charge of their

own sexuality, and thus, are not sexual agents. In her seminal work, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” Adrienne Rich (1980) works to demystify the “lie of compulsory heterosexuality” (657) in order to reveal how the lives of lesbians have come to be seen as “deviant, as pathological, or as emotionally and sensually deprived” (652). Rich argues that women’s “preference” for heterosexual relationships over lesbian relationships is not natural tendency. Instead, heterosexuality is the compulsory response to the historical, social, and economic condition of women. She writes,

Women have married because it was necessary, in order to survive economically, in order to have children who would not suffer in economic deprivation or social ostracism, in order to remain respectable, in order to do what was expected of women because coming out of ‘abnormal’ childhoods they wanted to feel ‘normal’, and because heterosexual romance has been represented as the great female adventure, duty, and fulfillment (652).

As a consequence of compulsive heterosexuality, Luce Irigaray (1985) argues that the discovery of female sexuality—which could include autoeroticism or a relationship with another woman—has been reduced to its “utility” within the dominant phallic economy. She writes, “In these terms, women’s erogenous zones never amount to anything but a clitoris-sex that is not comparable to the noble phallic organ, or a hole-envelope that serves to sheathe and massage the penis in intercourse” (23). In this construction of a sexual hierarchy where men are dominant and women are passive, Irigaray argues that female pleasure is ultimately lost. In this “phallic order,” women become a “use-value” for men and are “marked phallically by their fathers, husbands, procurers. And this branding determines their value in sexual commerce” (32). Unlike Rich’s conceptualization of compulsive heterosexuality as an institution that operates on woman’s sexual preference, Irigaray situates compulsive heterosexuality as an condition whereby women are thought of as sexual commodities in a dominant male economy. Aside from the degree to which this power dynamic dominates a woman’s ability to choose her sexual partner, the social

condition that compulsory heterosexuality presents to women ultimately shapes their understanding of human sexuality overall. Rather than operate as a choice among many sexual lifestyles, heterosexuality becomes the only choice; and under a patriarchal/capitalist system that supports it, women become sexualized possessions (Irigaray 1985, 32).

### *Sexualizing the female body*

Whereas the marginalization of woman as a sexual subject and her role within a compulsory heterosexual system both support the social process of women becoming sexualized beings, the reduction of a woman's worth to her sexualized body represents its materialization (Butler 1993; Bordo 2003). In this configuration, the female body becomes a sexual object; constructed and maintained by patriarchal, heterosexual desire. Feminists analyze the oppressive management of the female body through a critique of the "politics of the body," whereby the female body has turned into a "site of material struggle" (Bordo 2003, 16). Here, material struggle includes: debates over the use of women's bodies as commodities in pornography, political movements fighting for the right to an abortion, and resistance toward the allowance of the beauty industry in marking the appropriate body shape for women.

As Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000) points out, this sexualization of the body begins when infants are initially "sexed" by a doctor based on the visibility of "correct" sexual genitalia. If an infant's genitalia is identified as intersexual, or possessing both genitalia, a doctor is put in the position of creating a "sex" for that child. This is achieved through operation or through a recommendation to the parents to raise their child based on the gender that most closely resembles the child's underdeveloped or disfigured genitalia. For Fausto-Sterling, the correction of intersex children into a binary system of gender represents the hegemonic belief that, from birth, individuals must be sent on a trajectory that allows them to fulfill the cultural norms of gender and sexuality (76).

Fausto-Sterling identifies to the compulsive need for most parents to know that their children can live and reproduce as “normal” sexual beings; hence, the need to correct intersexual infants. This strong belief in the need for their children to eventually reproduce as adults is an extension of the belief that the body must fulfill its sexual role; for boys, to eventually “procreate,” for girls, to eventually “reproduce.” Here, Fausto-Sterling points to the starting point whereby female infants are sent on a path to fulfill their body’s sexual script: to produce a child out of a heterosexual relationship. Because women’s bodies are socially constructed as gendered and sexualized in binary terms (man/woman; ability to reproduce/no ability to reproduce), the sexing of children works to reproduce a hegemonic condition whereby women’s bodies are monitored and judged.

Building on de Beauvoir’s (1989) conceptualization of woman as passive “Other” and men as active “Subject,” Susan Bordo (2003) attaches the mind/body dualism to this theoretical framework and argues that women are culturally constructed—through theology, media, and cultural practice—to represent the “body” while men represent the “active spirit” (11). She writes, “For it, whatever the specific historical content of the duality, the body is the negative term, and if the woman is the body, then women are negativity, whatever it may be: distraction from knowledge, seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death” (5). If woman is the body, and the body is culturally constructed as a site of deviant sexuality, distraction, and desire, then by the transitive property of equality, women come to represent sexuality and desire.

Sandra Lee Bartky (1990) points out that this conflation between women’s bodies and sexuality should be evaluated as an extension of the “psychic” oppression of women, which includes stereotyping, cultural domination, and sexual objectification. She writes,

A person is sexually objectified when her sexual parts or sexual functions

are separated out from the rest of her personality and reduced to the status of mere instruments or else regarded as if they were representing her ... The identification of a person with her sexuality becomes oppressive, one might venture, when such an identification becomes habitually extended onto every are of her existence (26).

For Bartky, the sexual objectification of women is practiced when the fragmented part ( the body) stands in for the dynamic “whole” of a woman, including her personality and other human qualities. Bartky’s evaluation of the sexual objectification of a woman’s body parts contributes to the analysis of the body as a material site in the social construction of women as sexualized and alienated beings (31). If a dynamic woman is reduced to her female-sexed body that that has been socially constructed to represent a site of desire, intercourse and reproduction, than it could be argued that the female body plays a central role in this sexualization process. And, as women come to realize the role that the body plays in her ability to become sexually and culturally intelligible, maintenance of an “ideal body” becomes a woman’s responsibility and authority.

As Wendy Chapkis (1986) points out, women “ ... will be valued and rewarded on the basis of how close she comes to embodying the ideal” (14). As women come to recognize that both their bodies are sites of sexuality and that sexuality is woman’s dominant sites of identification, Chapkis argues that women work to self-objectify themselves in efforts to heighten their chances for “power, respect and attention” (14). Lastly, it is important to note that issues of race, class, and disability directly intersect with the social sexualization of the female body. For example, Patricia Hill Collins (2005) points to the historical construction of the exotic and hypersexual Black female body as representing the intersection of racism and sexualization. Collins points to the display of Black slaves, the cultural interest Sarah Bartmann and Josephine Baker, and representations in mass media as illustrating the use of sexualized bodies to perpetrate racial and sexual difference (30).

The sexualization and objectification of female body has been a continued point of interest for feminist media scholars, who have offered a steady stream of empirical output connecting this gendered practice to evolving technologies. However, two industries remain on the scholarly agenda for their continued reliance on these practices: advertising and pornography. Due to its ubiquity and direct connection to the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism, advertising offers a domain for analyses of the ways that media have reduced, or objectified, women to their sexualized bodies in order to compete for consumer attention. Some scholars, including Jean Kilbourne (2003), have analyzed the ways that this “toxic cultural environment” has socialized women to enter a cycle where they are socialized to “hate” their bodies due to the constant stream of objectified advertising, leading to increased “correctional” consumer spending, lower self-esteem, and for some, eating disorders (262; Bordo 2003). Although this socialization thesis has been discredited by others in the feminist media studies community, particularly by van Zoonen and the cultural studies approach, the fact remains that an entire branch of academic study has been developed in response to the use of women’s bodies as commodities in the sale of consumer products.

Although the commodification of female sexuality via objectified, or strategic, body display in advertising is similar to that of pornography, this industry’s inclusion of sexualized bodies *engaging* in sexual intercourse, rather than *suggesting* it, marks the success of these texts as ultimately determined by the objectified female body. Other media formats, such as print advertising or music videos, include consumer material and/or symbolic goods as accompaniments to an objectified body, but in pornography, the sale of sexuality and bodies is central. In the pornographic text, the sexualized use-value of women’s (naked) bodies is commodified through the documentation of their bodily display for the direct intention of sexual consumption. Here, there are no distractions from the fact that women’s sexualized bodies *are* the symbolic commodities of pornography; the representation of their performance, via DVD, etc. is the material commodity.

### *Sexual division of labor*

Similar to the sexualization and commodification of the body, analyzing the sexual division of labor is an attempt to demystify a material site of sexual inequality (Ridgeway 2011; Hochschild 1989; Chodorow 1978). Feminists such as Gayle Rubin (1997) and Heidi Hartmann (1977) have argued, in different ways, that an evaluation of the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism helps explain the social relationship between men and women as economic and political. According to Hartmann,

Industrially-based patriarchal relations are enforced in a variety of ways. Union contracts which specify lower wages, lesser benefits, and fewer advancement opportunities for women are not just atavistic hangovers – a case of sexist attitudes or male supremacist ideology – they maintain the material base of the patriarchal system” (108).

For Hartmann, not only do women supply the material base of the patriarchal system, they also maintain low-paying jobs in the material work force that are “thought to be appropriate to women’s role,” including teachers, welfare workers, and various positions in the health fields” (111).

Although the sexual division of labor is not an absolute condition, as evidenced by the labor status of women in the 1950s versus contemporary culture, Rubin and Hartmann suggest that the marginalized status of women must include a political economic analysis. And as part of that analysis, attention to the existence and maintenance of a sexual division of labor points toward the ways that the abilities of women in the labor force have been gendered and sexualized. For example, because women are believed to possess qualities of motherly nurturing, they have been hailed into the education system labor force. Further, when women possess qualities that reflect dominant beauty myths about appearance and body shape, they have an easier time getting hired for positions that rely on these valued physical qualities. Once hired, further sexualization of the woman worker may occur through the act of sexual harassment. As

Catharine MacKinnon (1979) argues, sexual harassment is a strategic act that works to reinforce women's inferior role in the labor force by reminding both the immediate labor community and the woman worker herself that although she has a job, she is still a sexualized being that can be treated as such (4). She writes, "Horizontal segregation means that most women perform the jobs they do because of their gender, with the element of sexuality pervasively implicit (9).

As Nancy Chodorow (1978) points out in her work, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, the act of mothering is central to the organization and perpetuation of the sexual division of labor through the naturalization of women's primary social location as "the domestic." She writes,

All sex-gender systems organize sex, gender, and babies. A sexual division of labor in which women mother organizes babies and separates domestic and public spheres. Heterosexual marriage, which usually gives men rights in women's sexual and reproductive capacities and formal rights in children, organizes sex (10).

Chodorow uses psychoanalysis—object-relations theory—to explain that the social construction of woman as "mother" is produced by the relationship between the development of the feminine psychic structure and socializing forces that equate "mothering" with gratification (39). She argues that due to the gendered interpersonal environments that males and female experience as they grow up, gendered personalities will develop as well, and will be preoccupied with gendered issues, including the female child wanting to be a mother because she was mothered by a female (211). In the end, Chodorow argues that the reproduction of the psychic desire to mother contributes to woman's responsibility for child care, thus setting in motion a sexual division of labor that contributes to male dominance and sexual inequality (214).

Similarly, Arlie Hochschild's (1989) seminal sociological work, *The Second Shift*, demonstrates the ways in which families of different race and class backgrounds negotiate the sexual division of labor in the domestic sphere. However, Hochschild refers to this phenomenon through the lens of "gender strategies" (17) rather than sexualization. However, as demonstrated



earlier, the relationship between gender relations and sexualization is mutually reinforcing, and these “strategies” are directly related to the social reduction of women as “sexual” and domestic. The inequality that the sexual division of labor supports is directly related to the myth that women are more appropriate for “jobs” that support their inferior, gendered, and sexualized status. Because the status of women has been socially constructed through the institution of gender, heteronormative sexuality, and her inextricable link to the condition of her body, it comes as no surprise that the managers of the capitalist system relegate female labor contributions to those activities that have received a feminized status as well (MacKinnon 1979).

### *Violence Against Women*

Due to the social location that women occupy due to the construction of women as a sexualized Other, the ideology of compulsory heterosexuality, the sexualization of the female body, and the sexual division as labor, women experience physical assault on a regular basis. The mythic combination of women as inferior and women as sexual beings perpetuates the opportunity for unmarked violence, sexual and otherwise. As Maria Bevacqua (2000) reports in her historical analysis of feminism and the politics of sexual assault, although violence against women had tangentially emerged during the first wave of feminist action, it wasn’t until the second wave’s radical feminist consciousness-raising groups (29), the liberal feminist’s configuration of the National Organization for Women (34), and Black feminists’ organization of the National Black Feminist Organization and the development of workshops “to explore political perspectives and women’s experiences of rape” (41) in the 1970s that rape and sexual assault fully emerged on the feminist agenda. During that time, the phrase “rape culture” entered the feminist lexicon, which is used to describe the cultural institutionalization of violence against women.

According to Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, and Martha Roth (1993), rape culture is “a complex of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women. It is a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality as violent” (vii). Interestingly, although the women’s movement agreed on a stance against sexual assault, the various branches of feminism approached the solution for violence against women very differently. Consider the following passages:

Radical feminism:

Indeed, one of the earliest forms of male bonding must have been the gang rape of one woman by a band of marauding men. This accomplished, rape became not only a male prerogative, but man’s basic weapon of force against women, the principal agent of his will and her fear. His forcible entry into her body, despite her physical protestations and struggle, became the vehicle of his victorious conquest over her being, the ultimate test of his superior strength, the triumph of his manhood ... It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear (Brownmiller 1975, 15).

Liberal feminism:

But human dignity is frequently violated on grounds of sex or sexuality. Many women all over the world find themselves treated unequally with respect to employment, bodily safety and integrity, basic nutrition and health care, education, and political voice. In many cases these hardships are caused by their being women, and in many cases laws and institutions construct or perpetuate these inequalities (Nussbaum 1999, 5).

Based on these exemplary passages—drawn from noted representatives of the radical and liberal branches of feminism—one can detect the absolutism in the radical discourse versus the legislative and philosophical rhetoric in the liberal example. Identifying these different approaches is critical to understanding the feminist entanglement with pornography in the 1980s; both “sides” drew from radical and liberal frameworks surrounding violence against women and used those frameworks to either support or reject the censorship of pornography and pending legislation (as drafted by Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin). The discussion of women, violence, and pornography will be explored further in the next section of this chapter.

It is important to keep in mind that violence against women, and sexual violence in particular, has a direct effect on female sexual subjectivity. From adolescence, young women are taught the “dangers of desire” through the pedagogy of risk, avoidance, and victim-blaming (Tolman 2002, 80; Friedman 2011, 55). Because women are socially and culturally sexualized, and can experience that daily through sexual harassment at the workplace, unsolicited comments in the public sphere, marital rape, or even Facebook comments, they are socialized to *fear* sexuality to varying extents (Friedman 2011, 58), with good reason: In the introduction to their two-volume work, *Victims of Sexual Assault and Abuse: Resources and Responses for Individuals and Families*, Michele A. Paludi and Florence L. Denmark (2010) map out such events of sexual violence (in the US context) that happened during the “course of editing” their two-volume set:

One in every 20 women college students was raped, with acquaintance rape accounting for more of the rapes than those committed by strangers. Approximately 50 percent of women and 15 percent of men college students and employees experienced sexual harassment, including unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion. Approximately 2.6 million women were victims of intimate-partner violence, including being slapped, having objects thrown at them, being pushed, and being grabbed and shoved by their mate or spouse. Twenty-one percent of these women were pregnant at the time of the abuse (xii).

However, as Jaclyn Friedman and Jessica Valenti (2008) point out in their edited volume, *Yes means Yes! Visions of Female Sexual Power & A World Without Rape*, statistics such as these, taken out of context, is exactly what perpetuates the “culture of fear” (21) around women and sexual assault. Friedman and Valenti argue that women need to reclaim their sexual subjectivity—which includes empowerment, confidence and education regarding sexual encounters and sexual activity—in order assist in the eradication of rape culture. They write,

Eradicating rape may very well be possible. But as long as we continue to view it as a crime committed by an individual against another individual, absent of any social context, we will have little success in combating it. Women must feel fully entitled to public engagement and consensual sex – and if conservative and anti-feminist men continue to argue that women’s very public presence enables men to assault them, then perhaps they’re the ones that should be pressured to

stay home (27).

Whereas this statement argues for the establishment of a healthy sexual subjectivity, it also invokes the “social context,” otherwise known as, the “social sexualization of women.”

Overall, these select yet fundamental feminist contributions to the theory of the social construction of women’s sexualized status successfully denaturalizes the assumption that women are born with the desire to become a sexual object for men, born with the desire to become synonymous with her objectified and sexualized body, or born with the desire to enter the gendered workforce and accept her inferior role within the sexual division of labor. While some women (and men) may argue against these anti-essentialist assumptions, it has been the specific project of feminist theory to analyze woman’s gendered and sexualized position in order find strategies to fight for gender justice (Jaggar 2008). It is important to note, however, that while most feminist theories tend to map out an otherwise deterministic frame for women to operate within, they also include strategies for resistance or identification of opportunities for the assertion of sexual agency in women’s lives.

For example, although Judith Butler (1999; 1997; 1993; 1990) recognizes that cultural norms related to the deployment of gender and sexuality directly contribute to the internalization and performance of a woman’s gender and sexuality, she argues that there are still opportunities to create articulations of agency. For Butler, a woman’s acceptance of sex/gender norms is marked by her enactment, or performance, of those norms on a daily basis. Rather than manifesting in a complete psychic internalization, sex/gender norms are adopted as repeated performances; a woman raising her voice when she gets excited, a young girl drawing hearts around the name of a male crush, or teenager wearing a short skirt on a date in order to showcase her legs. For Butler, these repetitive performances, such as putting on make-up every

day, are culturally and historically contingent, therefore, they can change with the currents of social revolution or a Republican term, for example.

However, these performances, managed by forces such as Laws and Peppers' (1977) "sexual scripts" or the adoption of Lorber's (1994) "gendered sexual status," can be briefly disrupted through the alteration of a performance. For example, if a woman who dresses according to gender norms decides to wear a man's suit to work one day, she is disrupting the repetition of her performance of "dressing like a woman." However, this doesn't change the existence of social institutions that construct the norms for what is and what is not appropriate regarding woman's appearance. But for that woman, the act of wearing a man's suit rather than repeating the codes of appropriate gendered appearance represents the existence of a form of agency to shift norms; the ability to make personal decisions within a socially constructed adherence to otherwise naturalized cultural norms. What this brief and general acknowledgement of Butler's theorization of the relationship between cultural norms, the unstable repetition of gender performance, and the ability to resist illustrates is the example of an approach to the negotiation of agency within feminist theories. This point was raised to reinforce that the project of feminism is to locate and analyze the dominance of oppressive social structures, but also, to suggest projects for analytical and political intervention.

#### *Focusing on Pornography: The Porn Wars of the 1980s*

As argued in an earlier section of this chapter, the major similarity among these theoretical contributions to the social sexualization of women is that they all describe an institutionalized threat to female sexual subjectivity. Operating in a cultural condition where your body is sexualized, your opportunities and treatment in the labor force are potentially dictated by your sexuality, and your sexual encounters could possibly result in violence results in a *heightened awareness for symbolic messages* that contribute to this condition. Put differently, if you

occupy an Othered subject position, myths and symbols that contribute to this position become highly objectionable. Because media effectively circulate a panoply of symbolic messages that antagonize female sexual subjectivity and promote the sexualization of the body, the sexual division of labor, and woman as sexual object, it has been identified as a disruptive institution for women (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2008; Douglas 2010).

In fact, as Carolyn Bronstein (2011) points out, radical feminists during the second wave argued that mediations of violence against women in popular culture perpetuated their sexualized status. Bronstein's historical account of the feminist anti-pornography movement, *Battling Pornography* (2011), works to re-envision the mainstream narrative that shines a spotlight on Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin while obscuring their opposition as well as other feminist organizations that pre-dated the anti-pornography activist group Women Against Pornography<sup>5</sup>. Based on her extensive document and qualitative research, Bronstein traces the emergence of the three most highly influential grassroots organizations leading up to the mainstream feminist anti-pornography movement: Women Against Violence Against Women, Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media, and Women Against Pornography. She writes,

WAVAW, WAPM, and WAP tried to disrupt and subsequently improve mainstream media. They opposed a proliferation of commercial images that glorified violence and reinforced gender stereotypes about women and men

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<sup>5</sup> As Bronstein (2011) recalls, "As I poured over the organizations' manuscript collections to reconstruct their work against media violence, it became clear that the reform accomplished in the first years of the movement, particularly by WAVAW and WAVPM prior to WAP, had received little critical attention. The successful campaigns that these groups waged against such establishment media conglomerates as Warner Communications were rendered almost invisible in historical scholarship and popular accounts, creating a significant gap in media history and the history of second-wave feminist organizing. By way of comparison, the MacKinnon-Dworkin period of anti-pornography activity has received extensive popular and academic analysis, resulting in a massive body of literature that examines both their theories of pornography's harms and the drive to pass ordinances in Minneapolis, Indianapolis, and several other American cities" (9).

that fostered sexist attitudes and behavior. They shared a goal of ending rape, battering, sexual harassment, and other forms of sexual violence. Each organization sought to improve the material conditions of women's lives by calling for reform of a visual environment polluted by sexist and sexually violent images. Using national consumer action and public education techniques, as well as performance art, feminist conferences, marches, and demonstrations, these organizations led a creative and innovative battle to improve the media, reduce violence against women, and pave the way for true liberation (3).

Bronstein's historical account marks a sharp contrast to normative accounts for the start of the anti-pornography movement, otherwise known as the "porn wars." For example, in their book, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (2006), feminists Lisa Duggan and Nan Hunter situate the feminist assault, and defense, of pornography as heightening after the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1982. They write, "Pornography offered radical feminists a clear target for their rage, complete with clear moral categories: Men were villains, women were victims. There was a brotherhood of oppressors, a sisterhood of victims. Pornography became the symbol of man's supposedly unquenchable hatred of women" (88). Here, the porn wars are framed as a consequence rather than the outcome of a historical battle between feminists and mediations of violence against women in popular culture.

However, as Bronstein points out, the organization of WAVAW, WAVPM, and WAP emerged in the late 1970s, far before the fall of the ERA in 1982. On the other hand, 1983 *was* the year that MacKinnon and Dworkin were invited to write anti-pornography legislation for the city of Minneapolis—one year after the failure of the ERA. Based on this time frame, coupled with the conflation of "anti-pornography movement" with "MacKinnon," and "Dworkin," it could be accepted that the ERA was the catalyst for increased protest against pornography. But this myopic version fails to incorporate the longstanding relationship between violence, feminism and media, which led to the focus on pornography. In the absence of this grassroots *historical* analysis behind the movement, mainstream feminism has been often misunderstood as anti-sex

apropos of pornography. Bronstein's historical study was published in 2011, so for many years following the porn wars, accounts like Duggan and Hunter's framed this period in feminist history.

However, the feminist articulations vis-à-vis pornography that emerged during the specific period of the MacKinnon/Dworkin ordinance have had the greatest impact on current feminist approaches to pornography, and are worth reviewing. This historical attempt to shift cultural policy exemplifies the first time that a political and marginalized group has argued for government assistance against the pornography industry, based on a theoretical position. Put simply, the radical feminist theoretical position articulated by Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin supported the notion that pornography was the reification of violence against women; the process of producing pornography promoted a cycle that kept women in degradation (MacKinnon 1993). MacKinnon and Dworkin argue that the pornographic text is not simply "speech defamation" but is rather "discrimination" against women and should be regulated as a human rights violation. According to MacKinnon, in her polemic *Only Words* (ibid.),

Within the confines of this (speech-based) approach, to say that pornography is an act against women is seen as metaphorical or magical, rhetorical or unreal, a literary hyperbole of propaganda device. On the assumption that words have only a referential relation to reality, pornography is defended as only words – even when it is pictures women had to be directly used to make, even when the means of writing are women's bodies, even when a woman is destroyed in order to say it or show it or because it was said or shown (12).

For MacKinnon, deeming pornography "offensive" or "obscene" as speech fails to confront the reality that pornography is the reification of the sexualization of social inequality through words and images. The enactment of that social inequality, she argues, is articulated in the physical act of masturbating to pornographic imagery. She writes, "The women are in two dimensions, but the men have sex with them in their own three-dimensional bodies, not in their minds alone" (1996, 17). Because this reproduction of social inequality is both mental and physical,



MacKinnon and Dworkin argued for a new policy that approached pornography as a civil rights issue. MacKinnon (2005) writes,

On the basis of this evidence, we have concluded that pornography, not alone but crucially, institutionalizes a subhuman, victimized, second-class status for women in particular. If a person can be denigrated, and doing that is defended and legalized as freedom; if one can be tortured and the enjoyment of watching it is considered entertainment protected by the Constitution; if the pleasure that other people derive from one's pain is a measure of one's social worth, one is not worth much, socially speaking (304).

In late 1983, legislators in Minneapolis employed MacKinnon and Dworkin to write a law, or ordinance, for the city based on their conception of pornography as a civil and human rights violation. In order to illustrate examples to state their case, this drafting process included the organization of hearings where women offered first-person accounts of harm and violation due to pornography (MacKinnon 2005). If passed, the ordinance would allow women, like those who had testified to personal harm and violence, to actively bring directors, distributors, producers, actors, etc. to civil court in the name of discrimination. According to MacKinnon (ibid.), "The ordinance, with local variations, provides a cause of action to individuals who are coerced into pornography, forced to consume pornography, defamed by being used in pornography without consent, assaulted due to specific pornography, or subordinated as a member of a sex-based group through traffic in pornography" (360). While the First Amendment protects those who produce non-obscene pornography, MacKinnon and Dworkin worked to institute an ordinance that would protect those harmed by pornography. Although iterations of the ordinance were also developed in Indianapolis, Los Angeles, and Massachusetts, they ultimately failed, in all jurisdictions, due to its ultimate status as "unconstitutional" vis-à-vis the First Amendment (ibid. 368).

The legislative system was not the only group in opposition to MacKinnon and Dworkin's attempt at radical feminist praxis against pornography. Many liberal feminists also categorized the anti-pornography ordinance as a violation of First Amendment rights, as well as a threat to women's sexuality in general (McElroy 1995; Califa 1994, Bright 1997; Strossen 2000). According to Wendy McElroy (1995), this liberal feminist, or anti-censorship, position argues that freedom of speech is a necessary condition for human freedom, that the suppression of pornography will hurt women, and finally, that pornography offers certain benefits to women (119). Anti-pornography feminist Pat Califa (1994) takes McElroy's argument one step further and projects that the regulation of pornography would actually *support* sexual repression. In her book, *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex* (ibid.), she lists out four main consequences of censorship:

- (1) People would have less access to erotic material and information about sex than they do now;
- (2) homosexuals and other sexual minorities would lose a vital source of contact – sex ads;
- (3) it would be even more difficult for women, lesbians, and other disenfranchised groups to circulate accurate information about their sexuality and create their own erotica;
- (4) it would convince women that they don't need the First Amendment (119).

Another outspoken feminist against the MacKinnon/Dworkin ordinance campaign was feminist and legal scholar Nadine Strossen (2000), who was concerned with the legal ramifications of censoring pornography as a form of sexual speech. She writes,

Make no mistake: if accepted, the feminist pro-censorship analysis would lead inevitably to the suppression of far more than pornography. At stake is all sexually-oriented speech, any expression that allegedly subordinates or undermines the equality of any group, and any speech that may have a tendency to lead to any kind of harm" (40).

In her book, *Defending pornography: Free speech, sex, and the fight for women's rights*, Strossen (ibid.) also warns of the "forbidden fruits effect" that arises once products or ideas are thrust under legal regulation. She writes, "The assumption that censorship would substantially reduce the availability or impact of pornography overlooks evidence that censorship makes some viewers

more desirous of pornography and more receptive to its imagery” (263). Lastly, but not exhaustively, outside the feminist critique of censoring pornography is the libertarian argument that erotica and pornography are aesthetic art forms, and therefore, should not be regulated on the basis of moral judgment (Sontag, 1969; Steiner, 1997). As Wendy Steiner (ibid.) asks, “But what kind of art will be created and disseminated if experts and audiences alike deny the value of virtuality and pleasure?” (209).

If MacKinnon and Dworkin’s ordinance had been successful, and women and men were then able to bring the pornography industry to civil court for human rights violations, it would have had a direct impact on the United States’ “hand-off” cultural policy on pornography. Radical feminist discourse, including themes of degradation, objectification, and the sexualization of inequality, would have entered the government’s conceptualization of pornography, producing significant restrictions on what could and could not pass as lawful sexual expression. Unfortunately for MacKinnon and Dworkin, but fortunately for anti-censorship feminists, the First Amendment has and will continue to protect pornography as free speech, unless it is deemed “obscene” by the *Miller* test<sup>6</sup>. In addition to First Amendment protection, the pornography industry is also protected by capitalism and conglomeration; the generation of high profits for production companies owned by other, more publically “acceptable” media companies creates a web of revenue streams (Dines 2010).

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<sup>6</sup> In 1973, the *Miller v. California* decision created this new, and current, definition of obscenity (Easton, 1994). Under the *Miller* test, a work must meet each of the three parts to be deemed obscene: (1) The average person, applying contemporary community standards’ would find the work, taken as a whole, appeals to prurient interest; (2) The work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law; (3) The work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value (Trager, Russomanno, & Ross, 2010, 507).

To date, there has been no attempt to introduce new policies or legislation for the pornography industry based on its alleged cultural promotion of violence against women. Further, empirical studies have failed to provide a causal link between viewing pornography and violence against women (Dines 2010). However, as media scholars continue to dedicate their work to the cultural ramifications of violent and sexist imagery circulated by the media industry, the discussion of “influence” still remains a point of interest. As radical feminist scholar Gail Dines (2010) argues,

These (media) images never stand alone but are implicated in the broader system of messages that legitimize the ongoing oppression of a group, and their power is often derived not from shifting attitudes and behavior but from strengthening and normalizing the ideology that condones oppression ... If we take these arguments and apply them to pornography, we see that some of porn’s effects might be more subtle than causing an immediate change in attitudes and behavior” (87).

Here, Dines invokes the ideology of anti-pornography feminists who argue that pornography normalizes the social and sexual degradation of women. Anti-censorship feminists, on the other hand, argue that while pornography may circulate questionable images of women, censoring pornography is not the solution: it may lead to the additional censorship of sexual materials and information, and, most importantly, it has not been proven that pornography the sole catalyst for sexual violence and abuse. Linda Williams (1989) sums up this argument in the following:

Thus, while I would agree with anti-pornography feminists that pornography—Especially the heterosexual film pornography examined in this book—[*Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the “Frenzy of the Visible”*] offers exemplary symbolic representations of patriarchal power in heterosexual pleasure, and while I believe that a feminist critique of this power is crucial, I side with the anti-censorship feminists who hold that censorship of these pleasures offers no real solution to patriarchal violence and abuse (22) ... This idea, I argue, is the central fallacy of all the anti-porn feminist positions: that a single, whole sexuality exists opposed to the supposed deviations and abnormalities of somebody else’s fragmentation (23).

So, while each side admits that pornography does have the tendency to circulate images of “patriarchal power,” as Williams put it, this dissertation argues that the split emerges along the lines of sexual subjectivity. On the one hand, anti-pornography feminists have adopted a paternalistic, surveillance-heavy orientation toward women and the effects of the pornography industry. Here, the circulation of pornography harms *all* women, and if you support pornography, you are contributing committing symbolic violence toward yourself and the rest of the female population. On the other hand, anti-censorship feminists argue that women, themselves, have the final say on whether or not pornography inflicts harm on the female population, and that sometimes, pornography can actually provide pleasure and contribute to sexual subjectivity.

After the failure of the MacKinnon/Dworkin ordinances, anti-censorship ideology was co-opted by moral conservatives during the Regan presidency. According to Bronstein (2011), “Feminists lost control of the movement and its support base moved to the right, and they were unable to compel the courts and the government to adopt the feminist worldview of the pornography problem” (330). In the wake of the dissipation of WAP, anti-pornography ideology was replaced by growing feminist support for the anti-censorship argument, which coincided with the postmodern turn in the late 1980s and early 1990s within feminist theory and practice (Jaggar 2008). This turn led to the “third wave” of feminism and due to its focus on the deconstruction of grand narratives and essentializing, the anti-censorship position on pornography survived the movement’s update. Feminists began interpreting pornography as a dynamic visual text that was neither “good” nor “bad.” Rather, third wave feminist discourse categorizes pornography as a complex source of sexual expression that has the capacity<sup>7</sup> to facilitate agency, desire, and capital.

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that while the anti-censorship position has been adopted by third wave discourse and reemerged as “pro-sex” or “sex positive” ideology, this does not mean that

### *The Treatment of Pornography in the Third Wave Context*

Instead of addressing pornography specifically, the emergent and current state of feminist theory and practice includes sexual visual culture within its larger articulations of sexuality, gender and media. Whereas second wave feminists engaged with the pornography industry in a more unique and explicit way, third wave feminists have rescinded that theoretical privilege: pornography is no longer understood as a main obstacle in the fight for gender justice or a culprit in the social sexualization of women. One of the main reasons for this lies in the individualistic framework of third wave feminism; feminists are no longer expected to act in solidarity or in a movement. This postmodern turn and the ensuing discourse that emerged from it provide an important contextual backdrop for the emergence and celebration of feminist pornography. Whereas, at one time, the feminist project critiqued or embraced pornography from a distance, the current climate of feminism has provided an opportunity for a *merging* of feminist practice and pornography. In order to understand this current context, a brief review of representative third wave discourse is provided here.

Broadly, one of the main differences that third wave writers posit is that third wave feminists “do not inhabit the same world as the second wave feminists did—as a result, their feminism is different” (Gilmore 2005, 112). As Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner (2004) writes, “Today’s young women aren’t necessarily drawn to the same issues, philosophies, and tactics of second-wave feminists: they need a feminism of their own” (96). Often, third wave writers discuss the differences between the second and third wave in terms of “generational conflict.” For example, in her article, “Solitary sisterhood: Individualism meets collectivity in feminism’s third wave,”

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critical judgments of pornography have vacated feminist scholarship (see Dines 2010). However, one of the main projects of third wave feminism is to break down that norms that have previously governed sexuality, sex work, and gender, resulting in an updated approach to pornography that is less absolutist and more context-specific.

Astrid Henry (2005) argues that the third wave is a “shared generational stance against second wave feminism and second wave feminists” (83). She argues that, “Third wave feminists haven’t often described their feminism by stressing what it is not, articulating the ‘new’ feminism in generational terms by contrasting it with the ‘old’ feminism of the second wave” (82).

However, as third wave feminists Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards (2000) argue, the gendered culture that third wave feminists inhabit is not a *complete* break with second wave issues. They write,

We have inherited strategies to fight sexual harassment, domestic abuse, the wage gap, and the pink-collar ghetto of low-wage women’s work from the Second Wave, which identified these issues. Together, we are still working on them. And we have modern problems of our own. Prominent Third Wave issues include equal access to the Internet and technology, HIV/AIDS awareness, child sexual abuse, self-mutilation, globalization, eating disorders, and body image (21).

In her review of popular and academic literature on third wave feminism, R. Claire Snyder (2008), points out that, “While every generation by definition confronts a new historical context, that alone does not seem sufficient to declare a new wave of feminism” (178). Snyder argues that third wavers “overemphasize their distinctiveness” (181) and illustrates the various similarities that emerge between the two waves, including political orientation, inclusiveness, and attention to media and popular culture. One relevant example of this mythic overemphasis is that second wavers were not sex positive or pro-sex. While this misconception is easily debunked in this chapter, it is often still generalized that second wave feminists were militant and anti-pornography. Snyder writes,

It is revisionist history to conflate second-wave feminism as a whole with the so-called anti-sex feminists and third-wavers with the pro-sex side. Such a depiction reinforces the commonly accepted caricature of second-wave feminism as anti-sex—a view that is clearly overly generalized, inaccurate, and reductionist to anyone who has more than a superficial understanding of the movement (180).

However, Snyder does admit that a unique relationship to sex work and pornography has emerged within the third wave context. Due to the third wave's postmodern approach to sexuality, combined with the presence of radical inclusiveness and individualism, there has been an increase in the publication of narratives from feminist sex workers.

As Henry (2005) points out, "Third wave feminists rarely articulate unified political goals, nor do they often represent the third wave as sharing a critical perspective on the world. Rather, third wave texts are replete with individual definitions of feminism and individualistic narrative of coming to feminist consciousness" (83). Two such exemplary third wave publications concerning sex work and feminist consciousness are *Whores and Other Feminists* (1997), edited by Jill Nagle and *Naked Ambition* (2005), edited by Carly Milne. Both volumes feature chapters from notable women in the pornography and sex industry and offer narratives of experience from a feminist (and sometimes non-feminist) perspective. In *Whores and Other Feminists*, positionalities range from peep shop performers to theorists of sex work and feminist culture. The essays that address pornography illustrate how complicated it is to support feminist and mainstream pornography from a pro-woman perspective. In her essay "Odyssey of a Feminist Pornographer," erotic author Marcy Sheiner writes, "I felt that neither side understood the complicated nuances of the issue—the gestalt of the sexual/political dichotomy. I was in a difficult place, a place many women are still in today: I bought the feminist rhetoric that pornography demeaned women, yet I was undeniably aroused by it" (39). In Jill Nagle's interview with Candida Royalle and Debi Sundahl, the following question was asked: "Why did you put yourself in an industry that socially scorned you?" (156). Candida Royalle responded with the following,

I decided that there was nothing wrong with the concept of sexual entertainment, but most of the actual films reflected this sexually shame-based society and its negative attitude toward women. I saw that there was nothing wrong with what I had done [referring to her past as a performer] or with the notion of pornography inherently, but rather the underlying societal attitudes toward sex



that were revealed in pornography. I decided that the answer was to create materials that bespoke a more living and healthy attitude toward sex and women. Were women exploited? Yes, because while we were essential to the production of porn and in fact were what drove the sales of pornography, our sexual needs were not addressed; we might as well have been blow-up dolls (157).

*Naked Ambition*, on the other hand, foregrounds “women who are changing pornography,” but not necessarily from a feminist perspective. However, several feminist pornographers and performers appear in this volume, including Jayme Waxman, Tristan Taormino, Nina Hartley, and Joanna Angel. The essays center on how each woman entered the industry, why that was meaningful, and how they sustain their presence in a male-dominated environment. Although they are short, narrative pieces, they provide personal insight that is often missing from mainstream media or website profiles. For example, Mason, a hardcore pornography director, writes honestly about coming to terms with her portrayals of degrading sexuality,

I wrote monthly that the women I carefully selected to appear in my movies were, like me, passionately into this kind of sex. The sex was meant to be degrading, because that’s what we, together, found sexually exhilarating. I fervently asserted that there shouldn’t be any restraint or shame to explore and experience those intrinsic desires. I found the entire critical dialogue personally challenging but vitally important to the way women were viewed in the industry ... Yes, it’s degrading, and yes, these women like to be dominated, but it’s one aspect of our sexuality, and an even smaller part of who are as human beings (131).

Both volumes offer personal narratives of women entering sex work and the pornography industry<sup>8</sup> in an attempt to provide nuance and context for these decisions. Rather than wrestle with the need to represent all women or all sexualities, the writers included in these volumes point to the need for alternative and diverse viewpoints within feminist theory. While these edited volumes aren’t considered “scholarly,” they offer a window to the various approaches to sex work, pornography, and sexuality that are often hidden from feminist analyses of sex work. While Nagle’s volume offers a collection of feminists justifying and exploring the relationship between

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<sup>8</sup> Because the pornography industry is the commodification of sexual performance, it is often missing from sex work literature.

feminism and sex work, Milne's work exemplifies the opportunities of the third wave: that the narratives of sex workers need to be shared and published.

In addition to developing a more diverse and nuanced approach to sex work and pornography, the third wave has also been very inclusive of LGBTQIA-related issues and as a result, has adopted the deconstructive framework of queer theory. Most often elaborated at the academic level, queer theory assists in the deconstruction of essentialist beliefs about sex, sexuality, and gender (Halberstam 1993; Ferguson 2005). According to Juana Maria Rodriguez,

This breaking down of categories, questioning definitions and giving them new meaning, moving through spaces of understanding and dissension, working through the critical practice of 'refusing explication' is precisely what queerness entails. 'Queer' is not simply an umbrella term that encompasses lesbians, bisexuals, gay men, two-spirited people, and transsexuals; it is a challenge to the constructions of heteronormativity. It need not subsue the particularities of these other definitions of identity; instead is creates an opportunity to call into question the systems of categorization that have served to define sexuality (24).

Queer theory has also influenced a methodological style of "queering," or, working within the margins of scholarly canons, disciplines, or methods. Frederick C. Corey and Thomas K. Nakayama (1997) offer a classic example of the use of queering academia in their article, "Sextext":

The swing position is one I enjoy. I engage in critical analyses of gay male culture, and I experience modes of knowledge in performance. To swing between asking what I know about performance to asking what I know through performance expands my knowledge of performance. To be a fulcrum subject, to be between the study and the experience, is to be there and nowhere, in the moment and off the clock. Yet I find myself with one seminal, throbbing question: How is it possible to write in the fulcrum between the language of academia and the language of sex? (58).

This particular passage illustrates the explicit questioning of borders that has become the defining principle of queer theory. Queer theory's project of naming, challenging, and existing between structural norms and borders has had a direct influence on the way sexuality is categorized, including the ways that sex work and pornography is understood. The contribution of queer

theory for feminist theory and third wave discourse has been the extension of critical questioning for any and all identity categories, locations, and social practices.

Alongside academic narrative-based publications, third wave members also have a meaningful relationship to the production of popular culture. According to Catherine Orr (1997), “Besides allowing for alternative venues and forms of institutions building, this newest wave is returning to popular culture, the medium through which feminism captured the popular imagination – and thus political clout” (41). The Riot Grrrl rock music movement in the 1990s with bands such as Bikini Kill and Sleater-Kinney, magazines such as *Bitch* and *BUST*, and current websites such as Feministing and Jezebel contribute to the dissemination of third waves’ focus on identity and empowerment. Postmodern articulations of sexual subjectivity are also found here, as feminists use these outlets to explore female desire and non-normative sexualities. According to Rowe-Finkbeiner (2004):

The essence of the third-wave philosophy, though hard to pin down, is that real social change is achieved indirectly through cultural action, or simply carried out through pop-culture twists and transformations, instead of through an overtly political, electoral, and legislative agenda. There is certainly power in these pop-culture changes: they are creating spaces for women to be seen as individuals rather than solely as members of their sex, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation; claiming the voices of young women in music, art, and the written world; and turning traditionally confining pop-culture images of women around to empower (88).

On the other hand, several feminist media scholars have criticized this empowerment-based relationship to popular culture, and media in particular, as mentioned in the introduction. Here, scholars are concerned with the contemporary intersection of third wave feminist discourse, consumer culture, and the self-sexualization of women’s bodies.

Throughout this chapter, the loss of and debate over female sexual subjectivity has been explored through canonical feminist responses to the social sexualization of women, the feminist porn wars, and the discourse of the third wave. In the absence of accessible discourses of agentic

female sexual desire, the visual treatment of female sexuality becomes a site of symbolic reproduction and regulation. Much is at stake here, and some third wave feminists even argue that an increase in the mediation of “genuine female pleasure,” can help increase sexual power and help stop sexual violence (Friedman and Valenti 2008, 7). Because media dominate the visual representation of female desire, feminists continue to have a vested interest in justification and analysis of mainstream and hardcore depictions of female sexuality.

Some feminists argue that the depiction of female sexuality in media is inherently sexist because of who controls the media, or because we live in a patriarchal and capitalistic culture, while other feminists believe that depending on personal beliefs about sexuality, sexual depictions of women have the capacity to be empowering (Riordan 2002; Milne 2005). The question then becomes: How can we accurately and ethically represent female sexuality? For some feminists, the combination of third wave discourse, personal experience, and the potential of media have driven them to produce their own representations of female sexuality. In order to boost the recognition and empowerment of individual female sexual subjectivity, these producers have chosen to enter and disrupt the very same industry that caused a historical rift in feminist politics: the pornography industry. In the next chapter, the definitions and conceptualization of feminist pornography will be discussed, and an introduction to the field of feminist pornography will be explored.

## CHAPTER TWO

In line with the tradition of constructing moving images in reaction to cultural and historical conditions (i.e., French New Wave and New German Cinema), feminist pornography grows out of a third wave, sex-positive feminist ideology that seeks to revision female sexual subjectivity. However unorthodox, this enactment of praxis (Sartre 1963) positions women to produce mediated spaces that attempt to undo the mythologies within mainstream pornography. In her book, *Good Porn: A Woman's Guide*, Spanish feminist pornographer Erika Lust (2010) playfully lists these common myths associated with “phony, predictable porn for men,” including: “2. Men can always get it up; 6. When a man is choking a women with his dick, she always smiles and enjoys it; 7. Beautiful young men just love to have sex with fat, ugly, middle-aged men; 13. Asian men do not exist; 25. Even when she’s being raped, a woman always shouts, ‘Yes! Yes! Harder!’ Every woman secretly wants to be raped; 26. Every lesbian is tall, thin and pretty and has long hair and nails” (21-23).

In an effort to shift these commodified myths of sexual performance, feminist directors have entered the “apparatus” (Althusser 1971) and have produced successful alternatives. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the state of feminism (as discussed in the previous chapter) has entered a postmodern condition, and interpretations of feminism—managed by third wave discourse—vary according to each director (this will be explained at length in later chapters). Therefore, “feminist pornography” is not a set of new, agreed-upon pornographic conventions that developed based on the trajectory of feminist theory. Instead, feminist pornography, at the definitional level, is difficult to generalize, and one goal of this dissertation is to analyze these nuances in order to discover patterns. In order to fully comprehend the nuances uncovered by this study’s qualitative data collection, it is helpful to review existing definitions of feminist pornography that have circulated via mainstream media, the Feminist Porn Awards,

third wave publications, and the directors themselves. At this time, this literature stands as the mainstream record of feminist pornography. Next, this chapter will introduce, chronologically, the current field of mainstream feminist pornographers. Because this dissertation focuses on the US cultural context, US-based feminist pornographers will be explored in more depth, and a textual analysis of one of their scenes will be provided. Due to limitations of exposure and the rate of growth within this genre, this is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather a cross section of the most prominent directors in the field and those that participated in this study.

### *Defining Feminist Pornography*

In her coverage of the first annual Feminist Porn Awards—held in Vancouver, Canada, in 2006—journalist Megan McChesney (2006) writes, “Feminism and pornography haven’t always been good friends. In fact, many people might say the concept of feminist porn isn’t just unrealistic, but downright oxymoronic” (D12). Later in the article, although she attempts to undo this assumption, McChesney fails to include a working definition of feminist pornography. While this could be understood as oversight, it is most likely due to the fact that finding a straightforward, detailed genre definition is difficult. On the other hand, it seems that this event—the inaugural extravaganza dedicated to feminist pornography—and subsequent coverage *should* provide the most solid conclusions about this emerging media form.

The website for the Feminist Porn Awards, sponsored by a Canadian adult store called *Good For Her*, provides a less blurry, yet pixilated conceptualization of genre conventions: “As feminists and sex-positive people, we want to showcase and honor those who are creating erotic media with a feminist sensibility that differs from what porn typically offers” (“Feminist Porn Awards” [http://goodforher.com/feminist\\_porn\\_awards](http://goodforher.com/feminist_porn_awards)). Further information is provided within the selection process outline for the participating films:

Winning films were selected based on the presence of at least two out of three criteria:

(1) Women and/or traditionally marginalized people were involved in the direction, production and/or conception of the work; (2) The work depicts genuine pleasure, agency and desire for all performers, especially women and traditionally marginalized people; (3) The work expands the boundaries of sexual representation on film, challenges stereotypes and presents a vision that sets the content apart from most mainstream pornography. This may include depicting a diversity of desires, types of people, bodies, sexual practices, and/or an anti-racist or anti-oppression framework throughout the production (ibid.).<sup>1</sup>

Over time, a popular and academic interest in feminist pornography has opened up further investigation, resulting in the circulation of more nuanced characteristics and accounts from the directors themselves. In her documentary, *Hot and Bothered: Feminist Pornography* (2003, Way Out Films), New York filmmaker Becky Goldberg makes an attempt to highlight feminist pornography as a medium in which women are *exploring* sexuality. Through interviews with various women that list their work under the heading of feminist pornography—from direction to distribution—she attempts to uncover shared concepts and challenges in their work. One of the underlying themes is that this pornography genre depicts realism: “normal” women enjoying sexuality rather than the more “plastic” women typically seen in mainstream pornography.

Another emergent theme in this film is that this population of female entrepreneurs enters the pornography industry in order to insert their own ideas of female sexuality into the pornography conversation. Unfortunately, as the women discuss in the film, entering the industry with ideas of implicating feminism at the center of their content is a difficult task. Veronica Hart, an actress-turned-director admits that, “It’s been more difficult for a thinking, intelligent women

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<sup>1</sup> These guidelines have become more specific in the last five years. The first time they were accessed (2007), for my Master’s thesis, the guidelines included the following: “First, they had to demonstrate genuine female pleasure and women getting their fair share of pleasure. Second, that women had a substantial hand in creating the film – either as producers, directors, or cinematographers. Third, that the film expands the range of sexual expression for women” (“Feminist Porn Awards” [http://goodforher.com/feminist\\_porn\\_awards](http://goodforher.com/feminist_porn_awards)). When compared to the current guidelines, the earlier iteration does not include “marginalized people” or the discourse of queer theory. This change is further evidence for the “queer turn” in feminist pornography, which is argued and briefly discussed in the Courtney Trouble section of this chapter.

to be involved in adult [industry] because you feel like you're not only standing up for yourself, but you're representing women and you're also making products that you hope are not degrading." This difficulty is one of many. Greta Christina, the General Manager of Blowfish.com<sup>2</sup> admits that funding is an issue that continues to limit the availability of feminist pornography. "This is a direct indication that the mainstream isn't interested. Also, this means that there is some compromise involved."

The picture that *Hot and Bothered* paints is the challenge that (some) women face when attempting to construct feminist-accepted pornographic imagery in an industry that often reproduces misogyny and sexism. Unfortunately, however, a conversation that explicitly investigates the qualifiers of feminist pornography is never included. While Goldberg offers talking-head interviews with directors, the definition of feminist pornography remains implied rather than explicit. When performer Nina Hartley comments on what she thinks feminist pornography is, she simply states: "It shows women desiring it." Later, when asked during an interview for *Iris Magazine* about this definition, Goldberg responds by stating:

I think what makes a porn feminist is that whatever the sexual situation that is going on, the woman is in control of what is being done to her and she enjoys it. I also think you have to go with your gut when watching porn. If you are watching something that makes you feel uncomfortable, feel gross, fat, or feel sympathy for the woman onscreen it is probably not feminist" (Long 2005, 15).

Based on Goldberg's summary, and the stipulations imposed by *Good For Her* for Feminist Porn Award submissions, feminist pornography could be defined in the following statement: Feminist pornography is a filmic genre that involves women at the production level; depicts women enjoying and in control for the sexual performance onscreen; and the film, overall, depicts sexual

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<sup>2</sup> Blowfish.com is an online sex toy catalog and boasts "Good Products for Great Sex" as their motto. Blowfish Video emerged in 2003 and produced and distributed Shine Louise Houston's *The Crash Pad Series*, along with *Superfreak* (2006) and *In Search of the Wild Kingdom* (2007).



diversity. However, this conclusion is helpful but still incomplete, and many questions emerge, including: How do audiences know if the performers are enjoying it? What exactly is feminist about the production process? How do we define “control” in sexual performance—and what about bondage and aggression? And lastly, what counts as sexual diversity?

However, if we circle back to third wave feminist discourses on sexuality, this amalgamated definition mirrors the individualism and non-judgmental space that has been constructed post-porn wars. Rather than outline strict guidelines for feminist pornography, what circulates is a *framework* that is left to individual interpretation. While this is true for most filmic genres (see Kracauer 1960), the invocation of feminism within the pornographic text is so polarizing and political that a higher degree of concern for the “what” is necessary. In other words, while a romantic comedy is constructed with a particular (heterosexual, patriarchal) framework, there is nothing inherently political about the suggestion that it’s a romantic comedy. In the case of feminist pornography, there is a suggestion that the sexual performances depicted within the conventions of pornography are inherently feminist, a claim that is as political as it is revolutionary. Drawing from the framework description offered above, the next step is to explore primary sources in order to grasp the logics of this mediation: What does feminist pornography look like? How did these directors arrive in this position? How do *they* define feminist pornography?

### *Origins and Practices of Feminist Pornography*

While the initial impulse to create pornography from a feminist standpoint is often credited to Candida Royalle and Debi Sundahl (Nagle 1997), it is important to acknowledge Club 90 as a notable conduit for facilitating the consciousness necessary to embark on the feminist pornography project. Club 90 was a group of current (at the time) and former female pornography performers—Veronica Hart, Gloria Leonard, Kelly Nichols, Candida Royalle,

Annie Sprinkle, and Veronica Vera—that met in New York City as “sort of a consciousness-raising group like those of the early women’s movement” (Fuentes and Schrange 1987, 41).

According to Candidate Royale,

It was a small group that we formed back in 1983 to meet and help all of us – there were seven of us at the time – and the goal was to have a place where we could all come and speak to each other because we understood that we were women in an extremely unique situation in terms of had thus far done with our lives ... We really weren’t that remarkable or different in terms of your average young women and we weren’t the way most people would perceive women who’ve done into the industry to be. So, and some of us were leaving the industry and confronting a lot of feelings about it, both in terms of how do we explain this to people, how do we talk about this, that we’ve done this, what do we do when people see us, um, and also the industry ... So this was the kind of thing that brought us together; there was no one we could talk to that could really grasp our experience and especially talk about it without falling back on pre-conceived notions and judgments (phone interview, April 26, 2012).

Royale participated in Club 90 after she transitioned out of the pornography industry as a performer (she did her last movie in 1980). During her tenure with the group, she was simultaneously involved in therapy in order to “move forward and gain a tremendous understanding of my situation and learn to accept myself and my choices” (ibid.).

It was within this context that Royale was able to develop her vision for feminist pornography, which would take the form of couples pornography. During a *Jump Cut* interview with the women of Club 90, the members were all asked about “women-oriented” pornography and what that might look like. Royale’s response was: “More erotica than just hardcore genitalia. Plots that aren’t insulting to women. That put the women as heroines” (Fuentes and Schrange 1987, 43). This response, which offers more detail than the “framework” responses offered above, reflects Royale’s unique position as a former performer that sought specific correctives based on personal experiences. Annie Sprinkle and Nina Hartley are other US-based, notable performers-turned-producers that emerged during this “structure of feeling” (Williams 1977, 132) in the

aftermath of the porn wars and before the emergence of postmodern-inflected third wave discourse (see Sprinkle 1998).

During a phone interview (April 26, 2012), Royale outlined why she decided to begin Femme Productions and re-emerge as a director and producer in the pornography industry:

My decision to start my own company was related and was a reaction to the fact that heterosexual pornography was extremely formulized. It was all a formula and it was still made exclusively with a male point of view. I found that much of it was really-, oh there was just so many things I disliked about it. It was still really, really hardcore; sometimes I just found the images, in fact, degrading and really unappealing to women. I felt that the women were the-, these movies were made and sold on the backs of women and yet our sexuality, what were really felt and wanted, was not really addressed at all ... So, it was that and it was a reaction to my own work that I had done myself and coming to feel that, in fact, conceptually and morally, I didn't think there was anything wrong with producing sexual material for people who would consent to perform or for consenting adults to share and watch together.

Based on additional details surrounding Royale's path to establishing her production company, Femme Productions, she admitted, during our interview, that she had some elements of "luck." While she was a participant in the Club 90 project, a woman named Lauren Mimi approached her and, according to Royale, they had a "meeting of the minds; she came to New York to do erotic rock videos for women and couples, and I had been thinking of, gee, what would women's erotica look like. I don't want to just do another big soap opera plot like people think women want. It's the sex that needs to change, the eroticism." At that time, Royale was married to a "young man from Sweden" and his parents were visiting them at the same time Royale was hosting a meeting with Mimi at their apartment in Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn. Her father-in-law overheard their conversation about women's erotica, and having made his fortune in "spaghetti westerns" in Italy and some "high-budget adult movies," he contacted Royale's husband after he left and told him that Royale's idea was "brilliant," and that he'd put up money for production if they could find distribution. According to Royale,

So the biggest challenge for me was to go out and find the distributor so I called up three of the major, top distribution companies that also produced their own movies and two of them completely rebuffed me and said, ‘nice idea, Candida, but women aren’t interested’ and this is still a boys club. And it was just one of those things, you know, in your gut when you’re on to the right idea. And so, but the final one I went to, it was a company called VCA that was really respected in the industry and they pretty much said-, because they knew me – I was always in the industry considered one of the smart girls, you know, that you can rely on to know their lines and, you know, I had been asked to produce but I wasn’t into it at the time. And so, I think they felt-, there was no investment on their part unless I handed them a good, finished product and so they said that they would handle it and that’s all I needed to go back and get the money and it was as easy as that (ibid.).

In the beginning, Mimi co-wrote and directed their films and Royale co-wrote and produced the films. By their third film, Royale also began co-directing the films. And although VCA was charged with distribution fulfillment, marketing and developing sales materials, Royale put her own press kits together and worked hard to put her (recognizable) face to the Femme Productions project. After their first three movies, Mimi left to move onto other projects and Royale’s (now ex-) husband convinced her to start her own distribution, so she negotiated away from VCA and did their own distribution for ten years. After they separated, Royale took over “complete running of both production and distribution and I found that I just couldn’t do it all and it was causing me to not produce any more movies. So after eight movies, that’s when I went over to Adam & Eve<sup>3</sup> and they took over distribution and fulfillment for financing” (ibid.)

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<sup>3</sup> Adam & Eve is a sex toy and video retailer that has a reputation for promoting sex positive products that undergo a rigorous review process before they become available on the website. According to their “Sex Positive Policy,” Every movie, book and magazine we sell is examined by a specially trained employee to make sure they do not depict negative or harmful sexual imagery. Following the employee's approval, the items are shipped out-of-house to a therapist or psychologist licensed by the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists (AASECT) for similar review and to ensure the items do not contain any indications of coercion, denigration or harmful acts. Only then will we offer an item for sale to the public. This ensures that every item Adam & Eve sells depicts a positive and healthy portrait of human sexuality” (“Our Sex Positive Policy: Laying Out the Details” [http://www.adameve.com/t-sex\\_positive.aspx](http://www.adameve.com/t-sex_positive.aspx)).

The same year that Femme Productions began (1984), Debi Sundhal established Blush Entertainment, a production company that focused primarily on sexual experience and desires within the lesbian community. During an interview with Jill Nagle, Sundhal—who earned her start-up money from performing as a stripper—recalls that,

I was told the same thing by gay men—that there’s no such thing as a lesbian market. We started Blush Entertainment, which consisted of *On Our Backs* and Fatale Video production and distribution companies, and Blush mail order, because both gay men and straight had tons of sexually explicit material, and lesbians had zero. I was told repeatedly that there was no lesbian market, and here I was making a living off of it. Fatale created the genre of authentic lesbian erotic videos, directly challenging the ruling stereotypes of lesbians created by men for men through their girl-girl videos. More importantly, Fatale gave lesbians their erotic voice for the first time in modern history” (163).

Later in that particular interview, Sundhal reveals that she had a difficult time finding distribution and ended up using the pages of her erotic lesbian and feminist magazine, *On Our Backs*, to promote the Fatale Video’s portfolio. Although Fatale Video, and Blush Entertainment in general, did contribute to the establishment of women’s erotica in the mid-1980s through the 1990s, the combination of failed distribution and the creation of a company “with an exclusive lesbian market who would not tolerate men in their erotic materials” (166), precludes this material from existing within the recognizable canon of feminist pornography as it exists today. It is important to consider the impact of Blush Entertainment in this historical context, however, because it represents the origins of a corrective to the inauthenticity of lesbian sexuality portrayed in the mainstream pornography industry.

Overall, accounts of moving image feminist pornography include diverse genders and diverse sexualities rather than *exclusively* lesbian-based content. In other words, feminist pornography is not “lesbians only,” or “heterosexual only,” and projects that begin with a sexual identity stipulation fail to promote the possibility and existence of sexual fluidity—a major characteristic of the feminist pornography genre. This is not to suggest that Blush Entertainment

cannot be thought of as a form of feminist pornography, but that it was not conceptualized as pornography with a feminist logic. Rather, it was constructed as pornography for the lesbian community with feminist impulses. This “feminist logic” was discovered through interviews with directors and audience members, and will be explored in later chapters.

Candida Royalle, then, who is often referred to as the “pioneer<sup>4</sup>” of feminist pornography, represents the earliest iteration of this genre during the era of video production (VHS) and digital video production (DVD), before the explosion of online pornography. Royalle’s work was also borne out of the theories of second-wave liberal feminist politics; porn wars-inflected discourse and conflict, dominantly white, dominantly heterosexual, and entrepreneurial. Royalle’s US-based successors, on the other hand, are largely influenced by third wave discourse and emerged after the pornography industry’s transfer to the new media environment in the 1990s, otherwise known as the “pornography gold rush” (Lane 2000, 114).

However, as the profiles in the remainder of this chapter will demonstrate, the feminist directors that emerged during this online era of participatory culture (Jenkins 2006) did not do so based on democratizing affordances. Although promotion and distribution online did allow for maximizing profits with lower overhead (Slayden 2010, 58), feminist directors do not cite technology as the driving force behind their decision to enter the entrepreneurial arena. Rather, their accounts reveal unique experiences and interests that led to an interest in the infusion of their feminist beliefs, the production of pornography, and the desire to shift sexual discourse. In order to identify these unique experiences and encounters, the remainder of this chapter will offer profiles of each of the US-based feminist pornographers that were included in this study. As

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<sup>4</sup> During the phone interview, she noted that, “Well, I like to be called the pioneer and I want my work to be remembered as a line that really broke-, how would I say this, a line-, I guess I wanted to show that you can make adult, sexually explicit movies that had integrity, value, and actually brought something to people’s lives and helped women feel good about their lives sexually” (April 26, 2012).

mentioned earlier, this is not meant to be an exhaustive list; this project could not account for every feminist director in the United States. Rather, this is a snapshot of the most highly recognizable directors that have won Feminist Porn Awards, appear in independent and mainstream media, and have been recognized on Tristan Taormino's list<sup>5</sup> of global feminist pornography directors.

Before moving on to introduce Tristan Taormino, Joanna Angel, Courtney Trouble, Madison Young, and Shine Louise Houston, a *brief* textual analysis of a scene<sup>6</sup>, directed by Candida Royalle, will serve as a contextual aid to shed light on her content and vision. This particular scene was chosen based on the fact that it won a Feminist Porn Award in 2007 for Hottest Group Sex Scene (for her work *Under the Covers*, 2007, Femme Productions), which works as symbolic capital in the field of feminist pornography. Each remaining director's profile will be accompanied by a similar analysis, based on a scene that won a Feminist Porn Award (except for Joanna Angel, who has never been nominated) as well.

This award-winning scene is the final scene in Royalle's feature, *Under the Covers*, and begins with sweeping shots of a masquerade-themed party. Those in attendance— well-dressed men and women—are enjoying champagne and socializing as upbeat music plays in the background. Eventually, the camera follows a couple as they find a separate, low-lit room with a

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<sup>5</sup> On one of her websites, Puckerup.com, Taormino has a separate tab titled "Feminist Porn," which includes a description of what feminist porn is, a list of directors, resources and news. As a feminist pornographer herself, and sex-positive lecturer and author, she has become an authoritative figure on the feminist pornography genre.

<sup>6</sup> The scenes that were chosen for the textual analyses were accessed through the website hotmoviesforher.com. They were purchased through the website's video-on-demand system. The textual analysis focused the sexual choreography, paying close attention to female pleasure and the possible reversals of mainstream pornography conventions. The textual analyses are not meant to be critical, but are rather descriptive in their intent to offer an example of what feminist pornography looks like to someone that has not had the opportunity to view this genre before reading this dissertation.

couch and a velvet-looking backdrop. After making themselves comfortable on the couch, a third woman enters and is invited to join the couple on the couch. This “second” woman begins kissing the “first” woman’s neck, her lips, then her thighs as the “first” man watches. Next, the women pour champagne on the first man and lick it off of his chest and legs. As this emerging threesome unfolds, the camera cuts back to shots of the masquerade party, offering shots of other couples engaged in light erotic activity: kissing and touching on the dance floor.

Back in the couch/velvet room, the first woman puts a dog collar on the second woman and the first man begins caressing the second woman’s body while the first woman begins to stick her finger in the second woman’s vagina. As this unfolds, a “second” man enters the room and begins rubbing and caressing the “first” woman. Eventually, the four individuals couple off and they engage in various states of oral sex and vaginal intercourse; positioning themselves so that at some points they can watch each other or so that the women can kiss or touch one another during intercourse with their male partners. Near the end of the scene, the first woman asks the second woman, “Are you going to come with me?” Interestingly, their orgasms are not given much attention (i.e., they do not announce “I’m coming” or change their vocal sexual response) and the men notably orgasm while fixed inside their partner’s bodies. Here, Royalle refrains from the “money shot” convention in the pornography industry. It is interesting to note here that there was not explicit application of condoms before the sexual activity began. At the end of the scene, they all sit on the couch together and take off each other’s masks. Their reactions to each other’s identities are tied to earlier plot points in the film and mark the end of the narrative.

Overall, Royalle’s “group sex scene” features female performances of pleasure and desire, which is noted in their facial expressions, performer chemistry, and active involvement in the sexual choreography of the scene. In addition, the camera remained at the mid-shot level; therefore the scene was not dominated by close-up “meat shots” (Williams 1989, 80). By straying



from the “meat shot,” an angle that frames on the genitalia during penetration, this scene allows the viewers to engage with the group activity and the performers as whole bodies rather than objectified body parts.

*Tristan Taormino: Education and Gonzo Performance*

The next cohort of feminist pornography directors emerged in the late 1990s, over a decade later than the emergence of Fatale Video and Femme Productions. At this time, third wave feminist discourse was permeating the movement, but as Taormino explained in a phone interview (October 13, 2011), there were lingering tensions left over from the porn wars and second wave feminist politics. Unlike the remaining directors, who were farther removed from this historical condition, Taormino’s journey includes exposure to *On Our Backs* and Femme Productions, which she admits had a direct impact on the development of her erotic voice. Two other notable directors that emerged during this time period are Maria Beatty<sup>7</sup> (France, Bleu Productions) and Anna Span<sup>8</sup> (England, Easy on the Eye Productions). Beatty debuted her first film, *The Black Glove* in 1997 and according to her website, “Her movies reveal the previously hard-to-find fantasies of bondage, spanking, tickling, sensual teasing, and more. Not only an astute observer of the cultural aspects of the fetish world, Beatty’s artistry as a filmmaker sets new standards of quality” (“About Us” [www.bleuproductions.com](http://www.bleuproductions.com)).

Span, on the other hand, starting filming pornography in 1998 and has completed an MA in philosophy, published a book titled *Erotic Home Video* (2003) to assist couples in producing their own erotic videos, and has released several films under her company, Easy on the Eye

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<sup>7</sup> Maria Beatty was nominated for a Feminist Porn Award in 2011 for her work, *The Return of Post-Apocalyptic Cowgirls* (2010) ([http://goodforher.com/feminist\\_porn\\_awards](http://goodforher.com/feminist_porn_awards)).

<sup>8</sup> Anna Span won the Indie Porn Pioneer award at the 2007 Feminist Porn Awards and also received the Best Bi Movie award in 2011 for her film, *Sex Experiments* (2010) ([http://goodforher.com/feminist\\_porn\\_awards](http://goodforher.com/feminist_porn_awards)).

Productions. According to her website, she is interested mostly in “women enjoying sex” and “female point of view shots” (“About Anna Span”

[http://www.annaspansdiary.com/about\\_anna.php](http://www.annaspansdiary.com/about_anna.php)). Like Taormino, Span encountered the rhetoric of anti-censorship feminism, but was able to find her own voice:

Originally, Anna was anti-porn, believing it to be an area in which men were given free reign to subjugate the woman for their own needs. This was during the ‘80s at the height of the ‘ban the top shelf’ campaign led by Clare Short in the UK. She then had ‘a moment of clarity’ walking down Old Compton Street in the red light district of Soho, London. She deconstructed her feeling of anger, asked herself why she felt this way and found the honest answer was jealousy. She was jealous that men had their Soho. The society in which we lived considered men’s desires worthy and was happy to invest money to cater for them. What was missing was the equivalent – but very different in content/style – for women. Why shouldn’t a woman have the subconscious confidence to know that even if she doesn’t personally want to use porn, the world in which she lives recognizes that she might want to and has a right to do so? (ibid.)

Span’s story highlights an important justification for *not* including non-US feminist pornography directors in this study. Although non-US directors have notable similarities in mission and content with US-based directors, their emergence is based on unique national and historical logics. Although feminist pornography is a Western, neoliberal genre, different countries provide different (legislative, cultural) contexts that can have a direct influence on content, production practices, distribution etc. However, it is still important to recognize non-US directors in order to establish this genre as global and evolving.

Although Taormino emerges from the US context, she is recognized internationally for successfully constructing the intersection of education, gonzo, and sex positive discourse in her work. During our phone interview, Taormino revealed that this filmic approach was based on a series of life experiences, beginning with the attendance of an event at her college that featured Deborah Sundahl (of Blush Entertainment) in the early 1990s. She noted that,

And so, I felt like seeing that film [Dundahl screened her film *How to Female Ejaculate* during her event] and then getting to see these other Fatale movies after that showed me,

like, my first real immersion in porn was not mainstream but was really lesbian/feminist porn, and so, I didn't have this notion that some of my contemporaries had, which was that all porn is evil and objectifying and misogynist. I knew that this thing, this alternative world existed and that porn could be educational and it could be sexy and it could be fun. And so I knew that that option out there really existed because of that experience (phone interview, October 13, 2011).

Although Taormino was determined to attend law school after she left Wesleyan University, she was wait-listed or rejected from every school she applied to, and didn't have a back-up plan. She sought the counsel of her senior thesis advisor and based on the excellence of her thesis—

Taormino wrote about representations of sexuality—her advisor suggested that she find a way to “write about sex” instead. Taormino decided to defer admission to the one law school that took her off the wait-list and a couple years later, in 1995, she started her own magazine, *Pucker Up*, which “included a lot of writing and art and photography about sex.” From there, Taormino pitched a series, *Best Lesbian Erotica*, to Cleis Press and after receiving the green light, began to edit the first collection. Shortly after, Cleis Press put out a call for books on specific sex education topics, and Taormino pitched a book, *The Ultimate Guide to Anal Sex for Women*, which was eventually published in 1998. During her book tour, many of her fans suggested that she make a video out of her book. It was at that time that Taormino began her transition into producing feminist pornography. She recalls that,

So I thought that if I was going to make a video, I wanted it-, well, I wanted to have explicit sex in it so I new it was going to be-, it was immediately going to be labeled porn, because I would show explicit sex. And I wanted it to be smart and I wanted it to be educational, but I also wanted it to be hot and inspiring. So, I approached a number of porn companies and pitched them with this idea of a video that was based on my book that was both educational and geared toward women and also sexy and hot. And all of them turned me down (ibid.).

Eventually, John Stagliano, the owner of the mainstream pornography production company Evil Angel, called and informed Taormino that he wanted to meet her and discuss the possibility of him producing the film. According to Taormino, “... and I went to Las Vegas and met with him

and he ended up funding the video and that was really my first foray into porn.” At the beginning of *Ultimate Guide to Anal Sex* (1999), this meeting between Taormino and Stagliano is dramatized, and after Taormino pitches the film, Stagliano tells her that he’ll fund her only if he can stick a certain number of items into one of his performer’s anus. After he brings a female performer into the office, Taormino successfully meets his demands, and he agrees to fund the film.

During our interview, Taormino admitted that at that point, “I never really envisioned that I would be a full-time pornographer. I really felt like I was a writer primarily and sex educator and I wanted to do these things and then go back and do what I was going before.” However, in 2005, she “came back to porn” and did a movie series with Adam & Eve called *House of Ass* with the intention of offering an alternative to Candida Royalle’s “softer, gentler porn” and the onslaught of mainstream duplications dubbed “porn for women.” Harnessing this vision, Taormino decided to make her own gonzo-inspired<sup>9</sup> series but Adam & Eve was “on the fence” about it. She decided to get in touch with Vivid Entertainment, the most successful pornography company in the United States (Lane, 2000) and talked to them about producing a gonzo series. Steven Hirsch, the owner of Vivid, agreed and then unexpectedly pitched a sex education line, Vivid Ed, and wanted to hire her as an exclusive director. Taormino agreed and became the creator, director, writer, and executive producer for Vivid Ed. In addition to Vivid Ed, Taormino has her own production company, Smart Ass Productions, as well as a retail website,

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<sup>9</sup> During our phone interview, Taormino explained that there was an original definition of “gonzo,” but that it had developed into “how far we can push the female body” in mainstream pornography productions. According to Taormino, gonzo pornography is, “People who aren’t playing a role, they’re being themselves. It’s spontaneous sex and they’re acknowledging that the camera’s there, so they’ll often talk to the camera” (October 13, 2011). In her “dictionary of porn,” found in her book, *Good Porn*, Erica Lust (2010) defines gonzo as, “(from the name of a type of journalism, pioneered by Hunter S. Thompson, in which the writer becomes a participant in the events on which he or she is reporting) a term describing pornography in which the camera operator or the director participates in the action” (73).

Puckerup.com, where she sells her books, videos, and select sex toys that she recommends (but doesn't produce).

Her film, *Chemistry I*, is part of the Vivid Ed line; it was released on DVD in 2006 and won a Feminist Porn Award in 2007 for Most Diverse Cast and Hottest Gonzo Scene. The beginning of the film immediately establishes the “gonzo” environment with Taormino explaining that there are no scripts, no schedule, and no holds-barred sexual practice between seven “real-life” pornography performers that are going to be together in a house for 36 hours (including a “perv cam” for confessionals). *Chemistry* is a parody of MTV's *The Real World*, and its reality programming-style provides a direct link to gonzo—a admission that the camera is there, speaking directly to the camera, the (arguable) absence of a script, etc. (see footnote 8). In one particular scene, one male and one female performer are filmed in a bedroom; the opening shot shows a woman on the bed and the man is sitting in a nearby chair. The man is holding a camera and it's aimed toward the woman as they discuss sexual activity and preferences. During their discussion of anal sex<sup>10</sup>, the woman begins administering oral sex on the man while he holds the camera, and the camera is angled so that the viewer has a point-of-view perspective. During this activity, the male performer tells her what he likes most about oral sex and she admits that, “I like the way it fits in my mouth. I think I have an oral fixation.” He tells her that, “It feels good going down your throat,” and they eventually move to the bed where they engage in vaginal intercourse. He continues to hold the camera during this activity, and in the end, does not film a “money shot.” It is interesting to note that while they are engaging in intercourse, another performer briefly enters the room, they all laugh, and the performer tells them that they're going to film in another room shortly. It is not explained what will be filmed, but that they are needed

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<sup>10</sup> The term “anal sex,” used to describe anal intercourse, is not only used by the pornography industry, it is also used in academic studies and publication (see Stulhofer and Ajdukovic 2011).

when they've completed their scene. While this scene is not exceptionally educational, it does highlight the gonzo style. The presence and practice of constant communication was also notable. Communication is a fundamental component to Taormino's work, and will be discussed at length in later chapters.

*Joanna Angel: Indie-Punk Pornography*

Unlike Royalle and Taormino, Joanna Angel had an entrepreneurial intention from the beginning of her career as a feminist pornography director. After attending Rutgers University, Angel lived with her college roommates, and worked as an unconventional rock journalist. One of her roommates, Mitch Fontaine, suggested that they start a pornography website together that featured band interviews and editorial content<sup>11</sup>. During a phone interview (October 12, 2011), Angel noted that, "I wasn't a porn fan that got into porn. I didn't have a fascination with it, and, I'm glad that happened because I think that's why, I think, a lot of my stuff has always been kind of unique because it didn't come from a place of like, I want to make something that looks like this." Angel recalled that Mitch approached her because, "he knew I was really into writing and knew I had a good personality and we were just really good friends and, I don't know, he just thought I'd be a really good person in a company."

Unlike Royalle and Taormino's accounts, Angel's emergence as a feminist pornography director did not begin with the impulse to use a feminist perspective to correct or diversity pornography content. Rather, Angel's approach and discussion of her journey is dominated by

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<sup>11</sup> In her account published in Carly Milne's *Naked Ambition* (2005), Angel writes that, "BurningAngel.com was the indie-punk-porn site thrown together with Mitch's friend's 2.0 mega pixel digital camera, my topless photos, a few other cute girls with tattoos, myself deprecating stories about my sex life, and a friend who was kind of okay with HTML. It grew faster than a Vivid Girl's cup size. After just a few months, I was bombarded with questions I didn't know how to answer. People really expected me to stand for something, and truthfully, I knew I did, but for what I wasn't so sure" (234).

an entrepreneurial, business-minded interest. It is also important to note here that Angel performs in the majority of her content, although she also employs “Angels” as performers, much like the business model of Suicide Girls<sup>12</sup>.

When Joanna Angel discusses the emergence of her company, BurningAngel, she discusses it as a “company” and focuses on growth, profit, and issues related to owning a business,

Um, we didn’t have any expectation at first, and, you know, my lifestyle was very different at the time [24 years old], nor did I know anyone in the porn industry or have anyone to compare myself to. Obviously as the company got bigger and more people got competitive with us, we developed bigger challenges, you know? It’s true, more money, more problems ... In the early days of the company there were very little problems because we had very low expectations, we didn’t know what we were doing, we didn’t know anyone, and, you know, we kind of existed in our own little world (ibid.).

BurningAngel features alternative, punk rock-themed identities—piercings, tattoos, etc.— as well as sexual performances that are more geared toward “hot sex and good quality” rather than any woman-centric philosophy. In Angel’s case, she’s a feminist that makes pornography, and is skeptical of the combined term “feminist pornography.” Although she doesn’t market her work as “feminist pornography,” she admitted to being offended that she’s never been invited to the Feminist Porn Awards. She explained that, “Sometimes in feminist porn I feel like they go out of their way to do these really unnatural sex positions just so the woman is dominating the man. And it’s okay, it’s okay for a woman to be in doggie and getting fucked really hard by a guy and getting smacked around, and you can still be a feminist and have sex like that” (ibid.).

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<sup>12</sup> Suicide Girls is a website that was launched in 2001 by “Missy and Sean” that is known for its depiction of “alternative” women donning piercings and punk rock aesthetics. Women can send in pictures to become a “suicide girl” and then have her pictures displayed on the website, [www.suicidegirls.com](http://www.suicidegirls.com). According to their “About” section: “With a vibrant, sex positive community of women (and men), SuicideGirls was founded on the belief that creativity, personality and intelligence are not incompatible with sexy, compelling entertainment, and millions of people agree. This site mixes the smarts, enthusiasm and DIY attitude of the best music and alternative culture sites with an unapologetic, grassroots approach to sexuality.”

Similar to the punk rock ethos, Angel is uncomfortable with labels or joining a dominant category. In the end, however, she does believe that her work is feminist,

I want to make clear that there is no answer to the question I get asked on a daily basis, *Is porn feminist?* [original emphasis] I wish people would simply ask me about *my* porn rather than leave it up to me to make an assessment of a \$20-billion industry. I can confidently say that BurningAngel in its current form, and everything it produces, is feminist (Angel 2005, 240).

Interestingly, later in the phone interview, Angel revealed that there is a “definitely a network” of feminist pornographers in San Francisco that she does not feel that she’s a part of. Rather, Joanna Angel is “trying to start the next Hustler, I’m not trying to start some small studio that makes movies for the same twenty people.” Here, it appears that Angel is making feminist pornography, but rejects the “scene” or reputation that comes with it.

As mentioned earlier, Joanna Angel has not won a Feminist Porn Award or the symbolic capital that goes along with it, so the scene that was selected to include here was done so arbitrarily. It comes from her feature, *Joanna Angel’s School of Hard Knox* (2011, BurningAngel) and is co-directed by James Deen, the “it” male performer of the moment (his rising appeal to female heterosexual audiences is discussed in a later chapter). The scene opens with Angel and a group of female friends standing outside in what appears to be a parking lot, along a graffiti-clad wall. Some of the women are smoking, one is enjoying cunnilingus from a male partner (in front of the group), and others are engaged in conversation. They are wearing “naughty school girl” attire and after the male performer finishes performing oral sex, he is, literally, kicked off of the lot, and the women begin discussing how they dislike “school.” They then mention Angel’s love interest and begin giggling as he approaches them.

The other women leave and Angel is left alone with her fictional love interest, performer James Deen. They begin kissing each other and begin taking off their coats and shirts. Deen then turns her around so that she’s facing the wall, spans her, and then takes off her underwear (her



bra and skirt are still in tact). He then engages in anilingus<sup>13</sup> and cunnilingus. Deen then stops to ask if Angel “likes it” and after she agrees, tells him to “Spank me, I’m a bad girl.” They then begin vaginal intercourse and she reminds him to “Fuck that pussy.” She then administers oral sex and he stops her abruptly, spans her, turns her around, and uses spit from his mouth to lubricate her anus for anal sex. While they engage in this activity, they are noticeably smiling at each other and inaudible communication between them is apparent, alongside explicit statements such as, “take it,” and “yeah, just fuck me.” After the anal sex, Angel bends down and performs oral sex on Deen. This is known in the industry as ATM or ass-to-mouth, in which “a man inserted his penis first in a woman’s anus and then puts it in a woman’s mouth” (Chyng et al. 2010, 343). After one more round of vaginal intercourse, Angel insists that Deen ejaculate on her “ass.” He does so and when he finishes, she immediately bends down and engages in oral sex for roughly thirty seconds. Next, Angel stands up and they smile at each other, embrace, and begin kissing. Overall, while most of the scene is composed in a medium shot, there are multiple “meat shots” throughout the scene. As mentioned earlier, there was some communication—mostly in the form of “dirty talk”—but there was a “check in” moment where Deen asked Angel if she “liked it.” Unlike Royale and Taormino’s scenes, Angel produced a “fantasy” encounter, marked by the schoolgirl costuming (although the female performers appear far beyond high school age) and “bad girl” behavior.

*Courtney Trouble: Queen of Queer Pornography*

Of the feminist directors mentioned thus far, none have set out with the intention of producing pornography that features queer sexualities and bodies. Although Royale, Taormino, and Angel have, in fact, featured non-heterosexual encounters, the majority of their work is

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<sup>13</sup> Anilingus or “rim job” is defined in Erika Lust’s *Good Porn* (2010) as “the practice of licking the anus and/or penetrating the anus with the tongue” (77).

steeped in heterosexuality. Courtney Trouble, on the other hand, is a feminist pornography director that has sought to produce “queer pornography” in the hopes that “by showing a diverse group of bodies and personalities in my work, that that awareness will transcend outside of porn and into my audiences’ daily lives – this includes improving equality for trans people, queer bodies, plus size folks, people of color, sex workers, and women” (email correspondence, February 15, 2012). Based on biographical information gathered from email correspondence, Trouble first became interested in pornography as a “kid” and “occasionally peeked at it or showed it to my friends.” She began studying photography at 10-years-old and began working as a phone sex operator at 18-years-old. At 19, she began constructing erotic portraits of herself and friends as a response to “working too much as a phone sex operator, where I played everybody else’s fantasies.” Using her web design talents and her portraits as content, Trouble then developed NoFauxxx.com in 2002. According to her main website (the hub to her online TROUBLEfilms Network), courtneytrouble.com,

NoFauxxx.com was created in 2002 as a space to explore sex beyond straight, gay, lesbian, and gender binaries. This site led to the creation of the ‘Queer Porn’ genre, with it’s all-inclusive casting and production standards. By all means an obscure, self-funded under-dog, No Fauxxx remains the longest-running porn site of it’s kind. No Fauxxx’s genre and gender-less navigation structure encourages the audience to think outside their own boxes and find something new and exciting to get off to (“Queer Porn Icon” <http://courtneytrouble.com/aboutme/>).

As Trouble’s website gained more attention, she was faced with issues of money and exposure. She admits that, “My biggest obstacles have always been money and exposure. You can’t get money without exposure, and nobody knows how to promote and expose my kind of work to a mainstream audience” (email correspondence, February 15, 2012).

However, Trouble has kept extremely busy and has developed numerous side projects that work to expose feminist, queer pornography. First, she continues to work as a performer and has worked for other feminist pornography directors such as Madison Young and Shine Louise

Houston, as well as mainstream production companies such as Kink.com. Trouble has also directed and edited eleven films for Reel Queer Productions, a “video house” she created with Good Releasing, the filmic arm of the San Francisco-based and sex positive adult store, Good Vibrations. She also manages QueerPorn.TV, a website that she launched in November 2010 with co-director Tina Horn. QueerPorn.TV offers hardcore content as well as in-depth interviews with queer porn stars, with “topics ranging from performing in porn, exhibitionism, kink, gender fluidity, and sexual appetite, allowing the user to access the starts of their favorite porn in a whole new way” (“Queer Porn Icon” <http://courtneytrouble.com/aboutme/>). Lastly, Trouble has developed QueerPornTube.com, the first (free) user-generated adult tube site geared toward the queer and sex-positive community.

Like Joanna Angel, Courtney Trouble recognizes that her pornography is feminist, but does not feel that she needs to label or market her work as “feminist pornography” exclusively. When asked if she considers her work feminist, she expressed the following: “Yes. I consider my work to be feminist, queerist, nerdist, humanist, universalist. Feminism is only a small part of the work I do, but I will say that it’s very important to me personally” (email correspondence, February 15, 2012). When asked, then, to describe feminist pornography in reference to her work, she offered the following:

I think that feminism can be inherent in many different kinds of pornography. What’s really feminist about porn is allowing women to make their own choices, and be respected for those choices, and to be treated more or less the same as her male or genderqueer counterparts in the environment in which she’s making her choices. This can, and does, happen on mainstream porn sets, just as it doesn’t always happen on indie porn sets. I will say that it always happens on my porn sets (ibid.).

In comparison to the language used by Royalle, Taormino, and Angel, Trouble most profoundly embodies the project of queer theory, and refuses to apply strict labels or any level of exclusivity to her work. In this way, it could be argued that Trouble represents the “queer turn” in feminist

pornography. Her attention to queer bodies—and the normalizing of transgender bodies in her work—is also evident in the work of Madison Young and Shine Louise Houston. It is important to keep in mind that this is not the direct result of third wave discourse, for both Tristan Taormino and Joanna Angel developed their companies in the third wave feminist climate as well. Speculation suggests that as sexuality and gender continue to be challenged in our poststructural condition—both inside and outside of the academy—mediations of sexuality will increasingly reflect this deconstructive logic. In fact, it is worth noting the increased presence of Buck Angel, a female-to-male performer-turned-director in the feminist pornography community (<http://www.buckangel.com/index.html>).

In 2009, Courtney Trouble received a Feminist Porn Award for Most Deliciously Diverse Cast for her film *NoFauxxx Roulette* (2008, Reel Queer Productions), a series of seven vignettes that capture queer sexuality. The scene opens with a woman looking through her closet, in a bedroom that projects a “lived in” look, complete with clothes on the ground and organized clutter. The woman in the closet begins to perform on a “fashion show” for her female partner, who is sitting in a chair, close to the closet. Some light conversation in the beginning—about a party they’re preparing to attend—reveals that they are a fictional couple. After modeling a sparkly green bikini, her partner gets up and approaches her. They laugh and engage in playful banter before heading to a nearby couch, where they begin kissing and rubbing each other’s bodies. The female partner takes off her<sup>14</sup> pants, exposing a strap-on dildo and the woman in the green bikini begins performing oral sex (on the synthetic penis). While this activity occurs, the camera pans from the immediate action to the performers’ facial expressions and bodily reactions.

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<sup>14</sup> Although this performer is discussed as “her,” she is dressed in masculine clothing and appears to identify as genderqueer. Because I am not in a position to ask about pronoun preferences, this performer will be described as female. However, “she” might be incorrect and “he” or “they” might be preferred. Due to limitations connected to the ability to ask this performer how she/he/they prefers to be addressed, “she” will be used as a default.

Next, the performers engage in vaginal intercourse and the bikini-clad performer tells her partner to “fuck me like that” and that she wants her partner to “finger-fuck me.” Alongside some spanking and moaning, she affirms this sexual activity by saying, “yeah, like that,” and eventually appears to have an orgasm, although she does not announce it. The scene includes shaky shots with minimal edits, which symbolizes Trouble’s do-it-yourself aesthetic and exploration (rather than limitation) of sexual performance. Communication between the partners ranges from playful instruction to “dirty talk,” and contributes to the belief that these performers are either real-life partners—which is common on feminist pornography sets—or just comfortable with one another.

*Madison Young: Bondage and Sex Positivity*

Like Courtney Trouble, Madison Young voluntarily pursued sex work before starting her production company, Madison Bound Productions (now Madison Young Productions) in 2005. During an interview at her San Francisco production studio on November 10, 2011, Young offered a biographical account that included themes of sexual shame, the curation of feminist art, and a career in bondage performance. She recalled that she grew up in “a very not sex-positive environment”; her single mother had married young and “she didn’t want us to really grow up and she felt like sex was this deflowering kind of thing that pushed us into adulthood and she wanted to shelter us from that for as long as possible.” Despite this shame-inflected environment and years of feeling frightened by sexuality, Young explained that at 17-years-old she began audio recording parts of movies that she found erotic so that she could retire to her bedroom and masturbate. After masturbating, her sense of shame would emerge and she began feeling that something was “wrong.” Based on these early experiences, Young revealed that, “And that’s where a lot of my work really stems from is, wanting people to realize that you don’t have to be

ashamed and trying to create a safe space where people can explore their sexuality and their bodies and pleasure and know that it's not a shameful thing" (ibid.)

After graduating from a performing arts high school, Young attended college for theater and art; she was attracted to the "visceral," "honest," and "open" experiences associated with performance. In December 2000, she started Femina Potens, a sex positive art project/gallery that promoted female and transgender artists. She explained that when she began Femina Potens, she needed a way to financially support the project and its artists, so she entered the sex work community in 2001 as a BDSM (Bondage, Discipline, Sadism, Masochism) model and performer. As a result of developing relationships in the sex work community, Young was able incorporate related themes and meanings into her work as a curator. She recalled that,

A lot of the artists we were showcasing were also sex workers. I would meet artists through doing sex work, um, that we should invite into the gallery and it was something that I was very passionate about politically as well and I felt like I wanted to like, curate art and create art that pertained to sexuality and to really honest expression of who we are regardless if that's sexual or not (ibid.)

Young's performances as a BDSM model and performer inspired her begin scripting and sketching different bondage positions for her own productions, and with the help of her partner, James Mogul<sup>15</sup>, produced her first film, *Bondage Boob Tube* (2006, Blowfish Video). She started her own production company, now called Madison Young Productions, and has since released 26 films, both from her own company as well as through Good Releasing, Abigail Productions, and Girlfriend Films. Young also runs a network of feminist porn websites called FeministPorn.net, which includes websites such as Women's POV, Perversions of Lesbian Lust, and her newest

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<sup>15</sup> Mogul, a photographer and bondage artist, "really helped me with my first production-, really helped me in creating my first shot lists and really figuring out what a shot list was and why I needed one" (interview, November 10, 2011). Until that point, Young "had no formal training" in film, although she had done some directing for theater.

addition, Femme-A-Fist<sup>16</sup>, which “is an all-fisting website, which includes educational videos on fisting, essays on fisting, erotica on fisting, as well as videos and photography that includes people of all gender identities” (in-person interview, November 10, 2011).

Madison Young won a Feminist Porn Award for Best Bi Movie in 2010 for her vignette-style feature, *Fluid: Men Redefining Sexuality* (2009), which she produced with Good Releasing’s Reel Queer Productions. The beginning of the film opens up with a talking-head shot of a male, who is discussing his experience as a bi-identified individual and performer. This “confessional” shot is then interrupted by excerpts from a (upcoming) scene that involves him and additional male and female performers. He continues to discuss the term “queer,” how he developed his sexual awareness, and what interests him about men and women.

The “confessional” ends and the scene cuts to a bedroom where he is seen kissing a female performer. He forcefully turns her around, grabs her hair, kisses her again, and throws her down on the bed. Next, they take off each other’s clothing as they continue to kiss one another. He eventually puts a belt, then his hand, around her neck, and then she begins performing oral sex. While she is doing so, he holds her hair back and then uses his fingers to plug her nose in order to stifle her breathing. At this point, the shot switches from medium shots to “meat shots,” or, close-ups of genitalia. Next, they engage in a “sixty-nine” sexual position and he spansks her vagina while she moans and laughs. He starts to pull her hair, kiss her, and play with her nipples. She tells him to “try and keep her down” and the scene cuts to another talking-head interview shot with the other male performer who was shown in the earlier foreshadowing edits. It is interesting to note that the female performer had short hair, small breasts and piercings,

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<sup>16</sup> During the interview, Madison Young’s production intern interrupted us to let us know that “legal” was going to support Femme-A-Fist. Young then explained that she was worried about this because it was the first website of its kind, and that fisting has been categorized as obscene by some groups.

symbolizing a non-normative pornography performer. Inaudible conversation and laughing was heard throughout the scene, which produced an atmosphere of consent alongside the use of aggression.

Around the same time that Madison Young emerged as the owner of her own production company (2005), there were several non-US producers of feminist pornography emerging as well, including Petra Joy, Anna Brownfield, Emilie Jovet, and Erika Lust. Interestingly, while the US-based directors can be mapped out according to the discourses that emerge from their corresponding feminist wave, non-US directors have missions that match unknown logics. Petra Joy is a German director that now resides in England and according to the biography on her website, [petrajoy.com](http://petrajoy.com), she founded an erotic photography service, Strawberry Seductress, in 2004 and produced and directed her first film, *Sexual Sushi*, that same year. She has since directed numerous films, created the Petra Joy Awards in 2009, published books on producing feminist pornography, and released a documentary called *The Joy of Porn: My Life as a Feminist Pornographer* (2009). On her website, she writes,

The focus of my erotic films is female pleasure. I would like to empower the women who appear and the women who view my films to experience their own personal pleasures away from the stereotypes of female sexuality in mainstream porn. Most porn is still done by men for men and therefore express male desires. I feel the need to create an alternative to the flood of images that distort female Sexuality and reduce women to their genitals (“Content” [petrajoy.com](http://petrajoy.com)).

Anna Brownfield is an Australian “feminist erotic filmmaker” and owns her own production company, Poison Apple Productions<sup>17</sup>. Brownfield is trained as a filmmaker and specializes in documentary film—in addition to feminist pornography—and has screened her work at international festivals. According to her website, “While its main focus is to create erotic, sensual films for a demographic of females and couples, with a truly Australian flavor that can

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<sup>17</sup> Her website, [poisonappleproductions.com.au](http://poisonappleproductions.com.au), did not indicate the specific year that Poison Apple Productions formed.



also translate to the global market, Poison Apple continues to make highly arresting documentaries and fictional films” (“What is Poison Apple?” [poisonappleproductions.com.au](http://poisonappleproductions.com.au)). In a *Melbourne Magazine* interview (Marshall 2010), she admits that progressing to explicit filmmaking was a “natural step”: “I had been interested in creating something that was more aimed toward female viewpoints and female fantasies, and challenging the ideas and the formulas that are in place in pornography ... Sex is meant to be a loving consensual activity, but a lot of it [in mainstream pornography] doesn’t seem that way” (article accessed from [poisonappleproductions.com.au](http://poisonappleproductions.com.au)).

Like Brownfield, Emilie Jouvét, a French director, is a filmmaker that produces artistic projects outside the feminist pornography genre. According to her website, [emiliejouvet.com](http://emiliejouvet.com), Jouvét is mostly interested in creating “personal, artistic, and political work” that privileges intimacy, troubled and confusing identities, a do-it-yourself aesthetic and her friends and lovers. She founded her own feminist and queer art organizations and then shot *One Night Stand* (2006, Fatale Video), her first pornography feature, which has won several international awards, including a Feminist Porn Award for Sexiest Dyke Movie in 2009.

Lastly, Erika Lust is a filmmaker from Spain that has emerged, like Tristan Taormino, as an international authority figure on feminist pornography. According to her website, [ericalust.com](http://ericalust.com), she moved to Barcelona in 2000 and began doing odd jobs in production houses alongside taking courses in film directing. In 2004, she set up her own production company, Lust Films, and released her first erotic film, *The Good Girl*, that same year. She has since released several films and won several film festival awards, most notably for her work, *Five Hot Stories for Her* (2007, Lust Films) and *Barcelona Sex Project* (2008, Lust Films). In her book, *Good Porn: A Woman’s Guide* (2010), Lust explains her inspiration to create feminist pornography,

So I had my criticisms of the adult film genre, as you can see [referring to earlier

discussion of female stereotypes in mainstream pornography]. But even though I didn't like what I was seeing, something inside me was pushing me to look deeper. I discovered that there were quite a few feminist intellectuals who also hated porn, but they hadn't stopped there. They had gone on to analyze it as a contemporary cultural phenomenon. Two books by Linda Williams, *Hard Core* and *Porn Studies*, inspired me. After reading them, I decided to become a porn producer and director myself. I understood that a different kind of porn was possible, and that women had a great deal to contribute to a genre that had always been the exclusive province of men" (7).

This cohort of non-US feminist pornography filmmakers represents diversity rather than convention. Some of the directors own their own companies, some don't; some of the directors include queer representations, some are more focused on women's heterosexual erotica; some are experimental, documentary, and/or fiction filmmakers, some only direct pornography. Without conducting interviews with Joy, Brownfield, Jouvett, or Lust, it is difficult to analyze their work or production practices at the level afforded to US-based directors in this study, but based on these short introductions, it is worth contemplating how diverse filmmaking and art play an increased role in non-US work than US-based work. While Madison Young does curate a feminist art project, Femina Potens, the rest of the US-based filmmakers are not explicitly concerned with pornography as an art form. One of the possible reasons for this is the level of surveillance that the art community receives due to cultural conservatism and obscenity laws in the United States (Steiner 1995). Because of this historical condition, pornography has been relegated to its corresponding industry, and therefore, has not become commonly associated with "art" or "creativity."

#### *Shine Louise Houston: Queer Entrepreneur*

The most recent addition to the mainstream canon of US-based feminist pornographers is Shine Louise Houston, owner of Pink and White Productions, based in San Francisco, California. Out of all the US-based directors, Houston is the most interested in the craft of filmmaking, and is the only one that has had formal training in film production. During a phone

interview (November 16, 2011), Houston explained that after attending film school at the San Francisco Art Institute, she began working at Good Vibrations, a sex positive adult store based in San Francisco. She worked there for five-and-a-half years, and during that time, noticed that the production of lesbian pornography was “pretty void.” She recalled that, “There was no consistency so from the start I wanted to create a company that would produce a consistent amount of content. So, it wasn’t that I wanted to make one film, I wanted to basically jump into the industry and be a really consistent presence” (ibid.)

After getting word from Indie Porn Net—a San Francisco-based listserv that allowed for networking—that Tony Comstock (of Comstock Films) was looking for someone to help him scout locations and recruit models for a test shoot, Houston answered the ad. After successfully finding a location and models, she worked as a production assistant on the actual shoot and when she was introduced to the founder of Blowfish Video, Christophe Pettus, she told him that she “was going to be the best porn producer in SF.” He then asked her if she had anything to show him, to which she replied, “I’m shooting a demo in two weeks.” Pettus asked her to bring it by and she went straight to work:

So I made the demo. I spent all night because I just wanted to give it to him and see what happens, so I spent all night editing and it was two o’clock in the morning and this was the first time I’ve ever burned a DVD, ever, because like I said, all my digital education was post-graduate; it’s not like I learned this in school. Everything I’ve learned had been on the fly. So anyway, I’m ready to burn and stick the necessary media into the drive and all of a sudden I hear this weird click and it failed. I was like, ‘what the fuck, I did everything right’ ... Anyways, I got it fixed because it was a manufacturing defect, but it was the wrong time to figure this out. So, in desperation, we went print-to-tape, but, for whatever reason, my camera is set to long play instead of standard play, so, when I took the DV tape to Christophe – and I’m already embarrassed that I’m bringing a tape – and then he sticks it in and it’s on long play and his player only does standard play and, uh, there’s no audio (laughs) (ibid.).

Despite the audio malfunction, Pettus agreed to help produce Houston’s future work using Blowfish Video’s resources. According to Houston, “And that’s kind of how it started and we did

a few more movies that way and then we started the website and we've one from there and we're working on the next phase of expansion." The website that Houston refers to is pinkwhite.biz, the online hub for her production company, Pink and White Productions. According to the "About" section of the website, "Pink & White Productions creates adult entertainment that exposes the complexities of queer sexual desire. Taking inspiration from many different sources, Pink & White is dedicated to producing sexy and exciting images that reflect today's blurred gender lines and fluid sexualities" (<http://pinkwhite.biz/PWWP/about>). Pink and White Productions is best known for their series, *The Crash Pad*, which operates on a separate website, crashpadseries.com. The website offers the following explanation for the series,

Based on the Award-Winning feminist queer porn film *The Crash Pad*, CrashPadSeries.com is home to authentic queer sexuality. Here you'll find real dyke porn, lesbians, femme on femme, boi, stud, genderqueer and trans-masculine performers, transwomen, transmen, queer men and women enaging in authentic queer sexuality, whether it is with safer sex, strap-on sex, cocksucking, kink and bdsm, gender play and fluidity, and always-authentic orgasms (<http://crashpadseries.com/queer-porn/>).

The "crash pad" is a "secret apartment" that requires a key for entry. The series is based on couples that find that key and travel to the "crash pad" to enjoy a unique sexual encounter. During the November 16, 2011 interview with Houston, she explained that the idea was loosely based on Berkeley Free Hot Tubs, a space that holds six hot tubs and requires knowledge of the combination lock code to get in (located on the gate). According to Houston, "He will pass out the number to some friends, like business, whoever, and I think it changes every month or if there gets to be too many people coming, then they change the combo again."

Shine Louise Houston has won several Feminist Porn Awards, including a 2006 and 2008 award for *The Crash Pad* (Hottest Dyke Sex Scene; Hottest Dyke Film) and a 2010 award for being recognized as The Visionary in feminist pornography. Outside of her Crash Pad series, Houston also won an award in 2007 for Hottest Trans Sex Scene for her work *In Search of the Wild*

*Kingdom* (2007, Pink and White Productions) and another in 2007 for Hottest Dyke Sex Scene for her film *Superfreak* (2006, Pink and White Productions). *Superfreak* stars fellow feminist pornographer Madison Young and includes Dylan Ryan, a queer performer who was also interviewed for this study. In this feature, the spirit of Rick James enters various individuals, causing them to embody a heightened sense of “freakiness.” In the second scene of the film, Young enters a party and immediately notices Ryan, who is standing alone. Young walks up to Ryan, grabs her, takes her to another room, and closes the door. After pushing her up against a wall, Young takes off her pants, exposing a strap-on dildo, and begins performing oral sex. Next, Ryan picks up Young and they have vaginal intercourse while remaining standing and up against the wall. Ryan then puts Young down, has her face the wall, and puts a condom on her hand. She then uses her condom-covered hand to enter Young’s vagina. This continues until the end of the sexual activity and although Young is moaning and offering oral cues of pleasure, it is unsure whether or not she has an orgasm.

During this scene, unique camera angles were offered, including medium shots, meat shots (see earlier footnote), close-ups of genitals, and ground-up perspective shots. In the DVD “Extras,” there is a post-scene interview with Young and Ryan, which has become a staple of Houston’s work. They discuss their favorite parts of performing in the scene, the hardest part(s), how they felt before the scene, and their participation in the sex industry. When they were asked about how they felt before the scene was shot, they discussed their development of professional chemistry by meeting and having lunch before the scene. Before that, they had never met each other.

#### *Field Analysis versus Reverse Discourse*

At this point, equipped with biographical interview data, moving-image text analyses, web-based material, and secondary source data, it is difficult to provide insight on specific

production patterns, filmic motifs, or audience reception beyond generalizations. For now, however, it is worth contemplating the following question: How do we organize feminist pornography directors? While the US-based directors follow a trajectory based on the historical development of feminist discourse, when analyzing all the directors at the group and global level, it becomes more difficult. One way to organize the producers of this genre, using terms of power and symbolic contribution, is through the application of Pierre Bourdieu's field analysis. In this theoretical framework, Bourdieu argues for the replacement of "markets" with the spatial metaphor, "field," in order to organize the accumulation of different forms of capital, the exchange of that capital, action, and relational power (Bourdieu 1998, 1993, 1984). Highlighting four types of capital—economic (money and property), cultural (cultural goods and services including educational credentials), social (acquaintances and networks), and symbolic (legitimation)—Bourdieu is most interested in "the study of how and under what conditions individuals and groups employ strategies of capital accumulation, investing, and converting various kinds of capital in order to maintain their positions in the social order" (Swartz 1997, 75). Using this critical framework, issues of competition, symbolic capital, and economic value could be analyzed within the field of feminist pornography.

As a site of capital accumulation, and as part of the larger pornography industry, feminist pornography is a site of cultural production that maintains diverse power dynamics. However, after considering each of these directors—some at more length than others—an analysis of capital accumulation doesn't seem to be the best way to analyze the intra-field relationships between feminist pornography directors. Based on interview and secondary data, feminist pornography directors do not hold or seek symbolic power; rather, they have an interest in creating diverse symbols. Also, feminist pornography directors are not interested in obtaining social capital from other members of the pornography industry; rather, they market themselves

as individuals, often as owners of “independent” production companies, and uninterested in conventions (symbolic capital), even within the feminist pornography community. Lastly, they are not in direct competition for resources; due to their diverse content strategies and use of digital media, they are not dealing with a finite set of opportunities, material goods, or (digital) space.

When asked about competition with other directors, most of the directors interviewed for this study said that they don’t feel any tension or need to compete. In fact, when the question was asked of Courtney Trouble, she admitted that, “I am competitive with myself first and foremost” (email correspondence, February 15, 2012). During an interview with Tristan Taormino, she admitted that she didn’t feel a sense of competition “at all” and referred to feminist pornography as a “pretty small, tight community”:

Because the thing is, are these people my competition? I guess, right, so maybe I shouldn’t be celebrating them on my website, but, the truth is, we’re all on the same side and we all have a lot of the same fans and I feel like, you know, their work makes room for my work, my work makes room for their work and, we’re all part of the same movement. I’m the first person to say, oh, you want to talk to so-and-so? Here’s their phone number. Because, I do feel like we have a lot of similar goals, we’re not all the same, we don’t have the same opinions, but, I’m just-, I’m more interested-, I just think there’s room for all of us and I truly believe that, I’m not just saying that. And there is a sense of community, or comradery, that I don’t necessarily feel with every other porn director in the mainstream porn industry (phone interview, October 13, 2011).

Joanna Angel, on the other hand, spoke about competition with all women in the pornography industry. Here, it is important to keep in mind that Joanna Angel has a different relationship to feminist pornography than most of the other directors; she has already become a breakout star and has crossed over into the mainstream industry. Although she still maintains that her work is feminist, she has also been established in the mainstream field. In fact, Angel cut the ceremonial ribbon at the Adult Video News (AVN) Awards—the mainstream pornography industry’s equivalent to the Academy Awards—in 2012. During our phone interview, she spoke directly about competition,

Yeah, I try not to let it get to me. I mean, the second you start worrying too much about competition you're going to fail, but yeah, I do-, I definitely feel competitive with other women in the industry. I mean, they're also people that I admire and I like and I'm happy for them when something good happens to them. But yeah, there's definitely competition. I've been at porn conventions where I'll have a booth next to really close friends of mine and if I'm having a bad day and I see that there's a really long line next to one girl's table and there's no line at my table and that girl's selling products like crazy and I'm not selling anything, that's tough, that's competition, you know? (October 12, 2011)

Here, Joanna Angel refers to the need to accumulate capital as a crossover member to the mainstream pornography industry. On the other hand, other feminist directors only discussed the need to accumulate capital as a factor concerning the growth and maintenance of their businesses. Awareness, diversity, community, and feminist activism were framed as higher priorities than competition for symbolic, cultural, social, or economic capital in a closed and definable field of cultural production. In the end, then, it could be argued that although Bourdieu's field framework is a helpful tool of analysis for most sites of media and cultural production, it is not the *best* way to organize the cultural space inhabited by feminist pornography.

For now, keeping in mind the diverse and resistive intensions inherent in feminist pornography, the most productive way to organize feminist pornography is to suggest that it is a set of reverse discourses (Foucault 1990) constructed to offer feminist alternatives to mainstream pornography. Rather than offering a "great refusal" (96), feminist pornography, as a reverse discourse, represents feminist and queer women "speaking on their behalf," often using "same categories" as mainstream pornography (101). As a reverse discourse, though, feminist pornography "runs counter" to (most) of the ideologies and convention upheld in mainstream pornography. On the other hand, however, they don't seem to "run counter" in a collective or competitive fashion. Rather, they represent alternative strategies for thinking about female sexuality that are typically not present in the dominant mode of pornographic content. The use of "reverse discourse" to organize the contribution of feminist pornography recognizes that this



genre is always related to mainstream pornography, but that it marks a shift, resistance, and diversity. According to Erika Lust (2010),

Is it possible to make feminist porn? I definitely think so. Pornography contains a discourse, just like any other kind of cultural or artistic expression. In pornography's case, the discourse involves sex, and whatever contains a discourse can be approached from a feminist point of view. If women don't take a role as creators of pornography's discourse, then porn won't express anything but what men think about sex (39).

Lust asserts that feminist pornography is a discourse, and after reviewing the mission statements of various feminist pornographers, it can be concluded that feminist pornography, in fact, is a network of reverse discourses.

At the beginning of this chapter, the secondary definitions of feminist pornography were vague and interpretive, and now, after profiling several directors, the definition still seems highly interpretive and difficult to analyze. We know that feminist pornography represents diverse sexualities, it privileges female desire, it works against sexual stereotypes, women represent the majority of producers<sup>18</sup>, and it looks different than mainstream pornography. We also know that feminist pornography produces reverse discourses about female sexuality. However, there are many cracks within these statements: What sexualities are dominantly represented? What is female desire and how is it portrayed? How does feminist pornography reverse sexual stereotypes? Can only women produce feminist pornography? What is feminist about feminist pornography? And the list goes on. The remainder of this dissertation attempts to work beyond the current knowledge production surrounding feminist pornography and works toward a deeper understanding of the production and consumption practices of this genre. Without a nuanced, practical and philosophical investigation, feminist pornography will remain at the level of “reverse discourse,” and this genre's unique contributions will be forever generalized.

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<sup>18</sup> While definitions do not exclude men from producing feminist pornography, it is mostly women that have started their own companies and self-identify as feminist pornographers.

In the last two chapters, the contextualization for the emergence of feminist pornography was established through a review of feminist theories of sexuality and sexualization, the historical episode of the porn wars, the current state of third wave discourse, and finally, the emergence of feminist pornography as a feminist media text that draws from these feminist articulations. Specifically, the review of feminist theories of female sexuality, sexualization, and the third wave was organized in order to situate feminist pornography as a contested and political space within feminism, and as the definitions and information offered in this chapter reveals, more information is needed in order to resolve questions regarding the circulation of “feminism” and female sexual subjectivity within this genre of pornography.

## METHODOLOGY

To date, there is a dearth of scholarship that interrogates the production and consumption practices surrounding feminist pornography. Thus, we are left with definitions and accounts that lack substantial cultural complexity. Although mainstream media provide insight via director interviews and coverage of the annual Feminist Porn Awards, investigations at the scholarly level have not yet been published. There are many possible reasons for this, including the historical location of this genre as relatively new and a resulting lag in scholarship, issues related to Institutional Review Boards and the challenges related to getting research protocols accepted, and lastly, scholarship not yet reaching the final publication stage. For example, a volume titled *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*, edited by Constance Penley, Celine Shimizu, Mireille Miller-Young, and Tristan Taormino, is the first manuscript to deal directly with this topic (among other topics related to feminism and pornography), but has yet to be published<sup>1</sup>. The construction of this edited volume illustrates the scholarly and industrial interest in feminist pornography, but due to its inclusion of various authors and distinct chapters, may lack coherence of a comprehensive academic study. While the essays and scholarly chapters from pornography practitioners and academics within this volume will most likely provide much needed updates and information, those findings are not necessarily put into *conversation* with each other.

The goal of this dissertation is to gather accounts from producers, performers, and consumers of feminist pornography, and through those accounts, attempt to understand the discursive functions of this genre as *processes* that flow within a cultural and historical context. Following a feminist/critical cultural studies framework, this study aims to be theoretically dynamic and pursues the overarching question: What are the limits of mediating female

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<sup>1</sup> According to The Feminist Press website, the publication date is February 18, 2013.

sexuality? In addition to addressing this shortcoming of scholarship on feminist pornography, this dissertation also aims to serve as a corrective to a history of pornography research that has centered on quantitative, text-based, and moralistic frameworks. In order to demonstrate how the present study attempts to mark a distance from this trajectory, the following section offers a review the genealogy of porn scholarship and the development of Porn Studies as an established research tradition.

### *Pornography Research and the Politics of Knowledge Production*

Because it is a medium of sexual expression, pornography, as an institution, has experienced a “convoluted dialectic with American history” (Strub 2011, 3). Societal attitudes toward pornography are varied, but at the political and legislative level, this industry has been identified, defined, and regulated alongside laws of obscenity and cultural corruption, which has imbued the term with controversy. Further, moral panics generated by social conservatives and radical feminists have cast pornography as reproducing abject and violent sexualities, which later became the impetus for experimental research into media effects (Strub 2011). However, as many historians have pointed out, the mediation of sexuality was not always politicized in this way. While visual depictions of sexual activity have existed since pre-burial Pompeii (Kendrick 1987), the term “pornography” has its origins “sometime in the century between 1755 and 1857” (ibid, 2). It was at this time that, according to historian Walter Kendrick, “‘pornography’ was born” (2). To suggest that a term was “born” invokes the work of poststructuralism, namely Michel Foucault (1990) and his conceptualization that language imbues objects and behaviors with (political) meaning. According to historian Whitney Strub (2011), “Pornography is never simply a political battleground but rather a discursive site onto which varied social tensions are mapped out” (3). In the case of pornography, Kendrick argues that the term was instantly

pejorative, and was used to categorize sexually explicit, or “pornographic,” materials that were positioned to threaten both the public and the private.

From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the era of the Presidential Commissions on Pornography (1970-1984), the identification and regulation of pornography was based on moral ideology rather than organized media effects research. When the Comstock Act (1873) replaced the 1865 congressional mandate that “no obscene book, pamphlet, picture, print, or other publication of vulgar or indecent character shall be admitted to the mails” (“Cleaning the Mailstream” [http://about.usps.com/publications/pub100/pub100\\_068.htm](http://about.usps.com/publications/pub100/pub100_068.htm)), Anthony Comstock used his Victorian outlook to actively conflate pornography and obscenity. He used his power as a “special agent” for the U.S. Post Office and the Secretary of the Society for the Suppression of Vice (Lane 2000, 15) to shift the norms of appropriate and inappropriate sexual knowledge. For example, the Act includes laws that broadened the list of “obscene” materials to include contraception and materials that included *information* about contraception and abortion (Strub 2011, 290).

In the absence of any strong opposition at the legislative or cultural level, Comstock’s moral crusade saddled the term “pornography” with the cultural myths surrounding “obscenity” at that time. According to Yuri Obata’s (2005) historical analysis of United States obscenity laws, Comstock’s Christian orthodoxy met with social opposition during the era of urbanization and industrialization, and by the end of the 1940s, both the Hinklin Test<sup>2</sup> (1868) used by the courts and the Comstock Laws used by the United States Postal Service were deemed insufficient for analyzing obscenity. The 1957 Roth v. United States ruling established a *new* test for identifying obscene materials, including that the work had to be “utterly without redeeming social

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<sup>2</sup> The Hicklin Test, which was adopted from British Parliament, “measured whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave or corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall” (Obata 2005 60).

importance ... to the average person, applying contemporary community standard, the dominant theme of the material, taken as a whole, appeals to prurient interests” (81). The Roth decision marked a departure from previous moralistic, paternal frameworks; an “average person” was used rather than a “vulnerable person,” the community standard assumed that tolerance for sexual expression would change in time and place, and the notion of prurient interest was based on sexual explicitness rather than moral perspective. With this decision, sexually explicit material, including pornography, became detached from its former conflation with obscenity, and took on a more secular, cultural position in everyday life.

Due to a combination of historical forces, including the relaxed definition of “obscenity” deployed in *Roth v. United States* (1957), the emergence of Hugh Hefner’s *Playboy* (1953), and the “Golden Age” of pornographic filmmaking (1957-1973), the circulation of pornography increased to such a public level that social scientists began posing the question: What are the effects of exposure to pornography? (Lane 2000; Donnerstein, Linz and Penrod 1987). However, it wasn’t until President Lyndon Johnson’s 1970 Presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography that social scientific inquiries<sup>3</sup> were made regarding the effects of nonviolent sexually explicit materials. The commission was asked to review and evaluate any existing

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<sup>3</sup> Before the Presidential Commissions employed social scientists, politicians used the *hearing* format to engage with the effects of pornography. According to Whitney Strub’s (2011) historical account of the relationship between pornography and the Right, Tennessee senator Estes Kefauver held hearings on “obscene and pornographic” literature (1955) and Pennsylvania representative Kathhryn Granahan organized a Subcommittee on Postal Operations included several hearings in the late 1950s and early 1960 on the ways that pornography contributed to the growth of juvenile delinquency (29). Both Kefauver and Granahan framed the growth of pornography as a contributor to juvenile delinquency and social problems, similar to allegations made toward the comic book industry in the early 1950s. At this time, due to pornography’s limited circulation, its “threat” was directly related to the corruption of youth. As the pornography industry entered the film medium and became more ubiquitous on magazine stands and theaters, this concern shifted from youth to the greater society. While the Presidential Commissions used hearings as part of their project, they also employed social scientists to design experimental research to measure social effects.

research—which at the time was centered on erotica within popular literature—to conduct new research, and report any new findings. After a series of studies on nonviolent sexually explicit material and the possible links between pornography and aggressive behavior, the report concluded that there was no causal link between pornography and aggression, and that there was no cause for censorship-based intervention (Donnerstein, Linz, and Penrod 1987).

Although this conclusion moved pornography out from under the legislative radar for a short period, the 1980s brought with it the technological advances of VHS recording, causing pornography viewing patterns to change from the public to the private. This change in viewing arenas afforded an increase in violent pornography and subsequently caused a rise in protest from conservative politicians, concerned citizens, and anti-pornography feminists, resulting in a call for new investigations into pornography consumption and effects on aggressive behavior and beliefs (Nathan 2007). Although non-government-related scholarly investigations emerged during the time between the 1970 Presidential Commission and the subsequent publication of the Meese Report (1986)—based on the findings from Ronald Regan’s sanctioned Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography—the initial drive for social scientific research into the effects of pornography was prompted by a political interest in policy advancement and the recruitment of social scientists to investigate the “question of pornography” (Donnerstein, Linz and Penrod 1987; Linz and Malamuth 1993).

At the methodological level, the majority of these early policy-based pornography effects studies employed a pre-test, post-test experimental design used to measure the possible increase in aggressive thoughts, including an increase in the belief of rape myths, or aggressive behavior, after exposure to nonviolent and violent pornography (Malamuth and Check 1985). Alongside these experimental exposure-based studies and findings, social scientists developed behavioral models and an explanation for observed effects. For example, Dolf Zimmerman’s “excitation-

transfer” theorizes that psychic residues after sexual stimulation that are activated by states of annoyance and anger could lead to hostile or aggressive behavior (Sapolsky 1984; Zimmerman and Bryant 1984). In addition to experimental designs, researchers conducted comparative and retrospective analyses based on crime, population, and pornography consumption statistics and conducted interviews with sex offenders (Linz and Malamuth 1993; Kutchinsky 1991; Goldstein et al. 1971). Researchers also used content analysis to trace the prevalence of violence in pornographic texts, relying on social-cognitive theories such as cultivation and social learning to make connections between consumption and effect (Malamuth and Spinner 1980; Prince 1990; Scott and Cuvelier 1993; Mock-Turner and Purcell 1999; Glascock 2005).

Overall, the media effects approach to pornography research, generally guided by paternalistic and political initiatives, fails to answer its own questions due to its artificial construction of experimental stimulus. Prompted by the goal of producing conclusive evidence of casual and correlative relationships, the traditional media effects approach to understanding pornography consumption and the production of destructive thoughts and behaviors has relied on fixed definitions, controlled settings, and irregular experiences—such as massive exposure to researcher-selected material—at the expense of research participants. Further, due to the introduction of VHS cassettes in the 1980s, the increase in private and personalized consumption practices changed viewing patterns. Due to this technologically advanced relationship to pornography, the continued measurement of behavior and attitudes in a controlled, public, and monitored setting represents a methodological lag in the lived practices of consumers. Further, isolating pornography as *the* indicator of abject thoughts or behavior denies the historical and cultural context of research participants. As Karen Boyle (2003) points out,

To see pornography as the ‘cause’ of yet-to-be determined effects is to position pornography as the active agent and deny the agency, choice, and crucially, the responsibility of the individual men [and women] who use pornography in ways



that are abusive to women [and men]. The effects model sees media in isolation, divorced from society and as uniquely powerful (408).

This inherently feminist critique of the experimental effects paradigm points to a more general critique of media effects research: its organization of actors into “powerful media” and “passive audiences.” As Boyle demonstrates, male consumers of pornography that are also prone to violence against women could remain out of focus due to the prolonged attention to cause-and-effect research. By placing the responsibility for incitement on the pornographic text, individuals are absolved of their individual aggressive tendencies and are then turned into victims of pornography.

The knowledge produced by traditional pornography effects research has been deemed “inconclusive” due to its politicized and experimental design and some researchers have gone so far as to claim that the studies that informed the 1970 Presidential Commission on Pornography failed to prove any statistically significant conclusions (Boyle 2003; Jensen 2003). While there is little doubt that frequent exposure has some degree of influence on a consumer, the methods used within the media effects tradition to investigate pornography excludes too many contextual- and consumption-specific variables to be able to collect substantial claims regarding exposure to pornography. At the time, however, this form of data collection and analysis was consistent with the effects paradigm within media studies research.

Although the Roth decision, the 1970 Commission, and the Miller v. California (1973) ruling all worked to distance pornography from obscenity, the Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography (1986)—ordered by President Ronald Regan and conducted by Edwin Meese—and the subsequent Meese Report, ignited the otherwise dormant moral panic over pornography (in the years post-1970 Commission), and its commissioned studies and organized testimonies were consciously developed to *isolate* pornography as a social problem rather than deconstruct its

dynamic role in lived culture (Straub 2011, Lane 2000). Early studies on pornography, then, were directly tied to political and policy concerns, and worked to frame meanings of pornography content and the consumers of pornography. And as technology moved moving-image pornography from theaters to digital media, consumption became individualistic and obscenity became more difficult to track and prosecute. Without the political push to analyze pornography as a “problem,” coupled by pornography’s movement from the public to the private, research shifted from instrumental designs to a more cultural focus; pornography was no longer a social “threat.” Rather, it had become diffused and had entered popular culture. Research questions, therefore, changed from: What are the effects of exposure to pornography to: What role is pornography playing in our daily lives?

Toward the end of the 1980s, as the feminist porn wars were winding down and panic rhetoric was retreating from the public sphere, a paradigm shift occurred in pornography research (Attwood 2002). By this time, pornography had been woven into the fabric of lived culture and as a result, scholars shifted their attention from a protectionist approach and to one that included historical, cultural, sociological, and critical analysis. According to Feona Attwood (2002), the publication of Walter Kendrick’s *The Secret Museum* (1987) and Linda Williams’ *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the ‘Frenzy of the Visible’* (1989) “played an influential role in this shift<sup>4</sup>; the first, through a historical assessment of pornography as a category; and the second, through a close analysis of pornographic texts as texts (92).

In their work, Kendrick and Williams offer a reconceptualization of pornography through the framework of cultural studies, “particularly in relation to the polysemic nature of cultural texts, the potential fluidity of readings, the status of popular culture, the significance of ‘taste’ as a

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<sup>4</sup> Other notable titles that contributed to this paradigm shift during the 1980s/90s include Laura Kipnis’ (1996) *Bound and Gagged*, Catharine Lumby’s (1997) *Bad Girls*, Laurence O’Toole’s (1998) *Pornocopia*, and Jane Juffer’s (1998) *At Home with Pornography*.

form of cultural distinction, and the relevance of ethnographic accounts for an understanding of the place of cultural consumption in everyday life” (ibid, 93). In a marked contrast to earlier experimental and policy-inspired research on the effects of pornography consumption, the adoption of (British) cultural studies promoted the development of *cultural* and *theoretical* approaches to the analysis of pornography in contemporary culture. For example, some empirical work has investigated pornography performers and has worked to deconstruct issues of labor and agency, rather than victimhood or crime, through survey and interview methods (see Abbott 2000). Feminist frameworks have emerged as well, and argue that pornography can serve as both an empowering and exploitative cultural mechanism (see MacKinnon 1993; Dines 2010; Nagle 1997; Strossen 1995; Lust 2010).

It is important to note, however, that although there was a turn in the academic approach to pornography research, effects studies are not isolated to the Commission era. This paradigm was appropriated—typically in the form of content analysis—for scholars in the 1990s that wanted to investigate Meese Commission claims, and then in the 2000s in reaction to the explosion of pornography available online (See Byrne and Gossett 2002; Mock-Turner and Purcell 1999; Scott and Cuvelier 1993; Yang and Linz 1990; Prince 1990).

Unfortunately, while the paradigm shift from commissioned effects research to Porn Studies (Williams 2004) has worked to situate the consumption of pornography as an everyday cultural practice (see Boyle 2010) rather than as a text inextricably linked to deviance and aggression, this paradigm has failed to offer a substantial body of qualitative audience research (Smith 2007, Attwood 2005), especially from a media studies perspective. While the contextualization of production and consumption has diversified scholarship beyond linear models of audience practices and direct effects, the limited availability of in-depth interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic research is a major limitation to understanding the individual

decoding practices of pornography consumers. While experimental audience studies are still being carried out (i.e., Glascock 2005), they continue to be criticized for their inability to obtain the narratives and nuance associated with qualitative research. In his polemic, “The Need to Bring the Voices of Pornography Consumers into Public Debates about the Genre and It’s Effects” (2005), pornography and creative industries scholar Alan McKee sums up the political ramifications for the exclusion of consumers in academic research:

Consumers of pornography as most commonly constructed as subjects in the sense of being subjected to experiments and rarely presented as subjects in the sense of being thinking agents who could offer an insight into the reasons for consuming pornography and the effects it could have on them. Most academic research into the consumers of pornography has been interested to find out whether the consumption of pornography has unconscious effects on tendencies toward antisocial behavior (in research conducted before the 1980s) and tendencies toward aggressive behavior toward women (in later work). Because of this focus of interest, the research has tended to be uninterested in the conscious process of thinking about pornography on the part of consumers (72).

Aside from this paradigmatic limitation, the historical development of Porn Studies as a field has shifted the scholarly interest in pornography from “texts and effects” (Attwood 2002, 92) and moral ideology to the understanding that pornography is a dynamic and complicated cultural text that warrants multiple methods and interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks. This dissertation aims to both *contribute* to the progression of Porn Studies yet also *respond* to the reception gap in the literature by contributing substantial insight to the pornography decoding process through the qualitative recovery of media accounts (Hoover, Clark and Alters 2004) surrounding the production and consumption of feminist pornography.

Because an investigation of feminist pornography—as a site of mediation, female sexuality, and power dynamic—has the potential to make a meaningful contribution to the empowerment/exploitation debate over female sexuality, it is essential that an academic investigation map out this commercial field as well as the reception of those consuming the visual material. Therefore, the main research questions are: *What is the field of female and feminist*

*pornography directors and how does this field contribute to the social construction of female sexuality? How do female audiences receive and utilize this explicit imagery? How do different directors interpret female sexuality within the political economy of the pornography industry and outside of it? What is the role of feminism for directors and consumers?*

Rather than remain at an abstract, theoretical level in attempting to understand the production and consumption of this genre of pornography and its intersection with female sexuality, this dissertation aims to use qualitative methodology to uncover this complex field of practice as well as the various interpretations of this field, the process of praxis, and the process of access and consumption. More broadly, the inquiry of this dissertation is: *what cultural work is being done when a sexualized group reappropriates a male-dominated medium and uses feminism to renegotiate its terms of discourse?* Another related question driving this study is based on the notion that feminist and female-produced pornography represents the most “authentic” representation of female sexuality on the scale of commodifying the female body. Whereas the male gender has historically been in control of such representations (Byerly and Ross 2006), the construction of feminist pornography represents a moment where women are in the position of creating and commodifying explicit representations of the female body and female sexuality.

#### *Feminist Methodology and Theoretical Frameworks*

Due to the absence of a substantial body of pornography reception data, the lack of quantitative or qualitative studies on feminist pornography content, and the history of politicized knowledge production surrounding pornographic texts and the industry, this dissertation turns to ethics as a foundational principle. Because the data and conclusions of this study are uniquely able to provide primary accounts of the production and consumption practices of feminist pornography, it is essential to gather and present these findings in a just manner. In order to do so, a careful consideration of epistemology, methodology and method were enacted, and the

decision was made to organize this study using the principles of feminist research and feminist methodology (the details of this approach are discussed below). It is important to keep in mind, however, that feminist research does not just entail the execution of a scholarly project that upholds the tenets of feminism. Feminist research is also concerned with questions of epistemology and methodology.

Before defining these terms, a definition of method will help situate epistemology and methodology as distinct, yet related, categories. Quite simply, Sandra Harding explains that the term “method” is to be used when addressing the techniques used to gather evidence (Harding 1987, 2-3). For example, interviews, content analysis, and textual analysis are typical methods employed in the media studies discipline. Methodologies, on the other hand, are “theories and analyses of how research should proceed and how evidence should be gathered” (Jaggar 2008, x). Methodology, therefore, is a critical reflection on methods used in research and should not be used interchangeably with the term “method.” Alison Jaggar (2008) writes, “Methodologies help researchers think critically and constructively about methodology in a broad sense, which includes not only techniques for gathering evidence, but also processes of selecting and designing research projects and publicizing their results” (xi).

Finally, epistemology, according to Harding, raises questions about the possibility of knowledge on a more abstract level (Harding 1987, 2-3). Epistemology includes investigations into the justification of knowledge claims as well as the notion of authority in the production of knowledge. In order to evaluate and reflect, *feminist methodology* is employed as a check and balance system that seeks to provide criticism and suggestions for improvement. Put simply, “feminist methodology seeks to assess knowledge-generative strategies in terms of their suitability for feminist research” (Jaggar 2008, xi). Feminist methodology considers two major themes in its evaluation of research methods. According to Jaggar, one of these themes is the dialectical

relationship between social power and inequality, on one hand, and knowledge production on the other. A second theme is the “inseparability of research projects and methods from social and ethical values” (ibid., xi) of the researcher, the participants, and the context in which the research is being conducted

Drawing on the historical treatment of pornography as an abject industry, the fact that most individuals working within the industry endure a mythic categorization as exploited and/or abused (Nagle 1997), and the cultural assumption that audiences are “sad old men or misogynist misfits” (McKee, Albury and Lumby 2008), qualitative research centering on feminist pornography would benefit from the inclusion of feminist methodology. Aside from the fact that feminist pornography has adopted the term “feminist” in its title, the adoption of feminist methodology for investigative pornography research is the direct result of awareness for the highly politicized nature of this topic and the need to treat research participants with respect and compassion.

While the adoption of a feminist methodology offers an ethical framework for decision-making, it does not offer specific theoretical frameworks or research methods for the researcher. After deciding that this study would operate within feminist methodology—while keeping in mind the trajectory of Porn Studies—the approach of critical cultural studies, as described by Douglas Kellner (2003), was chosen in order to collect dynamic and comprehensive data. Rather than focus on one component of media, critical cultural studies offers a contextual, comprehensive approach that refuses to privilege texts, audiences, or political economy. As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, this dynamic approach offers the opportunity to investigate relationships, reception flows, and power dynamics in a way that most frameworks—including media effects and political economy—can’t do on their own. According to Kellner (2003), “At its strongest, cultural studies contains a threefold project of analyzing the

production and political economy of culture, cultural texts, and the audience reception of those texts and their effects. This comprehensive approach avoids too narrowly focusing on one dimension of the project to the exclusion of others” (12).

### *Methods*

Based on this dissertation project’s adoption of research traditions that seek to uncover constructions of *experience*<sup>5</sup>, the choice of method(s) was based on the intersection of qualitative and feminist methodologies. According to Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2008),

Qualitative research is many things to many people. Its essence is twofold: a commitment to some version of the naturalistic, interpretative approach to its subject matter and an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of positivism ... Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry (10).

Staying reflexive about the “value-laden nature of inquiry” is fundamental to both methodologies, and therefore, the methods chosen for this project aimed to filter out the power dynamics that shape participant participation and meanings. With this in mind, the methods had to also work toward *answering research questions* related to production, consumption and text as laid out in the critical cultural studies framework. In order to meet these multiple needs, I chose to collect the majority of data via interviews and focus groups, and I administered an online questionnaire<sup>6</sup> in order to collect sensitive data that might not be appropriate (for some) during the focus group

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<sup>5</sup> The use of “constructions of experience” is not meant to appear distrusting of the recollections and accounts of participants. Rather it acknowledges the politics of collecting experience and the ways in which historical and cultural context intersect with “experience” (Scott 2008).

<sup>6</sup> The survey method has made a small resurgence in contemporary pornography audience research. Dr. Clarissa Smith, Dr. Feona Attwood, and Dr. Martin Baker (all from the Onscenity Network) launched a survey via pornresearch.org, and collected 5,490 responses. They are still working on results. Dr. Chyng Sun, another leading pornography researcher, is also in the process of conducting a worldwide online audience survey.



encounter. While the inclusion of ethnography could have been helpful—due to its ability to uncover day-to-day operations—there were limitations to accessing these populations (producers, consumers, performers), which will be discussed later in this chapter. One director, Shine Louise Houston, did allow on-set observation, but due to the fact that this was an isolated experience, it did not allow for comparative analysis.

However, the use of interviews and focus groups filled this *observational* deficit with an opportunity to collect and analyze participant “perspectives” (Patton 2002) and “social meaning-making” (Meyer 2008). Adopting the interview and focus group methods ran the risk of misrepresentation or “speaking for others” (Alcoff 2008), so it was important that reflexive contemplation occurred at various levels, including the construction of the interview and focus group schedules, the conditions under which the interview and focus groups occurred, and the power relations between the researcher and participants (ibid 2008). Most importantly, the use of interviews and focus groups allowed for a focus on phenomenological research, where, according to Deborah Tolman (2002), “... the point is not to test hypotheses but to develop an understanding of experience” (43).

In order to capture the nuances and intricacies associated with the *production* processes of feminist pornography, interviews were chosen as the optimal method. Because the impulse for this aspect of the dissertation project rests on revealing the tensions, definitions, and experiences related to production process for different directors in different contexts with different relationships to feminism, the choice to include interviews was based on the conclusion that quantitative methods, including the survey, might minimize the dynamism of expected responses. Further, interviews offer a corrective to the limitations associated with observation. As Michael Patton (2002) points out,

The fact is that we cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings,

thoughts and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things (341).

This ability to go beyond the observational and ask participants questions about their meaning-making processes allows for the generation of experience-rich and contextual information (Seidman 2006). The interview method offered an opportunity for producers of feminist pornography to reflect on their practice, away from the stressful environment of the production set while also creating a space where they could discuss their interpretations of feminism and sexuality in a transparent, non-judgmental environment. The semi-structured interview schedule created for the producers of feminist pornography focused on four themes: (1) Background and career development; (2) Production practices; (3) On being a female producer in the industry; (4) Reflections on feminism. (See Appendix A)

When choosing the method to analyze the consumption habits of feminist pornography viewers, many factors were considered, including: privacy, stigma, confidentiality, comfort levels, and location. Asking women to come forward and discuss their pornography viewing habits could be an intrusive request, so it was essential to develop a strategy that would alleviate many of these concerns. Keeping in mind the notion that many individuals cultivate their views and knowledge in the context of social interactions (Meyer 2008), the focus group method was chosen to offer the opportunity for female consumers to debate, discuss and collaborate. Inspired by the successes of Janice Radway's (1984) methodological model from *Reading the Romance*, the facilitation of group discussions could reveal "informants' self-understandings" (10) related to patriarchy, compulsory heterosexuality, and any other ideological structures, including pornography. Because the "consumer" population for this study was anticipated to be culturally progressive and extroverted, based on their interests feminist pornography viewing and

participation in research—it was predicted that focus group conversations would create a space for an *explicit* articulation of ideological issues related to sexuality, gender, media in general, and pornography.

Further, the assumption that consumers would identify as feminist—based on information from secondary sources (Nagle 1997; Milne 2005)—it was boldly assumed that the focus group setting might act as “radical pedagogy” (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2005). According to George Kamberelis and Greg Dimitriadis (2005), focus groups within feminist research can work to “validate” collective experience and serve as “safe spaces for dialogue in the company of others who have had similar life experiences ...” (898). It was not predicted that focus group participants necessarily needed this type of intervention, rather, it was predicted that this space could facilitate unexpected and meaningful dialogue and debate. Finally, although focus groups are not a conventional method for sexuality research, it has been found to encourage discussion and explanation. In her article “Focusing on sex: Using focus groups in sex research,” Hannah Frith (2000) admits that while “one of the biggest challenges for sex research, then, is to be able to create a comfortable environment in which participants feel relaxed enough to provide full and frank accounts of their sexual activities” (281). However, she goes on to suggest that focus groups can “enhance the disclosure of sex-related material in three ways,”

(1) Awareness of shared experiences between group members may encourage discussion of difficult and sensitive topics; (2) Agreement between group members can help build an elaborated and fuller picture of their views; (3) Disagreement between group members may lead participants to defend their views and provide further explanation (282).

Lastly, on a practical level, focus groups offer cost-effective data collection that generates a diversity of viewpoints in a shorter amount of time than interviews (Patton 2002). This was a factor during the organization of this study, but not the sole factor for selecting this method.

Due to the fact that recruitment was based on self-selection (this will be discussed in the next section), the ability to anticipate the number of participants was difficult. Further, because the recruitment took place in three different US cities—New York City, Chicago, and San Francisco—it was imperative that data collection occurred in the most efficient, cost-effective way possible. At the same time, it was essential to not privilege convenience over privacy or transparency factors. After reviewing literature, the financial and time restraints attached to this study, and ultimately, the positive outcomes of focus groups, this method stood out for its ability to create a unique space and opportunity for participants as well as the researcher. The semi-structured focus group schedule included five themes: (1) General questions about mainstream media and the depiction/representation of female sexuality; (2) General questions about pornography; (3) Interest in women-produced and feminist pornography and viewing habits; (4) Beliefs about feminism; (5) Background questions (See Appendix B). The background questions deployed during the focus groups were related to occupation and sexual orientation. Other general demographic information was gathered in the online consumer questionnaire, which will be discussed below.

### *Recruitment*

The methodological outline for this dissertation relied on the participation of industry practitioners that have been culturally marginalized as well as consumers that would potentially not choose participate due to social stigma, so while goals were set for the number of participants, the investigation was ultimately dependent on the success of recruitment strategies and the self-selection processes. The recruitment strategies for the producer population, the consumer population, and the performer population—which was added later in the data collection process—were based on the methods discussed above as well as the anticipated response from the University of Colorado Boulder Institutional Review Board. Acknowledging that these

populations may be categorized as “vulnerable and special,” although they do not fall under the explicit definition as laid out by the IRB<sup>7</sup>, various factors were taken into careful consideration, including the politics of pornography research and an allegiance to feminist methodology.

In order to fulfill the requirements needed for this study to reflect the feminist/critical cultural studies framework, it was essential to recruit individuals that could reveal experiences related to production, consumption and text. Therefore, recruitment strategies were based on attracting individuals with direct involvement with feminist pornography; the owners/directors of feminist pornography (producers), women who watch feminist pornography (consumers), and then in later stages of data collection, women who perform in mainstream and feminist pornography. In a deliberate move away from textual analysis, this study relied on the accounts of producers and consumers regarding the text, as well as descriptions given by reviewers and other industry practitioners. The goal of this dissertation is not to provide a subjective, or framed, analysis of feminist pornography. Rather, its goal is that the women in direct contact with this text could account for their experiences and interpretations.

### *1. Producers*

In this study, the term “producer” is defined as a woman who owns her own feminist pornography production company—in the United States—and directs the content produced by that production company<sup>8</sup>. While there are various women and men that could identify as

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<sup>7</sup> According to the protocol template provided by the University of Colorado Boulder Institutional Review Board, vulnerable populations include: cognitively impaired/educationally disadvantaged individuals, economically disadvantaged individuals, subjects who report to or are students of the investigator, non-English speaking individuals, children under the age of 18, prisoners, placental/fetus tissue, pregnant women, and neonates (version March 22, 2012, 3, <http://humanresearch.colorado.edu/forms-templates#protocol>)

<sup>8</sup> This operationalization is based on a combination of the filmic terms “producer” and “director.” All of the female pornography directors are also producers, due to the fact that they own their own production companies. According to Ascher and Pincus (1999), “The producer

feminist pornographers, this study analyzed the mainstream of this field. Participants included Candida Royalle, Tristan Taormino, and Joanna Angel, who responded to a direct email; Gypsy Goddess, who responded to the focus group advertising and identified herself as a producer rather than consumer; and Shine Louise Houston, Courtney Trouble, and Madison Young, who were contacted after Violet Blue offered their email addresses. As a prominent pornography reviewer, *Oprah Winfrey Show* guest, and author, Violet Blue was contacted as a source to provide insight on the categorization of “feminist pornography.” Although she did not agree to an interview, citing that if she does one interview with an academic she’ll have to do them all, she did offer to help me get in touch with producers. The emails that were sent to the producers included a short explanation of the study and then asked if they’d be interested in an in-person or phone interview. This email also included the IRB-approved informed consent form, and they were asked to express any concerns or questions in their follow-up email.

Although in-person interviews were the optimal method due to rapport building and the availability of body language, scheduling conflicts and location issues caused some of the interviews to proceed as phone interviews and email correspondence. Because the research sites were New York and San Francisco, producers living in those two cities were asked to meet in-person. However, only Madison Young (November 10, 2011) and Gypsy Goddess (November 12, 2011) were available in San Francisco for in-person interviews. Interviews with Candida Royalle (April 26, 2012), Joanna Angel (October 12, 2011), Tristan Taormino (October 14, 2011), and Shine Louise Houston (November 16, 2011) were conducted over the phone. Courtney Trouble (February 15, 2012) preferred email correspondence, so the interview schedule and informed consent were emailed.

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raises money for a production and often creates the ‘package’ which may include the script, the director and the actors ... The director is responsible for the production unit, translating the script into visual terms and directing the actors” (209).

All of the producers gave their consent to be interviewed, recorded, and agreed that this dissertation could use their names as they appear in the public, commercial sphere. It is important to note that other mainstream and female (not feminist-identified) producers were contacted to participate in this project, but they declined. Nonetheless, it is felt that this diverse collection of producers offered unique insight into the production practices of feminist pornography. After the interviews were recorded, the principle investigator transcribed them—there were no assistants involved in this study—and the audio files were transferred to an external hard drive where they will be kept until the end of the study.

## *2. Consumers*

For this study, the term “consumer” was used to describe female-identified<sup>9</sup> audiences of feminist pornography. It is important to note here that according to this study’s survey and focus group data, participants do not exclusively consume feminist pornography; rather, it is part of a set of media preferences that involves both mainstream pornography and female-produced pornography. Focus groups were organized for three major, liberal, US urban centers: New York City, Chicago, and San Francisco. These cities were chosen due to their relationships to feminist activism<sup>10</sup>, the pornography industry<sup>11</sup>, and/or that they served as the location of a nationally

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<sup>9</sup> One of the participants of the October 19, 2011 New York focus group, Madeline questioned the definition of “woman” in the focus group advertisement. She noted that she is a cisgender female and was curious about the inclusion of male sexed, female-identified participants. In an email back, it was noted that a female-identification, as a gender, is the main marker for participants due to the interest in the unique historical relationship between women and pornography – which is central to this dissertation. The conversation prompted the use of “female-identified” here, and is a nod toward the work of Queer Studies and postmodernism.

<sup>10</sup> According to Bronstein’ (2001) account of feminist activism against violent media and pornography in the 1970s and 1980s, New York City and San Francisco emerged as the main sites of operation.

<sup>11</sup> The feminist pornography producers involved in this study were split between New York City (Candida Royalle, Tristan Taormino), San Francisco (Courtney Trouble, Madison Young, Shine

known, sex positive “adult” store or boutique. This last item was especially important due to the fact that sex-positive adult stores were chosen as recruitment sites for consumer focus groups: Babeland (New York City), G Boutique (Chicago) and Good Vibrations (San Francisco). These sites were not only chosen due to their sex positive approach toward female sexuality, but also because they embody a safe space where women who are *already* interested in sex toys, pornography, and other adult material are likely to visit. Further, during an interview with Charlie Glickman, the Education Program Manager at Good Vibrations, he outlined the reasons why Good Vibrations—one of the sites included for recruitment in this study—is a positive site for facilitating and educating women about female sexuality,

Well, there’s a few different ways I can take that. One of them is that, you know, our philosophy has always been that we want to provide high-quality sex toys and accurate, non-judgmental information about sexuality. And what that means is if somebody comes to us and what’s most appropriate for them is not selling them a product, we won’t sell them a product. We’re not going to refuse to sell to them, but rather we don’t want to push things on people. We make suggestions, certainly, but we’re not doing the car salesman come buy this, come buy this. As a company, we’ve always been at the forefront in the industry toward making changes in a lots of different ways ... We were also the company that invented the concept of the sex educator sales associate – that there’s more to selling sex toys than simply ringing somebody up at the resister. If the store staff doesn’t have an answer, we’ll connect you with the education department, or Carol Queen, and if we don’t have the answer, we’ll research it (in-person interview, April 12, 2012).

The Babeland website offers the following information about its mission,

Claire Cavanah and Rachel Venning opening the first Babeland store in 1993 in response to the lack of women-friendly sex shops in Seattle. The store offered top quality products, a pleasant place to shop, and most of all information and encouragement to women who wanted to explore their sexuality. The store’s popularity with both women and men has led to three more stores in New York, plus a thriving and educational website (“About” [www.babeland.com/about](http://www.babeland.com/about)).

And lastly, the G Boutique website offers the following:

G Boutique is a concept developed by women, for women. G is a girlfriend thing!

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Louise Houston, Gypsy Goddess), and LA (Joanna Angel) as their main sites of residence and production.



After talking to girlfriends about our frustrations at all of the sex stores being geared toward men, we decided to change the scene in Chicago. We were tired of going to 3 or 4 different stores to plan one evening of romance. We wanted to present beautiful lingerie and have erotica right there with it. We wanted a boutique where women were available to help us make choices and plan our romantic escapades. So in 2002 we created G, a place where you can feel comfortable shopping for fabulous lingerie, sex toys, books and DVDs screened for female clientele, massage oils, lubes, whips, cuffs and more (“About Us” <http://www.boutiqueg.com/about/default.asp>).

After the decision was made to advertise for the focus groups in these locations, the managers of each store were contacted by phone and permission was granted to send a poster to each location. The advertising was sent to the Brooklyn, Lower East Side, and SoHo Babeland locations in New York City, the Polk Street and Downtown Good Vibrations locations in San Francisco, and to the one G Boutique location in Chicago. The poster included take-away tabs with a contact email address ([project.sexuality@gmail.com](mailto:project.sexuality@gmail.com)) in the event that visitors to the Babeland, Good Vibrations and G Boutique were interested in participating in the study.

Unexpectedly, Charlie Glickman noticed the advertising poster and offered to post the call for participants on the Good Vibrations blog and Twitter handle. This approach helped, as many of the participants cited social media as the way that they heard about the study and the call for participants. The posters and social media blasts were distributed in August and the focus groups were held on October 19/22, 2011 (New York City) and November 9/13, 2011 (San Francisco). Unfortunately, there was limited interest from Chicago (two responded) and it was consequently removed. While my speculation suggests that perhaps the time frame when the posters were up was too short, that the fact that G Boutique had only one location was limiting, or that Chicago’s history of conservatism was a factor, there was no way to identify the actual reasons for this recruitment failure.

The choice for a *self-selection* recruitment process for this study was a direct result of privacy and confidentiality concerns and in the end, the amount of responses could not be

controlled. Rather than advertise in a newspaper, website or other public forum, the choice to advertise in a women-friendly adult store was to recruit from a population that was *already* predisposed with an interest in this topic area. Additionally, there is evidence in that that snowball sampling occurred in this process. Many initial emails to the project inbox indicated their participation was influenced by hearing about the project from friends and relatives.

After contacting the email address for this project and expressing an interest in participation, each individual was given a hyperlink to an online self-administered questionnaire, titled “Female-Produced Pornography Consumer Questionnaire.” This questionnaire, developed through Survey Monkey, gathered demographic information and sensitive opinions that might be too uncomfortable to discuss during the focus groups (See Appendix C). For personal questions, including those questions related to sensitive topics such pornography consumption, the deployment of a self-administered survey, or questionnaire, was the most appropriate analytical supplement to the focus groups. In addition, the self-administration allowed for participants to choose when and where they participated; the online questionnaire does not require mailing materials and is distributed through in a modern medium that is already integrated into the daily lives of many individuals.

For example, in their survey study of pornography use among “emerging adults,” Jason Carrol et al. (2008) used an online survey to collect data from multiple universities to examine associations between respondent acceptance, use of pornography and their attitudes related to risk behaviors and family values (13). Although the researchers reported limitations due to the instrument and the need for more detailed information, the affordance of the online questionnaire generated an acceptable sample size in multiple locations. The questionnaire used for this study was modeled after Janice Radway’s (1985) questionnaire and her intention to gather *supplemental* information and preferences from her participants. It includes open-ended,

nominal, ordinal and ratio levels of measurement: questions ask for demographic information and sexual preferences (Schutt 2009). Before participants answered the online questions, they had the opportunity to review information about the study. Next, they had to “agree to participate in this study” by clicking the appropriate box.

Although some of the online questions overlapped with focus group questions, the questionnaire served as a safeguard in the event that participants were too embarrassed or shy to discuss particular topics in front of others. Although by agreeing to participate implied that they’d be open to such discussion, this was not an absolute given. Further, the collecting of demographic information through the questionnaire allowed for more time during the focus group to discuss more substantive matters. Questionnaire results showed that 45.5% of the 18 participants were between the ages of 23-27 and 18.2% were 28-32. 73.7% were single (never married) and 15.8% identified as married. In terms of employment, 35% reported working full-time and 35% reported working part-time. Forty-five percent graduated from college and 13.5% completed some graduate work. Sexual orientation and race were not asked in the questionnaire (the issue of sexual orientation will be discussed in chapter five).

The statistical collection of race was an oversight, although it was observed, unscientifically, during the focus groups. Although the race of participants was predominantly White/Caucasian, there was representation from the Black, Latina, and Asian American communities. However, because the question of race identification was not asked directly to participants, this remains at the speculative level. What can be reported about race, however, is that the consumption of feminist pornography is not limited to middle-class White audiences.

Lastly, the questionnaire included preferences regarding “favorite” DVDs and directors, and while this question was open to “female-produced” rather than only feminist, the majority of responses revealed that feminist directors and their productions were the most highly ranked.

Tristan Taormino and Shine Louise Houston ranked the highest in terms of directors, and Houston's *The Crash Pad* series received the highest votes in terms of DVDs. The questionnaire did not ask for names or pseudonyms in order to prevent matches between focus group responses with questionnaire responses. Rather, this was used as a way to capture group demographics and emerging patterns.

Organizing the locations for the focus groups was primarily based on privacy and confidentiality concerns; the rooms needed to be separate, quiet spaces in locations that were discreet and socially neutral. Initial requests were sent to universities in the three cities, but renting on-campus spaces was cost prohibitive and university contacts were unable to assist in providing classrooms or other non-designated meeting space. However, corporate meeting spaces and non-profit spaces met the requirements—although they did include minimal rental fees—and calls were made to secure dates and times. In order to extend the privacy concern, the spaces were rented under “Dissertation Focus Group,” and the only contact with people not involved in this study that participants experienced was asking for directions to the room, if needed. Directions were provided through email, but in the event that they were lost, personnel at the locations were available to assist them to the rented room.

In New York City, the October 19 focus group included 4 participants (Madeline, Olive, Emma, and Hazel) and took place at NYC Seminar and Conference Center (71 West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York, New York). The October 22 focus group included six participants (Rosie, Grace, Lily, Violet, Chloe, and Anna) and took place at the Annex space at The Center for Arts Education (520 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, New York, New York). In San Francisco, the November 9 focus group included three participants (Ramona, Arielle, and Maura) and took place at NextSpace, a “coworking” environment (28 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, San Francisco, California). The November 13 focus group included five participants (Naomi, Zooey, Abigail, Sophia, and Harper) and took place at The Women's

Building (3543 18<sup>th</sup> Street #8, San Francisco, California). Each focus group location included a separate, private space, a closed door, and refreshments. Before the focus group began, each participant was given an informed consent form and the text was carefully explained before they had the opportunity to sign. They were reminded that they could use an alternative name during the session if they felt more comfortable doing so. Although this confidentiality-based option was offered during email correspondence, a reminder before the focus group began was order in order to demonstrate the importance of this option.

### *3. Performers*

After the producer interviews were completed in early 2012, the decision was made to conduct additional interviews with performers in order to triangulate the data and provide unique contextual insight. After the phone interview with Tristan Taormino, she offered to assist with any additional contact information. In accepting that offer, the contact information was obtained, through email, for four performers (Dylan Ryan, Jiz Lee, Sinnamon Love, and April Flores) that had worked for Taormino, as well as other feminist and mainstream directors. After amendments to the IRB protocol were made to include this methodological update, the four performers were contacted through email, and phone interviews were scheduled with Ryan, Love and Flores. Lee preferred the email medium because she felt that she could get her thoughts out better in writing. Informed consent documents were sent over email, and each performer participant was asked if they (1) gave their consent to the interview; (2) agreed to be audiotaped; and (3) gave permission for their performer names to be used in the text of the dissertation. Before each interview, this was verbally discussed and in the email interview, permission for all three items was typed out in the email.

The semi-structured performer interview was broken up into two themes: (1) background information; and (2) comparisons between mainstream, female-produced, and feminist

production companies (See Appendix D). These interviews created an opportunity for comparison between producer and performer experiences during the pre-production and on-set portions of the production process. Further, because producers discussed, at length, the production environments they created in order to ensure performer treatment and agency, it was helpful to collect and share the voices of a handful of performers in order to “test” their claims.

### *Data Analysis*

Based on this study’s research questions, particular themes emerged from the interview and focus group instruments, and those themes were analyzed for discursive patterns using the analytic method of critical discourse analysis. Because this project is driven by the Foucauldian (1990) notion that discourses are productive and normalizing; Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was chosen as the appropriate tool for a deconstructive analysis of the construction and articulation of meanings. Further, because CDA is interested in uncovering the “connections between the use of language and the exercise of power,” it supports the overall feminist project that works to analyze and raise awareness regarding gender ideology and asymmetrical power relations in discourse (Fairclough, 1995, 54; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Further, as a helpful framework for critical research within Media Studies, CDA can assist in uncovering hegemonic readings within *mediated* discourses. According to Karen Tracy et al. (2011):

As media discourses continue to saturate everyday life in late-modern society, it is more important than ever to examine the ideological meanings of the texts that surround us. In essence, CDA brings to the study of mass communication a method for understanding the connection between how media communicate on the micro-level and what media communicate on the macro-level, an important connection to which more media scholars should attend (268).

After each interview and focus group was transcribed, transcripts were read carefully to reveal discourses surrounding production policies, agency, pleasure, feminism, and reception (see research questions). Overlapping discourses were particularly noteworthy, and became the

driving themes for subsequent data chapters and conclusions. Because this dissertation was organized with the intention of allowing the participants to speak for and reveal their own experiences, what was *not* said during interviews and focus groups was also noted, as well as which questions made participants uncomfortable or prompted minimal response. Identifying discursive functions, patterns, and contradictions within these accounts drove data analysis, and after this was accomplished, accounts were organized in *conversation* with one another. Drawing from the foundation of cultural studies, this study maintains that cultural production is a *process* (Williams 1977) and by comparing the narratives of producers, with those of performers and then comparing those processes with the reception practices of audiences, allows for a more dynamic understanding of feminist pornography—as a cultural text.

### *Limitations*

The limitations of this methodology were primarily due to issues of access: some of the producers that were emailed were not interested in participating, attempts to contact mainstream pornography directors and production company owners were turned down, and the amount of women that participated in the focus groups was disappointing. However, these challenges were apparent during the design of this research project. Additional limitations included time and the amount of money that could be spent on travel and focus group participation; rural areas and suburban areas were not represented in this study. Due to the actual amount of time and money allocated to this study, major cities with closer relationships to feminism and pornography were chosen in order to yield higher levels of participation. Fortunately, however, feminist-identified women have a tendency to participate in the circulation of *awareness*, and it was duly noted that this impulse played a role in the success, albeit underwhelming, of recruitment.

### *Situation of the Researcher*

Due to the interpretive and feminist-inflected nature of this dissertation, a reflexive account of my positionality as a researcher of media, sexuality and the pornography industry is an important tool for understanding some of the choices I made during research design, implementation, and analysis. According to Alison Jaggar (2008), “Reflexivity is often recommended as a methodological practice for feminist researchers, who are advised to consider how their questions, methods, and conclusions are affected by their own positionality” (459). As a feminist qualitative researcher of media, I am aware that this positionality has worked alongside my theoretical frameworks to influence the organization and interpretation of my data. First and foremost, it is important to note that I am not, nor have ever been, directly involved with the pornography industry. This “outsider” positionality prevents me from acquiring exclusive information and experiences related to the day-to-day production process.

It is also important to note that I’ve approached the study of pornography from a middle-class, white, educated, heterosexual standpoint and these points of cultural capital (acquired through family and socialization) have limited my ability to connect with study participants who identify as queer, pansexual and/or belonging to various races or ethnicities outside of my own. While “connection” is not necessarily relevant for the acquisition of interview or focus group data, it is helpful during those processes; knowledge of queer and Black communities, for example, and their unique experiences, can help with the development of follow-up questions or rapport. In order to account for this deficiency, I drew on the literature of queer theory, feminism, and sociology in order to frame my questions intelligently and ethically. Finally, my stance on pornography, as a self-identified feminist, has changed since I began researching. Because pornography research is highly political, even when it comes from the cultural studies framework,



I believe that my feminist orientation toward pornography is crucial to understanding the development of this dissertation.

My first introduction to the intersection of feminist and pornography came during a Taboo and Censorship class during my Master's coursework at The New School. The next semester, I attended a panel on the feminist debate over pornography and much to my surprise; I discovered that there were feminists supporting pornography. I decided to write my Taboo and Censorship term paper on the feminist "porn wars" and my interest in pornography research grew from there. I answered an ad in Craigslist from a New York University research team that was conducting a study on pornography—they were looking for coders for their content analysis—and I included my term paper in my letter of interest. I was then contacted and asked to be a research assistant for their studies on pornography and violence, and I accepted.

At that time, as part of my radical feminist stance on violence against women, I was still very much opposed to *all* violence in pornography, I should also point out that I had never really watched pornography as part of my media consumption, so my understanding of violence in pornography was limited to the stories I heard from friends, what I read in mainstream media, and the films that were chosen for the content analyses that I was working on. When the research team began working on the male versus female director content analysis, I was skeptical of any difference due to the dominance of industry conventions—and indeed, the results showed that female directors were just as interested in aggression as male directors. I decided to write my Master's thesis on feminist pornographers as a direct result of working with the New York University research team. I chose three directors to analyze and I connected their work to the "third wave" of feminism, and I argued that feminist pornography was using the term "feminist" in a problematic and sloppy way.

As I progressed through my doctoral classes and research projects, my stance on pornography in general, and feminist pornography in particular, has been challenged by the work of critical theory, feminist theory, queer theory and postmodern frameworks. I have since abandoned a strict, radical stance on pornography and have developed a scholarly outlook that moves away from judgment, the dichotomous stances of the “porn wars,” and moralist thinking. Although I don’t consume it, and I have personal reservations about some of the content, I approach feminist pornography as a genre that is meaningful for many people.

This shift from a radical orientation to a more postmodern and critical feminist framework also resulted from a movement away from my own personal politics of sexuality. As a woman from a suburban, middle-class, Midwestern suburb outside of Chicago, I grew up with a limited sense of sexual dynamics; heterosexuality was the normative option, even throughout my college experience at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. My personal understanding of sexuality has since broadened and become more complex due to my increased exposure to the nuances of sexual practice and identification, not only through my research, but also through talking to people, reading, and my own personal reflections. In the end, then, my approach to this dissertation has been informed by my personal interest in exposing the dynamics of sexuality and working toward a better understanding of why feminists are drawn to producing pornography and why women are drawn to consuming this genre of pornography. Whereas, during my time at The New School, I was skeptical of this genre and investigated feminist pornography from a limited perspective, I have since adopted a position that approaches sexuality and pornography as *complex phenomena*. My current feminist and political outlook allows me to approach feminist pornography as a unique cultural text that deserves serious scholarly attention because of its unique contribution to the mediation of female sexual subjectivity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

“Well, yeah, I do [consider my work feminist]. I consider it humanist also because this is my way as a woman of taking the reins of production and doing it and saying it the way I want to see it. And, I think I’m taking a prerogative and I’m speaking up for women and so, to me, it’s a feminist act.” (Candida Royalle, phone interview, April 26, 2012)

“But that being said, it’s really up to each person. I’ve worked with directors who have this feminist moniker and there’s a very specific idea about that constitutes female sexuality and it has to do with what they think is hot and a lot of it has to do with what sells.” (Dylan Ryan, phone interview, January 19, 2012)

Aside from the cultural shifts and technological advances that consistently influence the contours of pornography industry, the conventions of this media text remain virtually the same (Lane 2000). In order to remain socially intelligible and generate profits, directors adhere to a set of conventions that are often referred to as “the formula,” an agreed-upon performance choreography that organizes the sexual positions within a scene (Faludi 1995, 70). The most infamous act within this standardized performance has been termed “the money shot,” which has come to symbolize “the narrative conclusion of sexual action” (Williams 1989, 73). Through this filmic representation of the male climax—authenticated through the ability to witness ejaculation positioned at the face or other body part of his<sup>1</sup> performance partner(s)—audiences are reassured that pleasure did, in fact, take place within the scene, and that they received their money’s worth. Aside from the iconic “money shot,” oral sex, various sexual positions, and more recently, anal sex<sup>2</sup>, are among the standard set of practices audiences have come to rely on when viewing

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that women also have the ability to ejaculate. This sexual act has become increasingly popular in mainstream, feminist, and queer pornography. However, the term for this practice is not “the money shot,” rather, it has been known simply as “female ejaculation” when referenced by performers, directors, or the industry as a whole. (*GUSH: The Official Guide to the G-Spot and Female Ejaculation*. Directed by Dr. Carol Queen. 2011. San Francisco, CA: Good Releasing).

mainstream pornography. At the same time, while “the formula” continues to discipline pornographic sexual performances, there are popular genres (i.e., S/M) and sub-genres (i.e., Zombie Porn) that incorporate stylized sexual practices outside of “the formula.” In the end, while there are creative deviations due to genre, this standardized “formula” is omnipresent in the pornography industry. During the October 19, 2011 focus group in New York City, participants discussed “the formula” as part of a wider discussion of mainstream pornographic representations of sexual practice:

EMMA. It’s like you know what’s going to happen, it’s the same thing over and over again-

MADELINE. It’s really formulated and it follows this specific formula and it doesn’t seem spontaneous at all. It’s just like, we’re going to do some oral sex, then some penetration and then, okay, we’re done-

EMMA. And anal-

MADELINE. Yes, various other-

EMMA. It’s very routine. Yeah.

Interviews with feminist pornography directors indicated that this male-informed, standardized commodification of sexuality inspired their entrepreneurial<sup>3</sup> spirit. Based on their critiques of “the formula,” they felt it was necessary to create not only alternative content, but also, an alternative production environment. This impulse, for most of these directors, was inspired by their subjective experiences as performers<sup>4</sup> in the mainstream industry. Whereas this

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<sup>2</sup> During my interview with Candida Royalle, she mentioned that there has been increased pressure to include anal sex in her films due to its popularity within the mainstream industry (April 26, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> During email correspondence with Dr. Carol Queen (May 7, 2012), she asserted that feminist and queer pornography is not necessarily part of the mainstream industry, but is rather entrepreneurial and has little financial ties to the “porn industry.”

<sup>4</sup> Candida Royalle was a past performer who is not featured in her films anymore, Tristan Taormino appears in her work as an educator and during interviews with performers, Joanna Angel continues to perform in her work, Madison Young performs in her work, Courtney Trouble performs in her work, Gypsy Goddess performs in her work, and Shine Louise Houston

deterministic formula works to alienate, or estrange, performers from the performance product, feminist directors attempt to situate performers as *part of the production process* (Marx 1988). This is in direct contention with the mainstream industry's tendency to maintain a bureaucratic, commercial, and formulaic atmosphere that highlights the needs of the end product over the needs of those creating the product.

After attending a shoot for the production company VCA Pictures, journalist Susan Faludi (1995) witnessed this profit-driven protocol, writing that, "A porn shoot is an intricately delineated ecology" (69). However, interviews with female performers indicate that this "ecology" is not as structured as it has been previously documented:

APRIL FLORES<sup>5</sup>. With a mainstream company, they have more money, so the production is usually bigger, there's more people working on set, there's probably a hair and make-up person and sometimes they'll have wardrobe and sometimes you bring your own. So you just show up to set and you meet with the director or production manager that day and they you show them your wardrobe and you just sit around and wait until it's your turn (phone interview, January 17, 2012).

DYLAN RYAN<sup>6</sup>. The call time is around 10am or 11am and a lot of the mainstream companies offer make-up, so I'll show up, go in for make-up, fill out the initial paperwork either before or after make-up and most of the time I'll meet the director or the co-star I'm with, um, there's often food on set or things to snack on. I talk to the director about what's expected, there's usually a call sheet for what kinds of outfits they want you to bring, very rarely have I gotten a costume, that's not the norm ... And then you go on set and shoot the scene and it usually-, the shooting usually takes two hours, I would say. And then after that, it's whatever payment is arranged, sometimes it's payroll, sometimes it's checks, sometimes a check in the mail. I'm there on set from 10am-5pm or 11am-6pm, probably a good estimate of the day (phone interview, January 19, 2012).

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has never performed in the pornography industry (see earlier chapter on more specific profiles of the directors).

<sup>5</sup> Flores is a female performer who has experienced working on the following mainstream sets: Vivid, Hustler, Adam & Eve, and Evil Angel (based on interview data).

<sup>6</sup> Ryan is a queer-identified female performer who has experienced working on the following mainstream sets: New Sensations, Vivid, Hustler, Evil Angel, Elegant Angel, Penthouse, Girlfriend Films, Adam & Eve, and Digital Playground (based on interview data).

JIZ LEE<sup>7</sup>. It's varied. Sometimes with bigger productions, there is catering and more time spent waiting for lighting set up. Sometimes there are scripts, make-up artists. But smaller companies (indie ones) can have these things too (email correspondence, February 16, 2012)

SINNAMON LOVE<sup>8</sup>. Generally speaking, you don't find out who your co-star is until maybe the day before. A company might give you that information a week in advance, but a lot of times there are changes because maybe someone's test isn't in, or because of schedule conflicts or whatever the case may be. You figure out who your co-stars are and often you may get your wardrobe the day you arrive on set. Sometimes there's make-up and sometimes there's not, depending on who the director is and what the company's budget is. So if there's make-up, you go into make-up ... And the bigger the set, there's probably catering, if it's a smaller set, there's probably no food. Um, and then you wait and you wait and you wait until its time for you to have sex. And that's typical of most sets in general that you spend most of your time sitting around and waiting to have sex with someone (phone interview, January 18, 2012).

While these sketches highlight personal experiences, similarities are easy to identify among them. One of the more notable observations is the availability of hair and make-up, which points toward the continuity among the female performer aesthetic. This beauty standard (blonde, white, large breasts, etc.) is nuanced within each production company but has been normalized as an industry standard<sup>9</sup>. There is also a more standard availability of food, signaling a higher budget, as well as a "hurry up and wait" experience while they anticipate their performance, or for the lighting to be set up, as Jiz Lee notes. Lastly, as Dylan Ryan and Sinnamon Love highlight, it is a common experience that performers do not meet their co-star, face-to-face, until the day of the shoot. While, according to Love, they may know the name of the

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<sup>7</sup> Lee is a queer-identified female performer who has experienced working the following mainstream sets: Evil Angel, Belladonna Entertainment, Vivid, Digital Playground, Triangle Films, Girlfriend Films, and Mile High Media/Sweet Sinner (based on interview data).

<sup>8</sup> Love is a female performer who has experienced working on the following mainstream sets: Evil Angel, Elegant Angel, Vivid, Kink.com, and Extreme Comic (based on interview data).

<sup>9</sup> According to Blue (2006), "Apart from the standard set of positions and couplings, most porn films feature actors and actresses who are polished and coiffed to fit the ideals of Southern California-style beauty, since that's where the majority of the industry is based. An oft-voiced complaint is that the men in porn are unattractive, while the women's bodies must conform to a rigid standard of perfection: underweight, blonde hair, big lips, and big boobs" (54).

individual(s) a week in advance, performers reported that they are typically physically unfamiliar with their co-star(s) and have had minimal-to-no input regarding their impending sexual performance. In some of the interviews, the performers commented on mainstream director's treatment of the sexual choreography (including conventions and "the formula") during the shoot:

APRIL FLORES. I've only had one shoot<sup>10</sup> where the director was trying to say now doggie style, now reverse doggie, now blah, blah. It was so annoying and fake. Um, it was just one instance and noticing that, it really messed with the whole chemistry with the performer, it messed with the flow of the scene, it messed everything up. It turned a normally one-hour scene into three hours, which, that's unnecessary (phone interview, January 17, 2012).

SINNAMON LOVE. There are some companies that I'm not crazy about working for because they're very involved in scripting what is that they want to see and part of it has to do with if they are-, there's an Internet company and when I shoot for them, they have the storyboard of what exactly we're going to shoot. They have photos that they pulled off their website of positions so that you can see exactly-, it might be where you are doggie but your left leg is forward and your right hand is forward and your chest is down and-, it's all about to ensure that they get their camera angle and-, if it's a butt site, they have to make sure they have all the butt positions, if it's a boob site, they want to make sure it's boob positions (phone interview, January 18, 2012).

Both Flores and Love agree that a director calling out sexual positions is not the preferred performer experience. However, performers have the ability to deny a potential job due to the reputation of the director, and they can seek out directors that communicate their convention-inspired expectations in a less overt and authoritarian manner. Interestingly, even when directors are not explicitly communicating their expectations throughout the scene production, performers are aware of what is expected of them when they arrive at the shoot (see Goffman 1959). Not only must they adhere to aesthetic pre-production rituals, they have been socialized—through working in the industry—to perform according to the industry's conventions. This includes "finding the light" during performances, preferred styles during sexual practices and positions,

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<sup>10</sup> April Flores' manager and husband, Carlos, works with her closely when they book shoots and one of the things they look for is that the director does not control the sexuality as described in her experience above.

and preferred noises during performances. During an interview, Dylan Ryan admitted that there is added pressure to conform to mainstream standards and conventions due to the thousands of performers waiting to take your spot<sup>11</sup>. Further, performers are aware of the reputation of particular production companies and are urged to perform in a manner that symbolizes its genre and marketing strategies. This point is further illustrated in a quote from Oriana Small's (known as Ashley Blue in the industry) memoir, *Girlvert* (2011): "My scene started as if someone had pulled the trigger to sound a race. I was getting face-fucked by my two male counterparts, and they had a standard to keep for their company. Anabolic movies continued to have the hardest fucking known to woman. I was just a piece of warm flesh for them to pummel with their cocks. I knew the role. I was good that this" (236).

In addition to standardizing particular production and sexual practices, mainstream directors and production companies have worked to institutionalize performer rates as well as exploit young performers that are new to the industry. However, based on experience and popularity<sup>12</sup>, performers are able to set their own rates, but are often forced to negotiate with directors in the event that the proposed payment does not meet their personal expectations. It is worth noting that although pornography is "one of the few occupations in which men experience pay inequity" (Abbott 2000, 51) and women earn higher rates, they are still faced with negotiating those rates; mainstream production companies maintain a profit motive although

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<sup>11</sup> During a discussion of rates, Ryan stated that, "If I won't do it, there's definitely somebody out there – for sure, about 7,000 boys and girls." Although she wasn't speaking directly to adhering to conventions, this quote illustrates the expansive pool that production companies can choose from in the event that a performer fails to encapsulate the version of sexuality that has been scripted or "the formula" that has been chosen.

<sup>12</sup> During an interview with Dylan Ryan, she spoke to this increase in rate directly: "When I started I had a much lower rate than what the going rate was. Now I negotiate more than that because I've been in the industry longer, have more of a name, have more of a fan base and I can command a higher rate ..." (January 19, 2012)



their female performers hold a higher exchange rate. However, it is difficult provide an official report for the mainstream female performer rates due to a lack of transparency from the industry. In his 2001 article “Naked capitalists,” Frank Rich of *The New York Times* offers a vague description of mainstream wages: “Performers are paid at fairly standardized rates—by the day or sex scene, as much as \$1,000 per day for women, as little as \$200 for men” (51). In order to get an accurate sense of industry rates and personal rates development for this study, performers were asked about this directly. Sinnamon Love offered the following information on the “industry standard rate range”:

Um, there is definitely an industry standard rate range. Most talent will get between \$800-\$1200 for a boy-girl scene, or \$1200-\$1500 for an anal scene, but there’s room for wiggle in there and higher and lower and it all depends-, it’s based on the individual and what they want to set their rate at or what their agent sets their rate at and also, what the companies are willing to pay. And there are definitely companies that pay less than the standard (phone interview, January 18, 2012).

When asked about her personal rates, Love revealed that,

For a boy-girl scene I charge \$1000, for anal I charge \$1200, for scenes with two guys I charge \$1500, if there’s anal, I usually charge \$1700 [with two male performers], I don’t shoot blow-job scenes that much anymore because they don’t really pay very much money, but I do shoot-, and on the rare occasion that I shoot a girl-girl scene, I charge \$800 (phone interview, January 18, 2012).

When asked about her personal rates, although Ryan was hesitant to offer specific information

(as well as April Flores and Jiz Lee), she did speak to the rates that female performers should *expect* at the very least:

I want to say that the standard rates begin at \$400/\$500, I think, these days<sup>13</sup>. I’ve had people email me, usually women saying they’re getting into the industry and they don’t know what to ask, they don’t know what to do because they have someone offering them \$200 for a sex kind of thing. I will always say to begin at \$400 for solo, \$500 for girl-girl, \$600 for blowjob, and I mean, some directors will pay \$600/\$700 for boy-girl, but I advocate for no less than \$800 and try to stick

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<sup>13</sup> During each performer interview, performers commented on the decline of standard rates in the mainstream industry due to Internet piracy and its effect on revenue and production budgets. April Flores noted that the height of rates was in 2007/8.

to that as much as possible (phone interview, January 19, 2012).

The politics of female (and male) performance rates are directly related to the labor conditions that production companies construct. The general model that has been set by the mainstream industry—not including payment for contract models or shoots that last more than one day—is based on *sexual* acts, which sets up a reward system for the amount of sexual activity performed in one shoot as well as the risk factor. For example, anal sex is physically riskier than girl-girl sexual activity and is worth a higher rate. While conversations with performers illustrated that personal rates can be set higher than the “industry rate,” these discussions also revealed that directors and productions companies do not approach these performer rates as non-negotiable. When female performers attempt to increase their body’s value through higher rates, they feel that director negotiation sends a message that they do not agree with that monetary value and further, feel that a lower rate reflects a preference for profit over positive labor conditions. However, as Jiz Lee argues, not all mainstream directors bargain with female performers. Some *are* willing to meet expectations:

Sometimes mainstream companies have a wider audience and thus higher income and budget so they can afford a higher rate. However this isn’t always the case. In the same way, smaller companies may have smaller budgets in general, but sometimes they do pay the same if not more than a mainstream shoot. Also there’s consideration for time spent on set, which can vary, as well as what kinds of sex acts are done, and this can alter the rate scale (email correspondence, February 16, 2012).

As these performer accounts illustrate, although there is a range associated with the “industry rate,” it is negotiable and influenced by various factors, including the popularity of the performer, unexpected overtime on set, and budgets. While the ability to negotiate both higher and lower rates *can* happen as opposed to a locked rate set by the director or production company, it is important to point out that this act of negotiation is directly tied to the value of the performer’s time and the performer’s body. Further, although performers mention the

development of their own rates, they do not stray far from the standardized mainstream range; if their rates are too high, they can risk being passed up for another performer who will take a lower rate, resulting in the loss of work. According to April Flores,

But Sasha Grey, when she was performing, she was in one of Carlos' [Flores' husband] films and her rate was very high and she wouldn't budge because she could, she could demand that rate. I'm sure it's everyone prerogative to stay by their rate and say I'm not going to do this for less, but then I think your work choices get limited" (phone interview, January 17, 2012).

In the end, the mainstream industry— explicitly and implicitly—has a notable influence on performer rates. And these rates represent the exchange value of women's bodies.

As discussed in chapter two, the entrepreneurial impulse to produce an alternative to this model stems from various rationalities, including the need to produce a consistent line of queer-friendly, feminist content (i.e., Houston, Trouble), the motivation to shift production conditions due to experience as a performer at one time (i.e., Royalle, Young), and finally, to start a business or partnership in the pornography industry in order to offer alternative content (i.e., Angel, Taormino). Keeping these varied motivations in mind, a common theme that resonated during all interviews with feminist directors was the intention to create a *new model of production practice*. In theory, this model shifted the performer experience from a highly organized, bureaucratic, and alienating one to an experience that heightened performer safety, communication, and agency. However, each director interpreted and managed these practices differently, depending on intervening variables such as funding, experience, and personal belief systems.

During focus groups, consumers revealed that these practices are decoded as signals that mitigate personal reservations and negative experiences associated with mainstream pornography consumption. Rather than spending time discussing production qualities, such as lighting or sound quality, consumers were mainly concerned with issues related to production practices, including: treatment of labor, the choice to hire diverse female bodies, and direct intervention

with representations of consent and safety. However, some female consumers reported a reliance on a more natural set design (production quality) in order to enter a full engagement with the text and for it to feel relatable. In the following exchange from the October 22, 2011 focus group in New York City, the notions of transparency and authenticity emerged as a facilitator for pleasure:

CHLOE. I can definitely, I feel like I can relate more to like, a porn where it's somebody's room that kind of looks like my room than if they're by the pool – that must be nice.  
[*Laughter*]

INTERVIEWER. So why does that matter?

CHLOE. I feel like for a lot of people, porn is really about this voyeuristic thing, where you're looking at [*sarcastically*] *what do other people really do* and I feel like that excitement is that much more there when it seems more real, like, and it seems possible and it's like, I can totally do that. That looks like me in my room. I can totally do that. I feel like it's more-, it's so much more relatable and thus kind of more exciting.

ANNA. The certain kinds of sets or production values or whatever just kind of cue my brain into it being this and with that comes this list of issues or problems I may have as a feminist or whatever. So it stops making it hot; it stops being hot because I start to question it and I'm not like then, watching porn, I'm thinking about the construct of porn and that's not what porn is about for me.

In this exchange, it becomes clear that an engagement with production quality and practices (or, the “construct of porn,” as Anna reveals) ranks as an influential aspect of the decoding process. Therefore, not only are production practices central to the feminist pornography project, they are also central to audience reception. In an effort to track how feminist directors' production practices are deployed and then received by audiences, this chapter will focus on three major production-related themes that resonated with both groups: hiring, consent and safety, and the mark of authenticity. Due to the polysemic nature of pornography reception, production practices have become the hallmark of feminist pornography, thus emerging as a primary aspect surrounding the success of this project. It is important to keep in mind, however, that there is always a tension between intention and execution, and that

sometimes a feminist production set can privilege marketability over principle. The following story from performer Jiz Lee articulates this point:

I can share that at least one of the female directors<sup>14</sup> I've worked with has allowed male crew to say that male photographers are more professional/better quality than female photographers; she's had poor conditions in terms of long hours and no sustainable food on set, has not had safer sex supplies available to performers, asked that certain sex acts were not done because they were 'unnatural', and asked for fake orgasms and a conventional pop-shot. The photographer asked for feminine poses from me that did not feel comfortable in my gender expression, and after the shoot, the director refused to use my preferred gender pronoun, and fetishized my ethnicity by calling me 'exotic'. It was the least feminist set I've ever been on, and ironically, this director has been touted as a feminist director (email correspondence, January 8, 2012).

### *Hiring*

The mainstream model of hiring performers is varied, but typically falls within the following scenarios: directors employ through a large agency, such as World Modeling Agency<sup>15</sup>; performers have a personal agent and receive direct solicitation from directors and production companies; performers have been hired as "contract girls," meaning that they work exclusively with one production company; private casting calls; and due to relationships (i.e., friend, partner of someone hired)<sup>16</sup>. These scenarios are reflective of a typical media enterprise and shares similarities with the United States Hollywood system (Wasko 2003). In fact, the "contract girl<sup>17</sup>,"

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<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, the name of the director was not revealed for privacy purposes, although it would have been significant to correlate this experience with a director that was part of this study. However, this was probably not the case because Lee did go on to describe each of the participating directors (save Gypsy Goddess) and had positive comments regarding her work experience with them.

<sup>15</sup> World Modeling Agency has been a central figure in the mainstream industry since 1976 and is located in the San Fernando Valley of California. The term they use in hiring advertisements is "figure models" (Faludi 1995).

<sup>16</sup> This account of hiring strategies was drawn from direct interviews with directors, performers, and from Violet Blue's (2006) work.

used by production companies such as Vivid Entertainment and VCA (Blue 2006, 36) is similar to the organization of the 1930s Hollywood star studio system and its focus on exclusivity and long-term contracts (Pavlik and McIntosh 2011, 173).

Interviews with feminist directors of pornography, on the other hand, revealed varied hiring processes that act as extensions of their labor treatment principles and needs, depending on the budget of their company and genre conventions. In fact, a pattern emerged that combined a higher production budget with a more structured hiring policy and more rigid adherence to sub-genre conventions (explained below). In terms of labor treatment—including the admittance of performer input during the scene and making sure performers know and have communicated with their co-stars before they come to set—a correlation between a higher budget and a higher or lower adherence to the agency or comfort of performers did not surface. Rather, this ethic emerged from intersections of former experiences within the sex industry, beliefs about sexuality and feminism, and interpretations of the function of pornography.

Following this emergent pattern that combines a higher budget, a rigid commitment to sub-genre conventions, and a more structured hiring policy, feminist directors included in this study were organized into three analytic groups: high budget (Royalle, Taormino, Angel); mid-range budget (Houston, Trouble) and low budget (Young, Goddess). While it is not uncommon to find stricter hiring policies among production sets with higher budgets, the intersection of genre conventions is notable here. For the high budget grouping, each director has remained extremely pointed about her chosen sub-genre; further, each of their chosen sub-genres are intelligible within the mainstream adult industry: couples porn, alternative/punk porn and

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<sup>17</sup> According to Blue (2006), “These women are respected and well paid, and though they can only work for one company they have a lot more say in the project’s they’re involved in than other performers” (36).

educational porn. For the remaining groups—mid-range and low budget—their corresponding sub-genres fall outside of the mainstream spectrum: queer and authentic amateur<sup>18</sup>.

Based on interview data, when feminist directors adhere to sub-genres that can crossover into the mainstream pornography domain, they have a higher interest in professionalism and experience a higher degree of tension between their feminist intentions and the need to operate a business. The high budget group relies on casting calls, agents, connections (i.e., word-of-mouth, reputations), and online forms; the mid-range group used online forms and connections; and the low budget group preferred connections and scouting methods. The diversity of hiring methods employed by the high budget group versus the low budget group is a direct reflection of resources. Additional discussions regarding these structured, semi-structured, and unstructured approaches reflected beliefs about feminism, performer agency, and business ethics. These negotiations are discussed in the following interview responses:

CANDIDA ROYALLE (high budget, casting call). The silly things is, in the beginning, I felt-, I remembered always hating having to undress for them and stand there in front of these guys and they're staring at your body and sizing it up—it was just so demoralizing for me. And so I felt like I didn't want to put them through that, but then I would end up with these surprises, like they didn't really look like what they did in the pictures anymore or they had gotten a whole bunch of tattoos, or they had huge breast jobs. And I also realized that a lot of them are more comfortable without the clothes than with their clothes. I wasn't the norm, really. So I was being silly; I was responding to my own feelings and I think they all accepted that as part of what it is to get a role. So I leaned that I did have to ask them to undress and all of that, but I'm always very mindful of their feelings ... But, one of the things I would do is pair them up and have them read together and then I might have them just kind of act out a sensual scene. I would have them have sex in front of me or anything like that, but I might have them hug each other and I might ask the man to caress the woman on her back or her arms and then I'd watch the way he uses his hands (phone interview, April 26, 2012).

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<sup>18</sup> The term “authentic amateur” denotes the genre of amateur that is determined to portray “real” bodies and amateur sexuality from inexperienced performers. This is opposed to “professional amateur,” which involves “participants who are new to [mainstream] adult film or who may be having sex with professionals for the first time” (Blue 2003, 62). This aesthetic has now been “co-opted by the pros” and is produced by many mainstream companies (Wallace 2011).

JOANNA ANGEL (high budget, agents, online form). The style of girl we choose<sup>19</sup> is a little bit different ... Sometimes we do hire girls from the mainstream porn world and we go through their agents, but that's pretty rare; that's once every couple months. Which is strange because that's how everyone in porn generally books everything. But we have a model application on the website and people fill it out and we look at it and decide who's right and who's wrong based on a number of different things (phone interview, October 12, 2011).

TRISTAN TAORMINO (high budget, connections). Well, I'm pretty fussy (laughs) and now that I've established myself, I feel like it's much easier-, I feel like the people who I want to work with find me and vice versa because I'm really interested in people who are thoughtful, self-aware, opinionated, articulate. You know, there's a lot of talking in my movies and if you want to come to the set and fuck and leave, you do not want to be in one of my movies because I want to interview you and I want to talk about stuff and I want to ask you questions and I want you to come up with a scenario and I want you to tell me what your favorite sex toys are and so it's like-, it's so much more of a collaborative process with the performers for me and so they're really part of it from way before we get to set (phone interview, October 13, 2011).

In all three of these statements, a discourse of control emerges in relation to the type of performer that needs to be hired: Royale (couples sub-genre) admits to needing a particular form of sensuality, Angel (alternative sub-genre) needs a “style of girl” and the applications are based on “a number of different things,” while Taormino (educational/gonzo sub-genre) needs people who are “thoughtful, self-aware, opinionated, and articulate”—all are subjective qualities that allow the directors to maintain their sub-genre conventions as well as their audience needs. The extended quote from Royale uniquely reflects the straddling of personal beliefs and industry needs. Here, her interest in constructing an alternative casting call protocol was undermined by the socialization of the mainstream experience. Rather than assert her new format (i.e., not needing to undress during the interview process), she allowed the standard format to intervene on her feminist intentions.

Royale's story highlights the issues that emerge when productions hold higher economic capital and higher symbolic capital vis-à-vis the mainstream industry. In other words, because

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<sup>19</sup> Angel's brand is alternative/punk and this is explained in an earlier chapter. Her performers are an extension of this aesthetic choice and typically include tattoos and piercings, but conform to the bodily conventions of mainstream pornography.



Royalle's productions include mainstream performers, are included in a recognizable mainstream sub-genre (couples market), and include a higher monetary investment, her project's social and economic capital rises due to its adherence to the mainstream industry's symbolic capital. Due to the monetary success of the mainstream industry and the standardization of the "formula" and performer aesthetic, Royalle's semi-adoption of these conventions yields higher dividends than some of the other more overtly political- or queer-minded directors.

Feminist directors that fall under the mid-range or low budget heading discuss their hiring practices using sexuality discourse versus control discourse. For these directors, projecting diverse sexualities, bodies, and real-life sexual partnerships in their work is a higher priority than adhering to marketability or a chosen industry genre. Much like alternative journalism or the independent film industry, these directors operate within the constraints of media production, but due to their lack of monetary partnerships or interest in gaining symbolic capital, are able to operate more autonomously (but not completely):

COURTNEY TROUBLE (mid-level budget, online form, connections). Well, I adore working with people who are already in my community, that much is true. A lot of friends, friends of friends, etc. But then also, people apply for my sites via an online form, and I hold on to those and pic from them often. I will work with people of any size, gender, race, level of ability, experience in porn or sex work; none of that matters to me. I do like being able to perceive self-confidence through the lens ... When I see it, I see it, but I don't have ANY (Trouble's emphasis) rules (email correspondence, February 15, 2012).

SHINE LOUISE HOUSTON (mid-level budget, online form, connections). We have a model application that's on the website so we get anywhere from, at least, two to three applicants a day and when we have shoots coming up, we book in advance. So (production assistant) will be like, okay, so we have this opening in October, do you want to take it? And, you know, people will usually say yes and then we ask if they have a partner in mind or is there anybody on the site that you want to work with or do you have a partner, and it kind of goes from there (phone interview, November 16, 2011)

GYPSY GODDESS (low budget, connections). You know, I used to use Craigslist when it was still okay to post for couples<sup>20</sup> ... I guess when I meet women that I film, or when I meet

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<sup>20</sup> Due to complaints from sex trafficking activists, mainstream media outlets and legal teams, Craigslist shut down its "adult services" section on September 3, 2010. This section

regular women, I tell them that I film couples and I tell them that I'd like to film them, and I like to have my friends in the videos (in-person interview November 12, 2011).

MADISON YOUNG (low budget, connections). I may have gone through agencies once I met and known performers, but that's rare. I work with mostly local models, people I know; since I'm a performer and have worked with so many other companies, whenever I meet people on set that I really gel with or, whether I've performed with them or not, like, I see they're smart and articulate and they know what they're doing and they really love what they do and you can just see the way someone conducts themselves on set that you want to talk more with them or you want to get them involved with what you're doing. Or through events through the gallery, publically, or in workshops that I've taught; in film screenings, film festivals ... And um, we'll sit down and talk and I'll get a feel for why they want to do it and then what they might be interested in doing and then seeing if I have a project that they'd be a good fit for (in-person interview, November 10, 2011).

The online application used by the mid-level budget directors has a narrowing-down effect that is less inclusive than the low budget process of hiring friends or "local models, people I know," as Young admits. As argued earlier, this is connected to budgetary constraints and genre conventions. Whereas Royale, Angel, and Taormino represent hiring rigidity due to their access to higher budgets and expectations due to their adherence to a particular sub-genre, Goddess and Young's low budget constraints—including the position of having to pay their performers through a barter system at times—represent a more diffuse adherence to hiring policies or genre conventions. In the middle is the use of semi-structured online forms.

Because both Trouble and Houston have a reputation for producing content with queer bodies, it is not surprising that they have hiring preferences. Further, online application forms<sup>21</sup>

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allowed sex workers to advertise their services and for members of the adult industry (like Goddess) to post calls for casting. (Saletan 2010).

<sup>21</sup> During interviews, those directors that used online applications forms (Angel, Trouble, Houston) categorized the questions as demographic and sexual preference-oriented. They are interested in getting to know the individual as well as his/her sexual practice preferences (toys, positions, fetish, etc.) In an article titled, "So You Want to Be a Feminist Porn Star" (August 2, 2012) from the *Valley Advocate*, Yana Tallon-Hicks explains that, "On the site, you'll find a model application requesting your basic information and some (usually nude) snapshots. The better sites will also ask about your performance preferences – how do you identify your sexuality? What kind of sex do you want to model? Do you want to use sex toys? Would you like to perform solo, with your real-life partner, or with a known star? Can you female ejaculate? Tie a rope like a

are more rigid than word-of-mouth or experience-based hiring, but are less rigid than going through casting calls, agents, or a personal Rolodex of mainstream performers like Taormino. In the end, while all of the directors discussed a hiring ethic that includes varying degrees of control and convention, as a group of media producers, they all attempt to create an alternative model for this process. While each director embodied an informed position on the hiring process for their productions, due to intervening variables for each director, practices cannot be generalized. What can be generalized, however, is the intention of crafting a hiring policy that reflects a deviation from the mainstream circulation of body aesthetics and labor conventions.

### *Consent and Safety*

After the hiring process is completed, the director makes several decisions that directly relate to the treatment of their labor (i.e., performers). Aside from decisions over whether or not to include professional services, such as a make-up artist or craft services for the production shoot<sup>22</sup>, they are confronted with the need to prepare for the sexual activity between performers as well as the sexual ethics involved during the shoot. Based on interview responses, feminist-inflected pre-production includes conversations with performers regarding sexual preferences—such as toys, partners and sexual positions—and sexual ethics that are concerned with the surveillance of sexual behavior on set in order to ensure feminist and queer policies. While the development and enactment of production policies is different for each director, but they all share a common interest in providing a safe and consensual working environment. Not only is this agentic working environment a direct result of sex positive tendencies—adopted from both second and third wave feminist discourse—it is also directly related to the concerns raised by

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sailor? Fist your girlfriend? Now's the time to brag about it!" (<http://www.valleyadvocate.com/article.cfm?aid=15422>, Accessed November 14, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> During performer interviews, respondents correlated craft services and make-up artists to higher budget and mainstream production sets.

anti-pornography feminists during the Sex/Porn Wars of the 1980s. One of the common interests among the WAP, WAVAW, and WAVPM was the unethical treatment of women in violent media and pornography (Bronstein 2011). Due to the fact that behind-the-scenes production practices were absent from the final cut of pornography films at the time, audiences were never fully aware of whether or not the women in the films consented to the sexual activity. This lack of transparency, coupled by the radical feminist and socially conservative-based assumptions that female performers were manipulated victims (ibid.), led to the cultural myth that female performers were operating without consent in unsafe, misogynistic working conditions.

Stemming from this historical concern, along with a growing social awareness of the need for consent in sexual practice, the *issue* of consent has become synonymous with healthy female sexual subjectivity. In her book *What You Really Really Want: The Smart Girl's Shame-Free Guide to Sex and Safety*, Jaclyn Friedman (2011) discusses the need for “enthusiastic consent” as a “simple but crucial principle” in the practice of safe and enjoyable sexual activity:

Why is enthusiastic consent important? Well, for one, it ensures that everyone is having a good time, and isn't that a good thing? Beyond that, it does several important things: It gets past our common cultural assumptions that women are responsible for saying no, and if we don't, or don't do it loudly or repeatedly enough, whatever happens is “our fault.” Enthusiastic consent creates a standard where only “yes!” means yes. It encourages us to be in ongoing communication with our partners, which fosters playfulness, trust, connection, and dirty talk. It allows us to let go of worry that we might be crossing a line with our partners and instead just relax and enjoy the sex we're having (202).

Here, Friedman encourages readers to ask, “Do you like this?” and “How does this feel?” during sexual encounters in order to ensure enthusiastic consent. This sex positive approach<sup>23</sup> is similar to the conceptualization used by the feminist pornography directors involved in this study.

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<sup>23</sup> Carol Queen (1997) describes the sex positive community as people “... who don't denigrate, mediatize, or demonize any form of sexual expression except that which is not consensual” (127).

Although some directors choose to invoke this principle more than others, the general principle of “checking in” with on screen partners is encouraged. For example, Shine Louise Houston makes sure that her performers negotiate sexual consent before the start of the scene, and then continually (if needed) during the performance. Joanna Angel, on the other hand, encourages “checking in” in the form of “dirty talk” during her productions.

Mainstream news media tend to focus on consent within the context of date rape and other sexual crimes. Scholarly research, on the other hand, has approached the discourse of consent in non-violent situations and reveals that for young people, consent is a complicated matter. A mix of nonverbal and verbal cues, context-specific situations, cultural expectations, and other factors blend together to ensure that consent is variable and situational (Hickman and Muelhenhard 1999). However, as Friedman suggests, straightforward questioning can mitigate confusion. And in the context of feminist pornography, where consent is central for directors, performers, and consumers, the mediation of consent also becomes fundamental for viewers. During focus group interviews, the topic of consent was typically raised as not only a feminist act, but also a device that allowed consumers to let down their cognitive guard and find pleasure in explicit content. The following is an illustrative exchange from the October 22, 2011 New York City focus group:

ROSIE. When I started watching others [porn videos], especially female-produced stuff, I felt like, here’s more explicit awareness of the power negotiation, which I think is really important, like, it’s hard to be a feminist and enjoy watching porn with like, tops and bottoms and women in those positions because the violence is much more explicit, and so it’s really important to me to see that negotiated and female-produced porn does that much more clearly. I feel much more comfortable about it.

ANNA. No, the consent process is like, right there. And when it’s right there the scene feels really different.

ROSIE. Yeah, and that’s so important.

INTERVIEWER. Can you talk a little bit more about consent? How do you know that there’s consent between performers and the director?

ROSIE. Well, at Kink.com<sup>24</sup> there's always a little interview that they do afterwards, but they only show a clip of the girl smiling, and then sometimes you can hear what she's saying around it and you like, well, that's not necessarily the whole thing, you're just laughing at a joke – so that feels artificial, like, they put it on to be like, don't worry, we were just playing around. But, sometimes it feels artificial. But especially Tristan's [Taormino] work, I was thinking of *Rough Sex*, that whole series, they have interviews ahead of time and they talk about what they want and you can just see more of the negotiation back and forth between the partners instead of it just being constantly 'I'm going to tie you up and beat you' or whatever. That's a bit of an exaggeration, but you can see them checking in on each other onscreen and that's really great.

CHLOE. Yeah, I really like when there's interviews with people in porn, along with it whatever. Because I feel it makes it-, just like, seeing somebody talk as a regular person and being like, yeah, I want to do that scene and it was really fun and these things that we talked about, and it just really puts your mind at ease-, when you're able to watch the sex scenes and be like, oh yeah, this person's having a really good time and they're not just some fantasy creature. They're like, a regular person that I just saw talk articulately.

ANNA. And they have agency in choosing and consenting to what they're doing. They're real and human.

In this exchange, the theme of “communication” is central. Whether it's during a pre- or post-interview or during the sexual performance itself, the inclusion of consent and communication has become a successful hallmark of feminist pornography. However, not all feminist directors make a concerted effort to film performer interviews. Within the cohort involved in this study, Candida Royalle, Joanna Angel, and Gypsy Goddess did not discuss an interest or need to include the pre- or post-interview. Rather, each director had a genre-related reason for her decision, and therefore found other ways to portray consent to audiences. For Royalle, the illustration of consent is built into the script of her films. Because her genre is geared toward couples, the negotiation of sexual activity, or consent, is explicit throughout the feature. Couples are often shown asking one another what their sexual interests are, for permission during

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<sup>24</sup> Due to the fact that the San Francisco-based, male-run Kink.com includes performer post-interviews and professional payment, it has developed a reputation for being performer-friendly and sex positive. Based on discussions with performers at the Crash Pad shoot (Shine Louise Houston), Kink.com is *the* online S&M/bondage production house to contact when a performer wants to shoot a specific style of pornography in a professional setting. It is not known as “feminist,” but does employ many female directors. According to the website, “Kink.com’s mission is to create the most authentic BDSM experiences that foster community and empower people to explore their sexuality” (<http://www.kink.com/k/?c=1>).

sexual activity, and whether or not their partner is experiencing physical pleasure or discomfort.

According to Royalle,

Well, they pretty much know already if they're coming to set to work for me that I want something with integrity, they know I want something different than drop to your knees and suck the guy's cock first thing and don't just walk in the room and grab the woman by the hair; they kind of know, in fact, they're usually excited to interview for me because my work is different, it's a chance for them to do some acting, it's a chance for them to express themselves more and for the men, it's a chance to show how they can be with a woman and to be appreciated more than a stunt cock. They're already coming with a desire, most of them, to show a more sensual side of themselves and then my part in getting them to be more comfortable, I try to hire couples as much as possible, real-life couples, so they're already comfortable with each other and if not, then I try very hard to pair people up that would like to work together (phone interview, April 26, 2012).

Joanna Angel, on the other hand, relies on her reputation in the industry as well as her behind-the-scenes footage to not only humanize her performers, but to also illustrate that she is working in a light-hearted environment where everyone is enjoying themselves. Because her work is genre-specific (alternative/punk), includes narrative, and aims toward mainstream monetary success, the inclusion of a documentary-style consent interview would identify a continuity break. In other words, the function of a pre- or post-interview with performers is to illustrate that pornography is constructed and involves actual human beings, and will be discussed below.

Because Joanna Angel focuses on the conventions of her alternative sub-genre and the mainstream industry, and less on the portrayal of diverse sexualities, it follows that an interview with performers, outside of a behind-the-scenes option, would be counter-intuitive. Furthermore, the filming of consent between performers is simply not a high priority for her; it did not come up during our interview. Rather, Angel monitors safety and pleasure through her directing style, and does her best to navigate performer comfort while also trying to produce a marketable product. Her response to a question concerning "performer comfort" illustrates a tension between performer comfort, agency, and the demands of the industry:

And, I can't, like, make it my number one priority to just make sure that the talent is completely comfortable and not think about my own product. I have to find a comfortable medium where everybody's happy and has a good time, but, everything still gets done that needs to get done and the product still looks good in the end. Because a girl can have the best time in the world on set and, you know, feel like she's everybody's best friend and if three weeks later a really terrible-looking scene comes out on the Internet, she's not going to be happy, you know? So it's a fine balance. I really try to do everything I can, but I can't lie when I say getting a good product is the most important thing to me. Obviously, you can't get a good product when the girl isn't comfortable; it's not going to make any sense. I can do everything but I can't force a girl to have an orgasm, you can see it in a girl's face if she's not having fun (phone interview, October 12, 2011).

Finally, Gypsy Goddess explained that she steers away from onscreen performer interviews because the amateur genre is based on the premise of voyeurism and authenticity. However, due to performers' high involvement in the scripting and sexual choreography, she argues that they remain in full control of consent and safety. In the interview, Goddess admitted that,

We don't introduce ourselves in the movie because I try to make it look natural, just lives, so people sit there and are peeking into the keyhole or whatever ... We just discuss the general idea and then I let them say whatever they want to say so the whole thing is improvised based on the subject we decided to use and sometimes I'll stop the camera when they're lost in the dialogue and make some suggestions or figure out what we want to do next. But we create it together (in-person interview, November 12, 2011).

For Tristan Taormino, Madison Young, Shine Louise Houston, and Courtney Trouble, the onscreen pre- and post-interview is a device used to ensure performer communication, agency and consent. Interestingly, although it could be argued that Taormino's genre conventions and high budget productions may work against the inclusion of such interviews, it is actually *due* to her chosen genre (sex positive education) that performer interviews are taped. Because of her investment in pornography as education, her interest in transparency is vital:

TRISTAN TAORMINO. Consent is a big part of my films and establishing consent, and I think there is a difference when you look at something that's happening onscreen and you're not sure if the women involved is enjoying herself or is into it, um, I think people can read that and can read that discomfort or ambivalence and it really affects the way they see the film. But



when you established consent up front, and you have a fully embodied, empowered women saying ‘this is my fantasy, these are my turn-ons, this is what I like’, and then you see them go and do it, it’s in a totally different context. And so I think that my whole mission has really shifted and evolved into something different than it was when I did my first movie, which is not almost twelve years ago.

INTERVIEWER. So would you say that in the beginning it was more about your interpretation of feminism and now it’s more about the agency of the performers?

TRISTAN TAORMINO. I think it’s about the agency of the performers but it’s also about giving people context.

INTERVIEWER. The viewers?

TRISTAN TAORMINO. Yeah. Rather than just putting the images out there, I feel like people need a context for what they’re seeing. And that’s why it’s important for me to have the interview portion, which is always part of the narrative of the film. It really gives you a sense of the people and it really helps you see them as three-dimensional people who have their own embodied sexuality rather than these one-dimensional sex robots acting out the same thing you’ve seen in the last ten movies you’ve watched.

INTERVIEWER. That’s definitely educational-

TRISTAN TAORMINO. Yeah, I feel like, you know, I have this very specific line called Vivid Ed and then I have these other films, which are not marketed as educational and they’re-, yeah, they’re not labeled sex ed, but there is an educational component in all of my films in that, you often see people talking about their own sexuality beforehand. Sometimes you see in my films-, I’ll actually shoot the negotiations before the scene, so, you know, of course when people come to the set they don’t just dive in and have sex. Just like regular people, they have a conversation and say, ‘hey, what do you want to do, what things do you like, what things don’t you like, what’s off limits, can I pull your hair, how hard can I pull your hair, no don’t pull my hair at all’, and I film those conversations and sometimes you can see that as part of-, right before the scene you see the entire negotiation of the scene before they get to it. Um, and I think that’s an important component too and it really shows how people communicate about their desires and about their boundaries and about their limits. And it gives people a language and a model for how they might do that with their partner (phone interview, October 13, 2011).

While Madison Young, Shine Louise Houston, and Courtney Trouble<sup>25</sup> all support the mark of communication and consent in their work, these themes did not dominate the interview as much as it did for Taormino. Therefore, when the theme of consent was brought up during consumer focus groups, it wasn’t surprising that Taormino’s name was raised more than any other director, as illustrated by an earlier quote from Rosie. However, when Young, Houston, and Trouble did discuss communication and consent in their interviews, they were framed as a high priority:

MADISON YOUNG. And then discussing safer sex, I also encourage that discussion beforehand, but then we also review that as far as what I've heard from each party; we review that on set. Um, did you bring your own condoms, what toys are you using, do you need condoms for them? Um, do you need gloves, does this person have a latex allergy, discussing all of those things, are you using dental dams, what kind of testing has been done, so those are all things that we discuss. And then I do a pre-interview with them and a post-interview as well and sometimes that's behind-the-scenes and sometimes that's part of the film where I'm shooting more of a documentary-style film that's docu-porn, so there's a couple of those that I've done (in-person interview, November 10, 2011).

SHINE LOUISE HOUSTON. In general, I like to show the mechanics. When I was making my own films and art pieces it was a lot about showing the mechanics. So I think that's [the post-interview] just an extension. I also think it's important in porn because you get to see the difference between a person when they're doing their fantasy stuff and you get to see them in fantasy and not in fantasy and they get to talk about the artifice, which I think is cool; to break the illusion (phone interview, November 16, 2011).

This symbolic mediation of consent is highly effective. According to Zooey, "I also think weirdly, that watching porn has helped me understand in articulating issues of consent and issues of feminism and issues about sex and work ethics" (November 13, 2001, San Francisco).

However, discussions about these interview devices or behind-the-scenes features were not isolated to one section of the focus group discussion. Rather, the discussion of consent weaved in and out of other topics, including critiques of mainstream pornography, as illustrated by this exchange during the October 19, 2011 New York City focus group:

MADELINE. I feel like also, what you were talking about with like, the degradation, it doesn't seem like it's consensual degradation, it's more like I'm doing this to you and you're going to take it as opposed to, I'm consenting to this and we're having fun ((Agreement from other participants)) and I'm enjoying this, it's more for-

OLIVE. It's expected. It's like, this is the next step; we're going to fuck a while and then when I'm ready to come we're going to stop, whether or not you were close. It's like, okay, that looks weird and disjointed.

Here, both Madeline and Olive discuss the "formula," and recognize that this highly disciplined performance of sexuality typically fails to include negotiations associated with consent. For feminist pornography directors, consent is a negotiated form of communication that assists in the success of their production; if the performers have all the ingredients they need—condoms,

toys, understanding of do's/don'ts with onscreen partner—they will deliver a more improvised performance, which makes the media product (DVD, web clips, video-on-demand, etc.) more marketable to discerning audiences.

Although there is an inherent performativity involved in the process of mediating consent and the pre-/post-interviews, focus group participants did not seem to critically question this dimension. While directors encourage communication, consent, and safety during filming, this does not necessarily mean that this is “natural” for performers; hence, performers are consciously altering their performance to include such practices. For consumers, these onscreen negotiations of consent actively *authenticate* the sexual choreography within the scene and facilitate a heightened preference for the director. The following is an exchange from the October 19, 2011 focus group in New York City that highlights this point as well as Taormino's successes:

OLIVE. If it's something I don't like, I'll turn it off. I just don't like when people are face-fucked until they vomit. I know some people like that, um, and it's a very DS thing-

INTERVIEWER. What's DS?

OLIVE. Dominant-Submissive. It's a power dynamic thing. I think I saw it in a Tristan film, I think.

HAZEL. I've never seen that [DS].

OLIVE. But, I was really glad it was in that movie because while I was really uncomfortable and it didn't sit with me personally, I was like, I know that these people are consenting to it. They wouldn't be doing it if they didn't want to because that's how she makes films.

This exchange not only identifies director reputations and ethical production devices as successful at assuaging anxieties around performer consent, it also points toward patterns in audience reception. As Olive demonstrates, her reactions to a particular DS scene were otherwise disturbing, but because she knew that a feminist director, with a particular reputation, shot it, she knew that “these people are consenting to it.” Throughout the focus groups, there were many participants that discussed this gendered orientation: If a pornography director is feminist (or

simply, a woman), there is a high probability that the performers were all treated with respect, they consented to the sexual activity, and they were paid accordingly.

During the November 9, 2011 focus group in San Francisco, Maura described her first time seeing Madison Young in a film and the negotiation of feminism, violence and sexuality,

...when I first saw Madison Young in a movie, I didn't know who she was and I didn't know if it was feminist porn-, I knew it was done by women, but it was quasi-violent bondage and it was being done to Madison and if I didn't know something about her, I know she personally finds that erotic herself, but someone who didn't know that might think it's kind of heavy. But, she's very empowered by doing that and controlling that and yet there were aspects of that where the woman was screaming out and being subjugated that might not seem feminist on the surface.

Both Olive and Hazel demonstrate “negotiated reading” patterns due to their mixture of “adaptive and oppositional elements” (Hall 2001, 175). They have adapted to the feminist moniker and are led to understand that consent has been actualized but they remain oppositional due to their personal stances on what they find pleasurable or offensive. So, while Olive and Hazel can recognize that DS and “quasi-violent bondage” are generally problematic, they are able to condone those practices due to the environment that feminist directors illustrate through their production devices, as well as their reputations in the marketplace.

Discussions during focus groups also revealed “oppositional readings” of feminist pornography when participants reflected on genre commodification. In this type of reading, an audience member “detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference” (ibid., 175). For some focus group members, this alternative framework was a critique of capitalism; they were able to recognize feminist pornography as possibly commodifying the consent process, bodies and other sexual practice. During the November 13, 2011 focus group in San Francisco, Harper offered a story that illustrated the transformation of queer bodies into a commodity:

That's interesting because I think that also becomes a trope. I mean, with race

class and everything too. For instance, porn that-, I recently had a conversation with a friend and he was considering a role in porn that was specifically for queer people of color or people of different body sizes, who aren't usually in porn. And they had talked to the producer and the producer was like, that's great, you can do this, just make sure your partner is either a person of color or like, a bigger person. And they were just like, oh, okay, and also the problematic for them, too, was that the producer was a white lady and, he was just like, I feel really weird and he's-, my friend is a trans person of color, and, he was like, I feel like I don't know if this is exploitative of this niche market that people are looking for, like, portrayals of people who normally aren't portrayed – at least in a particular light. But I think that's also a consideration. But it is an industry and there is a market for it. You know, if people are going to buy it, then it becomes its own product.

Later in that focus group discussion, Zooey raised a similar point about marketing and commodification:

I know there's feministporn.net, which is run by Madison [Young], and there are a lot of sites under that. I would argue that their tendency to use only femme women-, I'd like to see more of a discussion around that on their websites, but that's their ... But I think there's also a lot of people who say their porn is feminist whether or not it is necessarily, whether the theory and the thoughtfulness is behind it, because it's become a marketing strategy in some circles.

This political economy critique did not emerge in all of the focus groups. Rather, it uniquely emerged in the second focus group in San Francisco. This could be due to the occupations of Haper (retail associate at a female-friendly adult store), Zooey (sex activist and blogger) and Abigail (former reviewer for pornography industry trade magazine) and their accelerated understandings of the organization and politics behind the pornography industry. While other participants discussed their critiques of feminist and female-directed pornography—which was directly related to sexual preferences and tastes—they did not bring up the meta-critique connected to marketing or commodification. It could be stated, then, that this oppositional reading was relegated to particular focus group participants, and that a negotiated reading was more common. Audiences have personal sexual preferences and sometimes do not find pleasure in particular feminist pornography scenes or features, but overall, they *read* the pre- and post-interviews, the behind-the-scenes takes, and the scripted conversations on consent as *cues* that

feminism exists in that space as a guiding principle. According to interviews with Young, Houston, Royalle, and Trouble, these consent cues were deliberately included (during the sexual performance) and constructed (pre/post-interview) as aspects of their feminist intentions.

### *Authenticity*

The focus on open communication during the hiring process and the portrayal of consent during production culminates around the question of performance authenticity<sup>26</sup>. Although Courtney Trouble and Gypsy Goddess were the only directors to use the term during interviews, the remaining directors communicated an interest in moving away from mainstream depictions of sexuality and moving toward a more realistic portrayal of sexual practice. In the domains of sociology and media studies, this goal can immediately seem futile. Within the critical approach that hails sexuality as socially constructed and disciplined (Foucault 1990, Weeks 2003), it could be argued that even if feminist directors mediate sexuality as egalitarian and consensual, the fact remains that sexual practices and gestures remain socially and historically contingent. In other words, the fundamental action of the project, the sexuality, is a reproduction of constructed sexual norms. Although the “formula” is synonymous with the mainstream industry, the same sexual practices and positions (i.e., kissing, oral sex, penetrative sex) are used in feminist pornography—albeit in different ways and with different intentions and ethics.

Therefore, the argument *could* be made that feminist pornography can never represent authentic sexuality because there is, unfortunately, no such thing. Within the discipline of media studies, general discussions of media representation have continued to focus on misrepresentation

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<sup>26</sup> During interviews, directors often critiqued the mainstream “formula” of sexual practice and bodies and whether they used the term “authentic” or not, spoke of a movement toward an anti-formulaic sexual performance in their work. Currently, there is not an academic definition of “performance authenticity”; this term has been developed as a result of interviews and conversations with participants. Although Butler (1999) would argue against authenticity in relation to performance, in this case, the term “authenticity” denotes the productive attempt to capture a more “realistic” sexuality.

and re-presentation rather than any discoveries of unfiltered, non-distorted representations of reality. Further, influences from The Frankfurt School (see Benjamin 2001) and postmodernism (see Baudrillard 2006) point toward the inability to maintain authenticity in the wake of mass production and for-profit reproduction. Lastly, scholars of political economy of communication (Mosco 2009; Garnham 2000) suggest that the production of media is infused with mystified power dynamics that directly influence mediated symbols, or, representations, and thus complicate intentions of transparency or realism. Based on these arguments, the claim that the pornographic medium could represent authentic sexuality seems impossible. On the other hand, the goal of authenticity is noted as meaningful for both directors and consumers, and is therefore worth exploring within pornography's structural and symbolic constraints.

During interviews with directors, the discussion of producing “authentic female sexuality” did not emerge as a unified goal. Rather, directors indicated a motivation for revealing a more *realistic* and *diverse* version of female sexuality that involved context (i.e. performer interviews) and a less invasive directorial style. As Williams (1989) notes, pornography is “nothing more than ways of speaking about and constructing the speculative ‘truths’ of sex (276); and feminist directors feel that their productions focus on the truths that the mainstream industry has deliberately left behind. However, each feminist director approaches the topic of realism in different ways, or, they don’t at all. For Tristan Taormino and Madison Young, ideal female sexuality is portrayed through their use of communication and contextual-based interviews, as discussed earlier in the chapter. For Taormino, the depiction of realistic female pleasure is closely connected to the stylistic form that her pornography embodies: gonzo.

TRISTAN TAORMINO. And I did like gonzo, which is really reality-style porn, which John Stagliano is considered the godfather of, is really my favorite porn to watch-, I like people being themselves, I like people being spontaneous. I didn’t need a storyline, I didn’t want a storyline, it didn’t matter if there was a chord or a plug in the shot, like, I didn’t need it to be polished, I just wanted it to be really hot se with people who were obviously enjoying themselves.

And, to me, the definition of gonzo is people who aren't playing a role, they're being themselves, it's spontaneous sex and they're acknowledging that the camera's there, so they'll often talk to the camera, right? It's a pretty straightforward definition. But what gonzo had become, um, by the middle of that decade [1990s], was these really extreme, sort of circus-like acts. And I felt like, um, there was all this emphasis on how far we could push the female body, but, there was still not a focus on female pleasure. So, I felt like there was still missing this porn that women could relate to, that women would want to watch and that really prioritized female pleasure (phone interview, October 13, 2011).

Candida Royalle's approach to more realistic content is located in her scripting practices, real-life sexual desires and encounters, and her performers—who are often real-life couples—are required to share sexual chemistry with their potential scene partner before they are hired. The facilitation of “realistic” chemistry carries through the pre-production to the day of the shoot. During an interview, Royalle explained that she enforces a policy while shooting the “erotic scene” whereby only the couple, Royalle, and the cameraperson are allowed in the room:

CANDIDA ROYALLE. But the other thing is, I clear the room when it comes time for the erotic scene, the lovemaking, and the only people I let stay are the absolute necessary like the cameras and maybe one assistant, you know, Assistant Director, someone assisting me and in fact, a great example of this is going back to that scene between Gloria Leonard and an actor named Ashley Moore at the time. They were both well into their 40s, maybe even toward 50. They did a very sweet scene where they rediscovered their passion for one another. And also, I did the same thing: I cleared the set and I had this very sweet cameraman who was just very quite and talented, very soft spoken, and I always go over what I want to see-, I kind of joke around that I'm probably the only adult director who discusses motivation with them, for their sex scenes. So we talk about it first and then I try not to interrupt them, but if I do, I'll lean in and whisper something to them and so it's a very respectful way of working together. We're really working together to create something really different, really beautiful and something everyone can feel really proud of (phone interview, April 26, 2012).

Shine Louise Houston spoke of a similar directorial style that privileged the actions of the performers rather than the demands of the mainstream formula. Similar to Royalle's commitment to a lack of interruption, Houston and her co-director, Fiona, work to capture the performers' sexual choreography. During a discussion of her role as director, she highlighted her technical focus, which is reiterated to her performers before the shoot (see introduction). It is a practice of hers to tell them that her job is to capture whatever they want to do during the shoot.



Because Houston is also the cameraperson, unlike Royale, there is minimal direction; both by choice and design. The following answer to the question “When you’re shooting, what’s going on in your head?” illustrates Houston’s focus on capturing non-scripted sexuality:

SHINE LOUISE HOUSTON. Mostly I’m keeping consideration of the system, so where am I in relation to the other camera [Fiona], where is the other camera in relation to me, where is basically-, where is the line of the models, we always try to keep on the right side of the line with the models, um, so there’s that. Mostly I’m thinking of that-, I don’t know, it’s just ingrained. The system is ingrained. I know if I’m in this corner I know what range that Fiona can get in generally. Depending on the position of the models, I know I’m getting good coverage of this one and Alexa is getting good coverage of the other model and at the same time looking at the cameras and editing the shots in my head (phone interview, November 16, 2011).

For Gypsy Goddess, Courtney Trouble, and Joanna Angel, the issue of depicting authentic female pleasure is directly impacted by their chosen sub-genre. For Goddess, authenticity is the marketing feature of amateur pornography. For Trouble, her work as a queer pornographer is driven by the need to introduce “real bodies” and alternative sexualities to the pornographic medium:

I identify as genderqueer, but I have spent my life striving to show authentic female desire, pleasure, and orgasms in my work. I have also encouraged performers to be very vocal about asking for what they want on screen, being sexually self-possessed, and demanding an equal playing field. I debunk myths about queer female sexuality constantly, and include trans women as apart of an overall focus on making sure than women are seen as authentic sexual creators that deserve satisfaction as much as men. I hope that when women watch my porn, they feel inspired to be sex positive and vocal, and excited (email correspondence, February 15, 2012).

For Angel, authenticity is not a motivating factor in her productions. Rather, her use of humor, scripts, and costuming situates her work as fictional and structured. It is important to note here, however, that Angel is still highly focused on female pleasure, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. But rather than privilege the unfiltered capture of female sexuality, Angel admitted that while she does everything she can to make the performers comfortable in order to portray said pleasure and sexuality, the product is the most important element in her production process (see earlier quote on hiring). Instead of consciously choosing to implement a pre- or post-interviews, or a

minimal production crew, or scripted consent to symbolize a feminist production process, Angel's directorial control of the production is her insurance policy against the possibility of an alienating performance.

During focus groups, female consumers refrained from using the term "authentic" to describe female sexuality within feminist pornography and rather, cited "relevance" and the ability to "relate" to the performers and sexual activity as markers of directorial success. The bulk of this conversation centered on the notion of consent, and the ability to witness that exchange as an audience member. Another factor dictating the ability to relate to the performers and the depiction of agentic female sexuality rested on the transference of pleasure and the ability to pick up particular cues, including facial expressions, bodily gestures and audible cues (moaning, screaming, etc.) This discussion of locating female pleasure will be discussed in the next chapter.

A final related factor within the topic of authenticity is the representation of safe sex, an issue that emerged in focus group discussions. In the following exchange, members of the October 19, 2011 New York City focus group discuss the portrayal of condoms and safety as reflections of more "realistic" sexual practice:

HAZEL. Yeah, I feel like with women-directed porn it's more organic, you know, there's not really a storyline. Maybe it touches bases with certain issues, but like, straight porn, or not straight porn, mainstream porn, I feel like there's a storyline, a hardcore storyline that's overacted, fake. I like role playing, depending on how it's done and directed. It's crucial to the scene.

EMMA. Yeah, in mainstream ones it's just like, this is it, two seconds of, hey what's going on, and then they're on the desk and-

MADELINE. Or the pizza delivery guy-

[*Laughter*]

OLIVE. It's also safer sex.

MADELINE. Yeah.

OLIVE. In mainstream porn, you'll see bareback and I just don't get it and in women-directed porn either they'll set up a scenario, like if it's a movie about couples or something, then you won't see condoms sometimes, but you'll understand why, you're not just watching people without any regard for their own safety or for like, real life concerns of safety.

MADLINE. Yeah, you'll definitely see more condoms and gloves in women-produced porn. I've only ever seen condoms in women-produced porn. I think, again, it seems more realistic. I personally really like seeing it.

During the November 13, 2011 focus group in San Francisco, Abigail brought up a similar interest in the representation of safe sex. Interestingly, she mentioned it as part of an internal checklist when she consumes female-directed pornography (note: not just feminist pornography) (During that same focus group, Zooey mentioned the checklist device, which will be discussed in the next chapter):

ABIGAIL. So that's one of the things I tend to notice when I'm watching porn made by women is, are they making a point-, do they use safer sex, which happens a lot more often, um, do they show the safer sex, like condoms, being put on, or do they magically appear? Um, is lube put on onscreen? Is there communication going on during the sex acts?

Whereas the women involved in Janice Radway's (1984) study on romance novels spoke of preferred romance *narratives*, the medium of pornography invites audience members to encounter explicit mediations of female sexuality. In other words, fictional literature emphasizes plot and character development, while pornography emphasizes explicit sexual practice; therefore, female viewers of pornography are involved in a heightened self-referential reading process. As demonstrated by some of the above comments, identification and relatedness are fundamental components for consumption, and authenticity becomes a concern. However, participants' discourse on authenticity points toward the production of new conventions. The repeated interest in communication, consent, and safety illustrates a shift from the "inauthentic" mainstream formula to a "formula for authenticity."

As Clarissa Smith (2007) warns, "Examination of texts for supposedly feminist elements or indeed for feminine elements effaces any possibilities for the authentic. In particular, anti-porn theorizing has almost erased that possibility" (226). For Smith, seeking a feminine or feminist authenticity is automatically problematic; the construction of the feminine and the borders of

feminism offer a synthetic framework. So although the production and consumption of feminist pornography includes a successful transfer of beliefs about diverse female sexuality, consent, communication, and safety, it is also processing a new production model that, according to Smith, cannot be termed “authentic.” Rather, as argued in chapter two, this genre falls under “reverse discourse,” and actually *relies* on the myths of mainstream pornography in order to appear as “relatable” or “realistic” (Foucault 1990, Barthes 1957).

Through decisions made during the hiring process and production process—including the inclusion of pre- and post-interviews and representations of safe sex—the feminist directors in this study make conscious attempts to provide ethical working environments that provide increased agency to their performers. And as focus group discussions illustrate, this practice successfully improves the viewing experience for audiences who have otherwise been socialized to equate pornography with formulas, ambiguity, and ethical tension. While content is undoubtedly the surface-level motivator for audiences, conversations indicate that it is the production practices that work as *reassurance* and *permission* to find pleasure in this politicized medium. Therefore, content alone fails to provide the level of psychic comfort needed for this community of active viewers<sup>27</sup>. Rather, it is the combination of preferable content and the knowledge of ethical production practices that allow for a positive viewing experience.

Although some viewers remain critical—indicated by the conscious use of checklists or reflection on setting, consent, or safe sex—they are assuaged by these markers as well. This is a sharp contrast to their reactions to mainstream pornography, which centered on critiques of formulaic sexuality and homogeneity. Interviews with performers echoed a similar sentiment of bureaucracy and limited agency during production sets. For both audiences and performers, then,

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<sup>27</sup> Refer to the methodology chapter for additional information regarding demographics. Here, the high incidence of feminist beliefs within research participants (consumers) is notable when discussing additional needs to accept and enjoy pornography.

feminist directors have successfully created an alternative to the general mainstream production ethic. Although these directors execute this ethic in various ways—depending on external pressures such as budgets and internal pressures such as their orientations toward feminism—their work represents a notable shift in pornography production practices.

## CHAPTER FIVE

“I think that it allows me to watch porn again and feel empowered as opposed to turned off by porn and so, yeah, I feel like it’s affected my life in a positive way, um, I feel like it makes me more sexually empowered and I feel like I’m not alone in my personal-, like, the things that I desire and the things that I like and, um, yeah, it’s a really great tool” (Madeline, focus group, October 19, 2011).

“It’s part of everyday life. I don’t know-, I consider it part of my general pornography viewing habits or practices or whatever and I consider that part of my life. I don’t think it plays a noteworthy role, but it’s nice to feel that things are shifting so that there’s female-produced pornography and that it makes me feel more comfortable and I like it better” (Rosie, focus group, October 22, 2011).

Beginning with the instantiation of couple’s pornography (and the lesser-known lesbian genre originated by Fatale Video and *On Our Backs*) in the 1980s, pornography produced “for women” has supported the cultural myth that women require a separate sphere of sexual imagery. It was at this time that women were finally *invited* to consume and find pleasure in this medium; these genres were breaking from “the formula” of mainstream pornography, including the impression that it was “made exclusively with a male point of view” (Candida Royalle, phone interview, April 26, 2012). During an interview with Candida Royalle (*ibid.*), she discussed the emerging and historically-situated interest for a “woman’s voice” in pornography:

It became clear to me that the time [1980s] was right for the woman’s voice and you know, because of the women’s movement, which I was active in, that gave us permission to explore sexuality and because of home video and cable TV, now we could look at home. We didn’t want to go in sleazy theaters. I could feel women’s interest and curiosity related to all of that, but there was nothing for them to look at ...

For women who were interested in pornography, but were apprehensive about content or other issues, couples pornography offered sexual material for “consenting adults to share and watch together” (*ibid.*). The introduction of couples pornography also offered a niche marketing model for the mainstream industry that could be implemented into production company portfolios as a strategy to *invite* female consumers to their empire of material. In an article published on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* website, as a supplement to her program, “Why Millions of Women Are

Using Porn and Erotica,” (aired November 17, 2009) correspondent Lisa Ling interviewed Steven Hirsch, CEO of Vivid Entertainment, about his company’s interest in couple’s pornography:

Steve says that porn producers are trying to keep up with the needs of new female consumers. ‘I would say that 30 to 40 percent of the market is female. Now, some of that are men who rent movies to watch with their wives,’ he says. ‘We saw this huge couples’ market that was untapped and nobody was really going after.’ To make porn more appealing to women, Steve says his studio began producing a different sort of adult film. ‘I think there’s more foreplay. There’s more tease,’ he says. ‘Women, in a lot of cases, like to watch movies with storylines’ (<http://www.oprah.com/relationships/Lisa-Ling-Reports-on-Adult-Films-Porn-and-Erotica/2>).

Royalle’s inclination that women seek a “*woman’s* point of view” in pornography and Hirsh’s assertion that women enjoy foreplay, tease, and storylines suggest that there is a standard, formulized female audience subject that can be easily entertained through these tropes. In her work, “*Good Porn: A Woman’s Guide*, Spanish feminist pornographer Erika Lust (2010) critiques this assumption,

The first cliché that needs to be challenged is the one that says women’s don’t like looking at sexually explicit images but would rather see suggestive, erotic, softcore pictures showing simulations of sex. But that’s a myth. A while ago, I was talking with some executives in Los Angeles, and they acknowledged that women account for 50 percent of sales in their *Hustler* Hollywood megastore on Sunset Boulevard. And websites like Suicide Girls and I Feel Myself and Beautiful Agony [still image online pornography] have quite a few women subscribers. Obviously, then, we do like looking at pictures of sex (29).

However, due to the fact that there is a limited amount of qualitative audience research on women who watch pornography, this stereotype—exploited by both the pornography industry and mainstream media—reproduces both sexual difference and the myth that women need “gender-specific accommodations” (Oswaks 2012) when they watch pornography. This gendered myth is so entrenched that it has been deployed as part of sexual arousal research studies. In a 2007 McGill University study, researchers used thermography to measure sexual arousal in men

and women while they screened neutral, humor, and sexually explicit films (Kukkonen et al. 2007). The results of these experiments included the controversial finding that men and women reach high arousal at roughly (the difference was found to be statistically insignificant) the *same time* while viewing sexually explicit material. This finding has been used in mainstream media to support the notion that women are indeed drawn by the “visual” and enjoy pornography just as much as men (Blue 2009), but after a careful review of this study’s methodology, the women were not viewing the same sexually explicit film as the male sample. According to the study, the sexually explicit films included, “a male-oriented erotic film clip validated from the Kinsey Institute and a female-oriented one based on criteria deemed to be sexually arousing to women” (Kukkonen et al. 2007, 96).

The McGill methodology was drawn from another study, “Selecting Films for Sex Research: Gender Differences in Erotic Film Preferences” (Janssen et al. 2003) and their basis for “criteria deemed to be sexually arousing to women.” In this 2003 study, the sexually explicit films were chosen by research assistants—male assistants chose the films for the male sample, and female assistants chose for the female sample—based on their personal assumptions and guided by catalogues such as *Adult Video News* and *Babeland*. In the study, it was found that women enjoyed the female-selected clips more than the male-selected clips, which were “standardized for the activities depicted, the amount of time devoted to foreplay, oral stimulation and intercourse, and the number and gender of actors participating in each of those activities” (248). The article does not discuss their standardization method. Further, the authors admit that the female-selected films did not generate the level of arousal from their female sample that the male-selected films did for the male sample:

Despite our efforts to include film clips that would be arousing to a female audience, women did not report arousal levels comparable to those of the men. Whether this means that women tend to respond less to visual erotic stimuli than



men or other (e.g., social) factors prevent women from feeling or reporting higher levels of sexual arousal remain to be determined (248).

Lastly, and most significantly, the authors report that the second highest arousal rating from women came from a clip chosen by the male research assistants; therefore, it was found that a “male-intended” clip was highly arousing to women. In the end, then, the female sample did not respond highly to the films that were chosen for them, they enjoyed films that were intended for a male audience. Although these findings point toward a feeling of ambivalence toward female-selected, or “for women” pornography, they were used in the gendered methodology of the 2007 McGill study, which was then cited in a *CNN* article used support the general idea that women have a similar sexual response to pornography as men (Blue 2009).

This trail of data, which rests on the personal decisions of research assistants, is exemplary of the limitations of experimental research working to understand the female spectator<sup>1</sup> of pornography. While some women *do* respond to narrative, increased foreplay, etc., this cannot represent the preferences of *all* women. Ironically, while this research suggests that women enjoy pornography, it also reproduces the socialization of gendered taste—although this is not made explicitly transparent in the methodology section or in subsequent media report. If anything, the “for women” genre attempts to mitigate sexism, violence, and wall-to-wall<sup>2</sup> sexual performances; this is an egalitarian issue, not a gender issue. And finally, although this “for women” genre may

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<sup>1</sup> This use of “spectator” is drawn from Judith Mayne’s (1993) cultural approach to subjects of spectatorship. She writes, “Spectatorship is not only the act of watching a film, but also the ways one takes pleasure in the experience, or not; the means by which watching movies becomes a passion, or a leisure-time activity like any other. Spectatorship refers to how film-going and the consumption of movies and their myths are symbolic activities, culturally significant events (1).

<sup>2</sup> According to pornography reviewer Violet Blue (2006), wall-to-wall productions are, “... all-sex, no-plot. They’re usually a tape of sex scenes strung together loosely by a theme, like amateurs, or focusing on a sex act, such as fellatio, or both, as in first-time anal sex” (89). Based on focus group data, and the high importance placed on context, a wall-to-wall production might not be the optimal style for women interested in communication, safety, and consent.

be economically effective, as Steven Hirsh reports, it still represents the interests of only a particular population.

The directors interviewed for this study were not particularly concerned with the sexual tropes that the above researchers, and Steven Hirsch, believe are the mandatory filmic qualities needed in order for women to find pleasure in pornography. Further, during focus group sessions, questions that reflected the assumed interests of women (narrative, extended foreplay, etc.) yielded minimal response. Instead, and as the previous chapter demonstrates, portrayals of consent, communication and safety emerged as the only *patterns* underlying audience preferences. During an interview with Charlie Glickman, the Education Program Manager at Good Vibrations, he reported that female customers seeking pornography are concerned with *context* over any other filmic quality:

You know, generally speaking, what that means when it comes to porn [female perspective] is that, a lot of women would really like to see a movie where the sex makes sense, there's some kind of context for it, there's some background for it. You know, they also say they would like to see movies where you see passion and connection between performers, that you see expression on their faces that looks like they're really enjoying themselves as opposed to let me get my camera between your legs. So those are some of the things that come up over and over again (in-person interview, April 12, 2012).

An interest in understanding the context surrounding a sexual performance in pornography is not a mandatory impulse for all women. However, based on focus group discussions related to contextual issues—including realism, labor treatment, safety, communication, safe sex, etc.—this data reveals a positive correlation between pornography consumption and receiving contextual cues.

Rather than account for the pornography preferences of all women, this study is narrowly interested in female audience responses to feminist pornography. This highly specified approach will allow for an in-depth analysis of a particular genre rather than an experiment-based or

generalized approach to the massive “for women” category. To be sure, while feminist pornography has been categorized under the “for women” category for marketing purposes, it differentiates itself politically and culturally, and so far, is dominated by feminist directors rather than male directors or female directors seeking profits from a commodification of the “female” perspective. Due to its unique position within the pornography industry, the audiences of feminist pornography offer specialized insight into taste, habits and preferences that are particular to this specific genre. Using the “media accounts” (Hoover, Clark, and Alters 2004) of focus group participants in this study, this chapter will theorize the development of the feminist pornography taste culture and will explore patterns of viewing: why they watch and how they watch.

#### *Development of the Feminist Pornography Taste Culture*

Because the pornography industry has historically privileged a male gaze, theories of *female* audience practices are noticeably scant in academic literature. From quantitative analyses commissioned by the US government (see Meese Report 1986; Donnerstein, Linz and Penrod 1987; Malamuth and Check 1985) to Internet addiction studies (see Griffiths 2001; Schneider 2001), the majority of published materials analyzing the “pornography audience” are focused on *male* attitudes and behaviors. Further, contemporary pornography scholars argue that moral panic and policy advocacy prompted the majority of the aforementioned studies (Attwood 2010; Juffer 1998) rather than an interest in cultural production and consumption. On the other hand, as the Porn Studies and feminist media studies paradigms continue to adopt the cultural studies framework, there has been an increase in contributions centering on the intersections of female audiences, sexuality, gender and media—although none have concentrated exclusively on feminist pornography at this point. Among recent publications interested in female audiences

and pornography<sup>3</sup>, Clarissa Smith's (2007) *One For the Girls!: The Pleasures and Practices of Reading Women's Porn* most closely resembles the scholarly impulses of this study. Smith uses a qualitative methodology to explore audience practices vis-à-vis a British magazine, *For Women* (no longer in publication), which was produced for women, by men. Her dynamic approach to female audiences privileges complexity and context over gender essentialism and generalization:

I'm not suggesting I can simply map 'readings' or 'decodings' onto individual women, or that these are somehow the only 'authentic' responses to pornography. Gender certainly is an issue in responses to the magazine—many of the women talked at length about the ways in which women need something different from men in order to be sexually aroused, however, their conception of what women needed was not uniform—I should make clear that there are not simply individual responses ... there are socially and culturally located ways of understanding and participating in a specific cultural form (127).

Here, Smith echoes the same hesitancy to psychologize and individualize that Janice Radway (1984) and Ian Ang (1985) demonstrate in their work on patriarchal media and the female audience. Smith's above statement highlights the role of gender in the reception process as *intersectional* rather than primary. In other words, the generalization that women enjoy different content simply because they "are women," holds low analytic weight within cultural understandings of audience behavior. In the conclusion to *One For the Girls!*, Smith offers an *update* to this culturalist reception approach with the introduction of "orientations to pornography" as a conceptual framework:

In coming to a sexually explicit publication, readers bring expectations—pornography has social meaning before an instance of use of it—and they measure the material in front of them in light of those expectations need to be understood as orientations to pornography, in other words, people don't interpret pornography, they respond to it and in an through those responses accord a significance in their understanding of themselves, their pleasure, the sexual pleasure of others, the social, economic, medical, and cultural place of sexuality,

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<sup>3</sup> Other publications include: Attwood, Feona, editor. 2009. *Mainstreaming Sex: The Sexualization of Western Culture*. London: I.B. Tauris; Attwood, Feona, editor. 2010. *Porn.com: Making Sense of Online Pornography*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing; Juffer, Jane. 1998. *At Home With Pornography: Women, Sex and Everyday Life*. New York: New York University Press.

the imbrications of pornography in sexuality, etc. (227).

Of the traditional approaches available to interpret the female audience of feminist pornography<sup>4</sup> Smith's use of the term "orientation" enabled her to interpret her data in a way that elaborated complexities and layers, and due to its ability to reveal ranges of meaning for audiences, her framework has been useful during data analysis. Further, its privileging of expectations and social meanings has been a helpful tool for obfuscating the (unstable) arguments over male and female difference in relation to sexuality, pleasure and sexually explicit materials. Instead, an analysis that focuses on "orientations" to pornography reiterates the social organization of sexuality and pornography (Weeks 2003) and can locate *relationships* rather than determinations.

During focus groups, participants cited personal, or psychic (Butler 1997), relationships to mainstream pornography; mainstream media and female sexuality; their own sexual preferences; and feminist pornography. Keeping this relational, expectation- and orientation-based audience framework in mind, it follows that Bourdieu's theory of taste cultures (1984) becomes especially useful for unpacking the female audiences of feminist pornography. After critically analyzing focus group discourse that centered on media depictions of female sexuality and mainstream pornography (Fairclough and Wodak 1997), accounts indicated that participants held a particular orientation, or had adopted a specific taste culture, toward gendered representations of sexuality. Using those findings, the next section will argue that a feminist taste culture acts as a primer for audience interests in feminist pornography.

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<sup>4</sup> Before writing this chapter, I felt that feminist film theory might provide a helpful framework for understanding the shift from a male to a female gaze of pornography. A review of relevant articles from E. Ann Kaplan's *Feminism and Film* (2000) was read, as well as Kaplan's *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (1983). In the end, this paradigm's focus on psychoanalysis proved to be too deterministic and essentialist within a cultural studies framework.

In his sociological work, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Bourdieu (1984) argues that class positionality acts as a socializing agent for taste; the wealth of one's parents and the level of one's education can determine whether or not you will be able to distinguish high culture from low culture. Further, those with higher economic (and social and cultural) capital are in a position to *set* the classification of high culture, resulting in a continued dominance over the construction of aesthetic taste. Following this logic, but replacing class positionality with *gender* positionality as the fulcrum of power, the male gender—the gender that holds the most economic and symbolic capital in US cultural production (Douglas 2010)—determines mainstream cultural taste.

For women, cultural taste is also influenced by the circulation of commercial depictions of female sexuality in mainstream media and mainstream pornography (Byerly and Ross 2006). Despite the ubiquity of these hegemonic forms, the women in this study displayed a form of resistance (not absolute) to the *taste* formed by those in control of mainstream media and mainstream pornography. In other words, the “enlightened sexism” (Douglas 2010) used to construct female sexuality in mainstream media and “the formula” used to construct female sexuality in mainstream pornography shaped rather than socialized the *taste* of study participants. Due to their habitus and the intervening variables of third wave and sex positive feminism—and for some, queer sexual politics—they developed an oppositional stance toward these messages. In her analysis of SuicideGirls and Nerve magazine<sup>5</sup>, Feona Attwood (2007) adopts Bourdieu's “taste culture” to describe new forms of commercial and participatory pornography that produce specialized relationships with female audiences,

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<sup>5</sup> Attwood describes SuicideGirls and Nerve Magazine as breaking with the traditional mainstream “formula” and concentrating on “tasteful pin-up or art styles rather than images of explicit display or sexual activity” (444). These sites are considered alternative porn sites, similar to Joanna Angel's work, and combines coverage of music, news, art, culture, and counterculture (444).

These cultures can be understood as taste cultures which draw on a broader aestheticization of sexual representation where some forms of pornography and their consumers are reconstructed as sophisticated. In the process, sexual display is recast as an expression of authenticity and, combined with an ethos of community, becomes a departure point for thinking about the ethics of sexual representation (441).

Unfortunately, Attwood's article is not informed by an audience analysis, leaving many questions unanswered regarding the development of a "sophisticated" taste for pornography. As stated earlier, and based on focus group discussions, the tastes of participants were directly related to their *distaste* for both mainstream media and mainstream pornography depictions of female sexuality. The following excerpts provide a sample of critical commentary<sup>6</sup> toward mainstream media:

MADELINE. I feel like in movies, or anything, it's always, most likely about the male pleasure when it's a male/female couple. And if you notice, there's never any hands going, like, toward the clitoris or anything like that, it's just always, everything's up here (motions to chest and head). It's just so-, I don't know, it's mostly male-focused and the women are calm and semi-disinterested (New York City, October 19, 2011).

HAZEL. Yeah, I definitely think women are portrayed really inaccurately, all over the map, from religion, from everywhere—all aspects. And basically, I agree with them [other focus group members], you never see a penis—and I'm a lesbian—I don't even want to see a penis (laughter), but why can't you see a penis? It's always women being exploited; that's how I feel. Even if it's two lesbians, it's still for male gratification (New York City, October 19, 2011).

LILY. I think it kind of builds on this idea of a sexually empowered woman as a predator with sexual power, you know? She goes after what she wants and it makes her an animal rather than someone with a healthy sexual drive; they demonize her sexual desires. Like, oh, this woman sleeps with a lot of men, automatically she's aggressive and yet she uses her feminine charms to get what she wants. It's like, sexuality as a manipulative power rather than empowering (New York City, October 22, 2011).

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<sup>6</sup> Although there are comments from the same focus group, they are connected to one another as conversation. Rather, they are isolated quotes from a larger conversation on mainstream media depictions of female sexuality.

VIOLET. Yeah, I was feeling what you<sup>7</sup> were saying about like, different types of sexuality not being represented. I feel like, yeah, I can't really relate to what I see feminine sexuality to be on TV or in magazines that doesn't look like me—I just can't relate to that (New York City, October 22, 2011).

SOPHIA. Well, I think women are highly sexualized, right, in our media, right? In music, music videos, in television, in commercials, in magazines—it's everywhere. Um, you know, and it often bums me out, you know-, my feelings are complicated but oftentimes when I think about young girls being exposed to representations of women just as sexual objects, it's a little bit upsetting because it's really reductive, but at the same time, obviously sexuality is a huge component of who we are as human beings (San Francisco, November 13, 2011).

HARPER. I think part of the other reason why-, it kind of bums me out when young people mimic what they see in media, um, is because media is produced because it makes money and sexuality is this totally broad thing to me and like, our being is sexual and kids should find out what that means for them, you know, but instead of just being funneled into this articulation of what sexuality means, which is pretty narrow and like, yeah, just for making money. The other thing is, I think female sexuality—it's very narrow—and when ladies assert their sexuality, like, from a male perspective, whenever it's hot it's also an anomaly (San Francisco, November 13, 2011).

The following is a similar exchange from the November 9, 2011 San Francisco focus group:

RAMONA. I would say mainstream media, very objectified, um, almost like a product. To me, it's all about selling and I do think it's catered toward men or what men like.

MAURA. Yeah, I'd have to agree with that, I mean, I don't feel like most of the images represent me in any way, they tend to be super feminine and while I identify as feminine, it's kind of-, well, I'm gay, so, I know who it's for and it's not for me or any of my friends or anything.

ARIELLE. I would agree, and also there's sexuality viewed through a male lens and then there's also that women aren't supposed to have sexual desires-, it's all about how you can please your man but not about, do you have your own desires and what they are and being empowered. Um, so I feel like it's a weird mixed message for women in mainstream media

RAMONA. I feel like it's a lot about beauty, too, or this idea of beauty. Um, you know you have to strive to be like some mass-produced image instead of about a female personality or a women or figure, you know, it's like, a lot of what I see in mainstream media is about looking good or being desirable.

Similar to commentary on the mainstream pornography industry, *all* of the focus group participants projected an ambivalent outlook toward mainstream media depictions of female sexuality—while they were critical, they did not abstain from consumption. Many of the above

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<sup>7</sup> Violet is responding to an earlier comment from Grace: ... many other forms of female sexuality are neglected or represented and then the rest of society thinks this is how it's supposed to be, but, a lot of people aren't that way (New York City, October 22, 2011).



comments feature an awareness of political economy issues, including the repercussions of male-owned, mass produced cultural products and the tendency for those products to represent the views, or gaze, of producers. Participants were aware of “who it’s for” (Maura), that it’s “male-focused” (Madeline), and that it’s about “making money” (Harper). Overall, participants approached mainstream media—mostly television and film—as sending “mixed messages” (Arielle) about female sexuality. On the one hand, women are sexualized, on the other; they are “demonized” (Lily) for acting on their sexual desires and impulses.

Although there was no way to identify exactly how and when participants developed this resistant stance toward mainstream media and mainstream pornography’s depiction of female sexuality—this was beyond the scope of this study—the fact remains that they maintain an awareness of the production of these images, why they are problematic, and, they have the ability to articulate why they do not care for them. Using Bourdieu’s (1998) terminology, their gendered female habitus positions them to form an unrequited relationship with these images, but intervening social variables allowed them to break from hegemonic taste development. According to the consumer questionnaire, these social variables include: all participants live in a major liberal metropolitan environment (New York City or San Francisco), 100% of participants identified as feminist, the majority (65%) discovered mainstream pornography between 10-15 years of age, the majority of participants were aged 23-32 (marking them as growing up in third wave feminist culture), 45.5% graduated from college (13.6% completed some graduate work and 13.6% hold a graduate degree), 70% were working, and the majority household income fell between \$50,000 and \$70,000. Further, focus group discussions identified the majority of participants as queer, in terms of sexual identity, seconded by lesbian and pansexual and heterosexual as the least (3 participants).

This breakdown of participant sexual orientations was unexpected. Due to statistical audience analyses of women's viewership of pornography—1 in 3 visitors to pornography websites are “women”<sup>8</sup>—coupled by media attention toward (heterosexual) couples' interest and consequences from watching pornography, the high rate of non-heterosexual participants was significant. During the November 9, 2011 San Francisco focus group session, this issue was brought up explicitly during a discussion about the online questionnaire and the absence of a question for sexual orientation. Based on a methodological decision, his question was deliberately left out so that it could be asked during the focus groups as a prompt for discussion and/or solidarity purposes. The following is an excerpt from that discussion:

INTERVIEWER. Is there anything else that you'd like to add that I haven't brought up or asked about this topic?

ARIELLE. I think one thing I was surprised about on the survey was that you didn't ask about our sexual orientation and I feel like that's a big factor in who's exposed to female-produced pornography. Because I was thinking about it, I was like, I have a lot of straight friends—mostly queer friends—and I really don't talk about porn or sexuality with my straight friends and maybe that's just me and my particular group of friends, but I wondered, would straight women come to the focus group? Would they be watching porn? I don't know.

MAURA. The kinds of things I'm talking about with my straight friends, is, well, you know, he really wants sex a lot, is there something wrong with me, or, how often do you have sex? Is it more than once a week? And it's sort of in a generic way.

INTERVIEWER. So when you talk to your straight friends you don't ever talk about pornography?

RAMONA. I wanted to comment on that. When I talk to my straight friends who I don't think would ever consider-, it's funny, I consider myself straight, but if you wanted me to break it down as a percentage, I'd say 65/35 or something like that, and I would say that, I think, my straight friends who would also admit that they are attracted to the same sex are the people who I can openly talk about porn with whereas my straight friends who are 100% attracted to the opposite sex, I would say, maybe don't even watch porn, would only ask really dry questions about sex.

Within the social condition of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980), heterosexual women are less inclined to discuss/confess their unmarked sexual orientation. However, this doesn't necessarily correlate to a rejection of pornography. During an interview with Charlie Glickman,

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<sup>8</sup> “Internet Pornography Statistics” <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html>. Accessed January 12, 2012.

the above conversation was discussed, and Glickman felt that heterosexual women are, in fact, watching pornography, but perhaps they were not interested in *discussing* their viewing habits in a group setting.

INTERVIEWER. In my focus groups, most of the women who answered my call for participants were non-heterosexual. Based on your experience in this industry and as a sex educator, what do you make of that?

GLICKMAN. Well, there are a lot of heterosexual women buying porn. They may not have contacted you for a number of reasons. Where were you advertising?

INTERVIEWER. I posted advertisement flyers in three locations of Babeland in New York City, G Boutique in Chicago, and three locations of Good Vibrations in San Francisco.

GLICKMAN. You know, that's one piece of it [where the advertisements were located]. The other is that within queer and gender-queer circles or minority communities, there's much more discussion of this stuff, so there's a filter not only who saw your advertisements, but who was willing to come in and talk about it. But heterosexual women are definitely watching porn. I think that women who don't identify as feminist-, there's a lot of slut shaming-, there's that whole piece. And for those who do identify as feminist, there's a lot of ambivalence around porn, in part because of the demonization that happens within feminism. Women slut-shame each other and shame each other for transgressing in ways that are not generally talked about. And compared to folks in queer communities where it's generally more accepted because folks have been saying for years, look, there's no representation of me and my sexuality in the mainstream and it's a wonderful thing to be able to watch a movie with people who look like me. So it's a very different thing. Almost all of the talk within feminism about porn is specific to heterosexual porn with men watching it and so queer women have the freedom to watch queer porn in a way that heterosexual women really don't. There's a lot there (phone interview, April 12, 2012).

As discussed in the methodology chapter, the choice to advertise in women-friendly, sex positive adult shops was done in order to target women who were already comfortable interacting with sales associates and purchasing sex-related retail products, including pornography. As Glickman notes, there are several reasons why more heterosexual women did not choose to participate in this study, but on the other hand, the fact that there was a higher percentage of queer participants is notable. For the reasons Glickman raised, including slut shaming and anxiety discussing sexuality in public, heterosexual women have a more difficult time discussing sexuality in public setting. On the other hand, heterosexual women could be purchasing their porn online. Unfortunately, identifying one's sexual orientation before

purchasing pornography online is not required and therefore, this statistical information is not available.

While this study cannot prove correlations between these social indicators (age, education, sexual orientation, etc.) and an interest in feminist pornography, it could be argued that a third wave orientation, exposure to the culture of a major, liberal US city (New York City and San Francisco), and success in the labor environment could impact “orientations” toward mainstream media and pornographic depictions of female sexuality. Overall, as pornography consumers, focus group participants displayed a heightened awareness of political economy issues within mainstream media, representation, and personal preferences vis-à-vis mediations of female sexuality. The feminist pornography taste culture, then, appears to be sexually progressive, self-reflexive and arrived at due to an accumulation of prior experiences with problematic depictions of female sexuality<sup>9</sup>.

Keeping all of this in mind, the argument that women naturally enjoy a separate sphere of sexual imagery—based on the notion of sexual difference—reproduces essentialism. Participants seemed interested in a separate sphere of sexually explicit material because mainstream depictions are riddled with the political and economic interests of powerful men, forcing most women and underrepresented (or offended) populations to seek alternative sources. It is important to point out, however, that participants do not watch feminist, or “alternative” porn exclusively—only 9% reported that they do not watch mainstream pornography on a regular basis.

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<sup>9</sup> One participant (Zooey) was directly introduced to feminist pornography (the work of Annie Sprinkle) through her parents and did not have to experiment with mainstream pornography or discuss pornography with friends in order to arrive at the feminist pornography genre.

Due to feminist pornography's status as a specialized genre, with some directors more obscure (Courtney Trouble, Shine Louise Houston, Gypsy Goddess) than others (Joanna Angel, Tristan Taormino, Candida Royalle), issues of *access* becomes especially relevant when discussing audience practices and behavior. More specifically, how do directors provide access to their work, and secondly, how did focus group participants gain access to feminist pornography? According to the questionnaire and subsequent focus group discussions, consumers gained access to feminist pornography via recommendations from friends, employment at female-friendly sex boutiques such as Babeland and Good Vibrations, and experimentation/browsing online. The following exchange from the October 19, 2011 focus group in New York City illustrates the ways that social experiences eventually lead to feminist pornography consumption:

HAZEL. So maybe word of mouth? Friends? I consider myself feminist and I hang out with a bunch of feminist women and I'm pretty sure word of mouth and then I checked it out to see if it was cool. I was disappointed, though-, does anyone know whippedass.com [Kink.com]? I thought it was run by women because it was S&M with women and I was so disappointed to find out that it wasn't.

INTERVIEWER. How does that change the way you felt about it?

HAZEL. Just to think that some guy is directing it-, just like, I don't know, kind of rubs me the wrong way.

EMMA. I guess the first time I even thought about it, um, was through a friend's girlfriend who did photography for Suicide Girls. I'd heard about it, but I never really actually looked into it until she was photographing it and she became one of the models and then I started looking into it and realized it was a woman that started it all and it was the first time I became aware of the difference between males and females producing porn. Before that I hadn't thought about it too much.

MADELINE. I always know about BurningAngel [Joanna Angel] because a lot of my friends really liked it because it was tattooed girls and everything like that. Before I started working at Babeland I was shopping there [Babeland] and saw the different titles and names.

OLIVE. Yeah, like I said, my friend introduced it to me. We were just hanging out and she put on *Crash Pad* or *Superfreak* [Shine Louise Houston]-, it was really exciting. I was like, whoa, this is a whole new thing, just from like, the kinds of people doing stuff I'd never seen on camera before. It was really cool-, so basically for a little while I just asked her do you know of any more movies and she recommended a couple and then I started looking for performers and that's how I found out about Madison Young and she's really badass, she does her own films and stuff and, it's just, really cool. But yeah, it was through my friend.

During the November 13, 2011 focus group in San Francisco, participants developed a rapport and higher comfort levels than the other focus groups. They were able to open up more about the development of their pornography habits, initial interests in mainstream pornography, and how they were introduced to female/feminist pornography:

SOPHIA. See, I actually only really starting consuming porn just like, a few years ago because I spent my intervening years before that just having a lot of assumptions about-, pornography equals produced by men, it's objectifying, it's exploitative—I had a very narrow view of it because I hadn't been exposed to other kinds of pornography. So it wasn't until-, think I came across Bobbi Starr on *Fleshbot* and it was the first time I sort of felt like, well, here's a woman who's doing her own thing, she clearly enjoys it and it blew my mind a little bit. And through talking to other female friends of mine, you kind of figure out, like Amazon, if you like this, you might like this (laughs), um, but for me, anyway, it's only been in the last couple years that I've taken steps into that world of finding other kinds of porn that doesn't fit this mold that makes me feel bad and feel bad about women who are doing it, so-

ABAGAIL. Dyke porn was my gateway drug to more mainstream porn, which I guess is kind of backwards, because (laughter) I found *On Our Backs* in its original incarnation, um, this would be in the early 1990s and so they had enough time where they had started producing their own videos and referring to other videos and, so I checked those out too; yeah, I sort of networked from there and made my way up to mainstream porn over the next 20 years. That's how I did it and then I was like, wait, I don't actually like this stuff, what am I doing, and then I stopped [watching mainstream pornography].

NAOMI. For me, my impressions of pornography as an adult video were, I guess, through my young adulthood, through my marriage, I had that thought that porn was exploiting women and, um, but like you [Sophia], in the last four years, I have-, and a lot of this has to do with studying sex [Therapy], it was an opportunity for me to get exposed to a lot of different kinds; I saw my first gay male porn and I was highly aroused by it. It really didn't occur to me that there was female-produced porn, and once it was, once I had the opportunity to see, I think it was Nina Hartley's *Two Girls and A Guy*, um, that I realized that there was a different tone to what I was seeing and I liked it a lot. I was-, yeah, through my studies I've seen a bit of everything and I know have a completely different-, I can completely understand how this can be incorporated into a relationship and it's not going to take away from or hinder the connection that you have with your partner and a lot of times it can foster communication and you can talk about stuff you like and let's try this-, so yeah, I've seen a lot in the last four years but prior to that I really had that typically messed up view that it's bad or evil.

HARPER. I wanted to echo the fact that I also worked backwards. I was never really fascinated by porn or sex as a young person. In 4<sup>th</sup> grade, our teacher talked about human reproduction and I was, being a very rational person, she was like the sperm and egg come together and the cells multiply and you get this human, and I was like, no, wait, you missed a step because the sperm and egg, I think, are in separate bodies, so like, ((Laughter)) you're going to have to explain that to me because you never bridged that gap. But it was really never something I consumed, but in college, being friends with a ton of queers and everything and being queer myself it kind of-, I think at a party there was two people giving each other rim jobs [in a pornography video being shown] and I was like, oh yeah, porn, I haven't really watched porn,

really. And it just started, being introduced to that-, my friends watched a lot of queer porn and I haven't really touched a lot of mainstream porn because I can't really watched the whole thing, it's just, I'm really over it in that first fifteen minutes. That was my gateway-

Focus group and survey data reveal that access to the feminist pornography genre is directly, for most, related to participation in feminist and queer communities—and the establishments that support them, such as female-friendly adult shops Babeland and Good Vibrations. Regarding the more instrumental notion of access, or, how consumers *acquire* the content after they've been introduced to it: the majority of participants (63.6%) reported via questionnaire that they accessed feminist pornography online, while 36.4% reported adult bookstore/boutiques. Interestingly, “borrowing” from a friend or relative yielded no positive responses considering the community, or social, interest surrounding this viewing practice. This high percentage of online viewing practice directly corresponds to both the modern model of pornography consumption—preferences for website memberships and video-on-demand over DVD purchase and rental (Wallace 2011; McKee, Albury and Lumby 2008)—as well as the “domestication of pornography” (Juffer 1998).

For directors, the use of the web for content delivery offers low overhead, the chance to build a portfolio before seeking larger distribution, access to larger (global) audiences, audience participation (comments), and a way to generate additional capital outside of DVD sales. In addition, the affordances of online distribution include the ability to upload and offer content faster as well as the ability to develop a “network” with additional websites (Lane 2000). For example, Joanna Angel developed a network of sites linked to BurningAngel that offer different content specializations: JoannaAngel.com<sup>10</sup>, CumOnMyTattoo.com, PunkPorn.com,

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<sup>10</sup> During the interview with Joanna Angel, she explained that she no longer appears on BurningAngel.com due to the fact that she would like to perform scenes that fall out of audience expectation for the BA site. JoannaAngel.com was developed so that all of her content could be

BigBoobsAreCool.com, FuckMeInTheBathroom.com, HeavyMetalPussyParty.com, POVPunx.com and PunkSchoolGirls.com. These offerings represent Angel's interest in diversity of content rather than a way to generate more membership capital; if an individual pays for a membership (\$19.99 for 30 days, \$49.00 for 90 days, \$119.00 for one year) to one site, they are granted access to all the other sites. Madison Young's network of websites, called Madison Young's Feminist Porn Network, is "a group of different websites that I run that cater to different niches of feminist porn" (Madison Young, interview, November 10, 2011). Membership to this Network costs \$29.00 for 30 days, \$59.00 for 90 days, and \$150.00 for one year). Courtney Trouble's network, TROUBLEFilms network, includes indiepornrevolution.com (formerly nofauxxx.com), queerporn.tv, and courtneytrouble.com and includes the same impetus – diversity – as the others as well as the same membership pay structure: membership includes access to all network sites and costs \$28.99 per month. She also offers video-on-demand for feature works, and users can purchase for instant streaming. Gypsy Goddess offers a membership for her site, lustfulgoddess.com at \$20.00 for 30 days.

Shine Louise Houston offers a separate pay wall for her *Heavenly Spire* website and her *Crash Pad* Series website. Heavenly Spire users are asked to load money into an account and pay for web videos a la carte, while for *The Crash Pad*, users are to choose between three "levels": Level 1 is \$22.00 for 30 days and includes photos and streamed episodes; Level 2 is \$32.00 for 30 days and includes photos, episodes and behind-the-scenes footage; and Level 3 is \$37 for 30 days and offers photos, episodes, behind-the-scenes footage, and live events. Although Candida Royale does not include a membership package on her website, she offers a video-on-demand option that takes the user to the Adam & Eve website (adamandeve.com), an online and offline

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accessed from one website and so that that she could direct and produce content without the constraints of BurningAngel restrictions.



sex product retailer. In addition to Adam & Eve, Blowfish Video and Good Releasing—the production arm of adult retail chain Good Vibrations—are the main sources for DVD distribution for feminist pornography directors in the United States. For Tristan Taormino, Vivid Entertainment acts as her distributor for the Vivid Ed. DVDs that she produces. However, due to the overwhelming trend toward online consumption, DVD distribution does not act as the timeliest vehicle for content; VOD and online membership allow for the transmission of individual scenes and newer content while DVDs are reserved for features and complications.

In addition to providing memberships for audiences looking to access online material, the majority of the directors (except for Candida Royalle and Gypsy Goddess) use social networking in order to keep their work relevant in the public sphere, to generate a fan base, and as a way to humanize themselves. During our interview, Shine Louise Houston told a story that illustrates the importance of an online presence:

INTERVIEWER. Do you feel like you need to have it [online presence] in order to survive in this industry?

SHINE LOUISE HOUSTON. Um, I don't know If you need it to survive, but, you know, probably, let's see-, it probably increased sales by, maybe, as much as 5% or 6% per week. That's a good little bump and I can see when we slack off. I'm like, oh, hey, and they you can see an upswing. I feel like we naturally have a rhythm to our income, but every once and a while you'll see an unexpected dip and I'm like, (assistant), what's up, and she says, I didn't promote the last episode [online] and then I tell her to get on it. And then you'll see it bounce up again.

INTERVIEWER. So you have Facebook and Twitter?

HOUSTON. We have Facebook, we still have MySpace, Twitter, Tumblr, sometime else-, we just have a ridiculous amount. We have four Twitter accounts: my account, Crash Pad, Pink and White, Heavenly Spire, and they all have Facebook pages (phone interview, November 16, 2011).

While Angel, Young, and Trouble all run their own online networks, Houston runs two websites, Crashpad.com and Heavenllyspire.com under her main website, Pinkwhite.biz—but she doesn't refer to them as a “network.” Tristan Taormino does not run a “network” either, but she does offer video-on-demand on her website, PuckerUp.com, for her films as well as select films that she has deemed sex positive. Lastly, Gypsy Goddess' website, Lustful Goddess offers a

membership to access her amateur videos and Candida Royale's website provides links for audiences to either stream her videos or purchase them.

All of the feminist directors in this study run their own websites and generate revenue from memberships and/or video-on-demand rentals. Audiences, then, are able to access this content at their preferred time, space and frequency. During focus groups, some participants mentioned their distaste for paying for memberships and cited user-generated media spaces such as YouPorn and RedTube as sites they frequent in order to save money. These sites, which are the pornography equivalent to YouTube, offer access to free pornography content and threaten the success of the mainstream and independent pornography industry (Wallace 2011). One participant, Harper, from the November 13, 2011 focus group, cited that she uses a friend's membership password to access Shine Louise Houston's *Crash Pad* website. Unfortunately, feminist pornographers do not escape the complexities of piracy and the general interest in free media.

Once access is granted—either through online memberships, video-on-demand, DVD rentals, or free streaming sites—participants engage in a variety of viewing practices. During discussions, it became clear that the “how” of watching feminist pornography is directly linked to the “why”; in other words, media accounts of why participants enjoyed viewing feminist pornography seemed to indicate habits—where, with whom, whether or not masturbation was involved and frequency/time of the day. For many of the participants, feminist pornography successfully serves its most obvious function: to incite or assist individuals with their feelings of sexual desire. A secondary function was education: many participants watched feminist pornography as a way to get ideas for their personal sexual practices, including activity with partners. The following is an excerpt from the October 19, 2001 New York City focus group:

INTERVIEWER. Overall, what role does this genre of pornography play in your life? What does it do for you?

HAZEL. It gives me new ideas. Opens my mind, basically the same thing.

MADELINE. I think it's a really good tool to get new ideas, whether you watch it with a partner or not, but, um, I know my partner does like to watch it and get new ideas and it's a turn-on and it makes things fun.

OLIVE. If you're down in the dumps, it gets your blood flowing if it's doing what it says it's going to do so it's just fun-, what's happened with my partners a whole bunch of times is um, we'll watch stuff and be reminded of stuff that the other person likes, you know? There's only so many things you can do in one session and sometimes you overlook really simple things that your partners like and then you see it on a screen and you're like, oh, I love that. I like when you do that and it can revitalize things. But not in that methodical, let's read a how-to book way. More fluid, I guess.

HAZEL. The whole attention to detail-

Similar to the above exchange, during the October 22, 2011 focus group in New York City, themes of "opening your mind" to diverse sexual activities, exploration, and pleasure/entertainment emerged. Interestingly, the notion of viewing "what's acceptable" in sexual performance came up twice during this discussion:

INTERVIEWER. So, in general, what role does female-produced and feminist pornography play in your life?

ROSIE. It's part of everyday life. I don't know, I consider it part of my general pornography viewing habits or practices or whatever and I consider that part of my life. I don't think it plays a noteworthy role, but it's nice to feel that things are shifting so that there's female-produced pornography and that it makes me feel more comfortable and I like it better.

CHLOE. Yeah, I guess I would say a similar answer. In some ways it plays a more specific role of being like, I want to watch something that's exciting or arousing, but, I think it also is-, I mean, I feel what I really like about watching porn that's like, more intentional is, just feeling like I'm knowing about things that other people aren't knowing about, I don't know, I feel like it, like, just broadens horizons about what's acceptable to do, even, to be like, this person's really cool and this is just what they do, they just make porn, or they act in porn or whatever. And I feel like for me it's more of a broad cultural thing; I'm queer and I'm a feminist and I'm interested in what queer feminists do in general and if they're making porn, I'm interested in that. So I feel like it's more media consumption than anything else.

LILY. I guess it would be visual diversity because I have a visual rolodex in my head that gets old really fast, so, you know, I browse to see what's out there and to see what people are doing, to see what's acceptable, because, I don't know, maybe pooping on someone's chest might appeal to me someday, so it's kind of a food you don't like, you're going to try it again, if it's not working alright, so it's not my thing, move on, and it's just to explore. And to get off, obviously. ((Laughter)) But yeah, it's definitely a curiosity and mind-opening purpose, I guess.

VIOLET. Yeah, I feel similarly. Um, I guess it's sort of, like, an entertainment and I have this curiosity to see like, what's out there. Um and yeah, I know a lot of people who have done

porn and I'm curious to see, like, what they're doing and to see what other titles that company has done and just try to find more-, just to see what else is out there.

ANNA. Yeah, I feel like it's pretty similar; it's for pleasure and mind expansion and exploration and um, I would say that I don't think it's currently playing this role in my life, but in the past it's played a community building role in that, especially from a feminist produced standpoint of women who are interested in delving in to sexuality and the various expressions of that and whatever range you want to do and talking about it and having it be this thing that's consensual and comfortable and, even if it's extreme, kinky sex, it's in a way that feels empowering instead of, oh god, I want to take a shower and you want to wash the "ick" of how you feel about watching the other mainstream porn that doesn't feel that way.

GRACE. Um, I think it also plays a similar role for me-, obviously for masturbating purposes, but also, just to know and have the knowledge-, I think watching porn makes me more able to talk about it, like, different kinds of sex, or communicating with my partner or to customers [Babeland] even.

During the November 9, 2011 focus group in San Francisco, each participant revealed very different reasons for the role, or the "why," of pornography in their lives:

RAMONA. Well, being unemployed, sometimes it's a way to pass the time because it's the most fun thing to do at the time and um, actually it's interesting that you talk about your relationship with your partner [directed to Arielle] because I'm currently in a long-distance relationship and um, we trade back and forth – he'll pick out things for me, I'll pick out things for him – and it's almost a way-, and sometimes we'll watch things together and it's-, you feel more connected and involved. And also, I really like to orgasm, I really like sex and, you know, since I don't have my partner here, it's a way of fulfilling that pleasure.

MAURA. So, if we include non-visual stuff, because for me, if you put in the category a really trashy noel, well, I don't know if you'd call it a novel, but like, I have a particular genre that I like and literally, it's a quickie thing – I have fifteen minutes, you know, I'm having a hormone spike, I have to do something, um, and I grab a book on the shelf and twenty minutes later I'm good. And that's pretty much a solitary thing whereas the visual porn is more likely to be shared with my wife as a marital aid.

ARIELLE. I don't know what role it plays. I think it's just one aspect of sexual experimentation.

During the November 13, 2011 San Francisco focus group, the discussion of "why" centered around pleasure:

INTERVIEWER. So why do you watch?

NAOMI. To get off.

ABAGAIL. No, I would say that, in fact I was going to say that I don't watch porn to get off; I watch porn to get turned on.

ZOOEY. Yes.

ABAGAIL. So I do often watch the whole way through, unless it totally sucks and then I'll stop, but it's good, I'll watch all the way through because it's really hot foreplay.

NAOMI. What's interesting is I say to get off, but I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that, with kinds around, I typically don't have a lot of time, so it's a very focused, get in, get out, get off. ((Laughter))

Drawing from these diverse responses, some patterns emerge. Participants watch: (1) to “get off”; (2) to explore and expose themselves to diverse sexual behavior; (3) as an instrument to assist with foreplay (sexual aid) with a partner; (4) to get “turned on”; and (5) as a way to support feminist activity/activism. Aside from the last category, the other patterns are similar to the reasons that men and women watch mainstream pornography (McKee, Albury and Lumby 2008; Paul 2005). Interestingly, although there has been an increase in scholarly and media attention toward pornography addiction and/or the use of pornography to replace the lack of sexuality within a relationship, these psychological issues did not emerge during focus group discussions. Rather, participants spoke of isolated issues with some of their partners, but once partners displayed distaste for watching pornography as a couple, it was not pressed afterward. Overall, once feminist pornography audiences gain access to this genre, they then give themselves permission to find pleasure in pornography in a very mundane way. The previous chapter revealed that the inclusion of communication, consent, safety, and realistic bodies allowed audiences to then *relate* to the media product and in turn, support the feminist directors.

Focus group discussions and the consumer questionnaire revealed instrumental viewing patterns, rather than open-ended marathon viewing sessions. According to the questionnaire, 0% of participants watch feminist pornography every day, 95.2% watch 1-4 times per week<sup>11</sup>, 78.3% watch in the evening (8.7% watches in the afternoon), 91.3% also watches mainstream pornography, 47.8% watches a few scenes then turns it off (21.7% watches with a partner and decide together when to turn it off), and 56.5% will “sometimes” re-view a clip that they’ve already seen (26.1% “rarely” does). In terms of viewing and incorporating masturbation, this question was left out the questionnaire because it was anticipated that participants would engage

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<sup>11</sup> The “amount of time” in the questionnaire was operationalized as the amount of times that a participant participated in a viewing session of feminist pornography, from start to finish, for any amount of time.

in an honest and revealing discussion during focus groups. Although this direct inquisition about personal sexual behavior proved to be difficult for some (hence the methodological justification for supplementing a questionnaire for most viewing questions), those that did respond revealed that masturbation did not happen during every viewing session. During the October 19, 2011 focus group in New York City, the discussion of masturbation was very short and provided limited information:

INTERVIEWER. Do you ever watch and not masturbate?

HAZEL. Yeah.

MADELINE. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER. So, viewing and no masturbating?

MADELINE. Yeah, sometimes.

HAZEL. Yeah.

EMMA. Yeah.

MADELINE. I mean, that's not normally what I'm doing, but I feel like, once in a while. But usually it's for masturbation.

This exchange highlights two important points: first, it was an uncomfortable conversation due to the shortness of responses, and second, that masturbation was a context-specific activity that happens sometimes, but not all the time. Other focus groups demonstrated a similar reluctance to divulge details regarding their masturbatory practices while viewing pornography, but overall, each group revealed that it happens "sometimes" rather than every time they watch. In terms of couples viewing and sexual intercourse, this question was not raised explicitly, but responses indicated that pornography is used as a "sexual aid" or "foreplay" for sexual activity between couples. For Arielle, a participant in the November 9, 2011 San Francisco focus group, viewing as a couple was domesticated: "Well, sometimes we'll watch it when we're folding laundry and this is more entertaining than television, it might not be a sexy situation and we'll see something and then we'll talk about it later. Sometimes we'll watch it like TV and then sometimes we'll watch it as foreplay or whatever."

There was only one focus group that engaged in an extended discussion of viewing *rituals* while watching pornography. That conversation indicated that the idea that women should “create a mood” before viewing pornography (Blue 2006) does not pertain to them, rather, creating a positive experience with pornography has more to do with mental preparation and being “present in your body” (Chloe, see below):

INTERVIEWER. You bring up something interesting – do you set up a mood when you watch?

((Disagreement))

ROSIE. Just up here (points to head).

CHLOE. Well, I feel like that’s in a lot of books, too. I feel like I read a lot of books are like, you know, women, you have to masturbate because know your body and I feel like a lot of times in those books, it’s like, and you might want to take a bath, or whatever-

VIOLET. Create a mood-

CHLOE. Yeah, get comfortable and create a mood and I feel like that’s something people do and that’s awesome, but it’s not important to a lot of people the way it’s made out to be.

ROSIE. I think that is very much about being more in touch with your-, I think the idea that it’s about being in touch with your physical body and sometimes that’s fun and sometimes it’s completely unnecessary to be in touch with your physical body.

ANNA. Or I think, for me, I get there faster and I don’t need to have a ritual to get there because I’m 40 and I’ve been masturbating for more than 30 years (laughs). I don’t need a transitory period. I know when I need to get off and I just do it. And I know where my body is and I know what that means.

INTERVIEWER. Great. So does anyone here have a ritual you use to get you in the mood to watch porn?

GRACE. Not really. Um, I’m just at home and if the mood strikes; it’s not a planned thing, so it happens a couple times a week.

CHLOE. I think this is kind of what we were saying but didn’t explicitly say-, I think there’s two sides of that, like, sometimes it’s just like, about just being more present in your body and all of these things can help – having candles or taking a bath or massage oil – I feel like that’s part of it but there’s also this distance, like, a distance between your everyday life where you like, walking around and then, like getting to a point where you would feel sexual where you’re not feeling sexual all the time or something like that. Or, the idea that women don’t feel that way and they need something and I feel like that’s not necessarily true. I think there are people who want these things and then I think there are other people who are like, yeah, I could just watch porn and masturbate or have sex anytime in the day and it’s not like getting in to some other mental mode or something.

This conversation becomes especially relevant within the context of pornography consumption and sexual difference. The notion that all women would need a “transition,” into a

mental mode for watching pornography, suggests that viewing this material is not *natural* behavior for a woman. While some women do enjoy the use of calming aids—such as candles, music, massage oil, etc.—the assumption that women *need* a ritual to enjoy pornography supports gendered and essentialist approaches to women as sexual beings. Rather, focus group discussions did not reveal viewing patterns or behavior that could be coded as symbolically feminine or female-specific.

While specific interests in content do reveal feminist orientations, modes of watching did not prove to be dramatically different than male viewing patterns (Paul 2005; McKee, Albury, and Lumby 2008). However, there was one particular viewing habit that has not yet been cited as a uniquely male viewing activity: group viewing. And, to date, there are no published studies or academic reports on pornography group viewing among women. This first exchange is from the October 19, 2011 focus group:

OLIVE. I watch with friends.

INTERVIEWER. Can you tell me about that experience?

HAZEL. I know for me, I don't know why, but I haven't watched with my partner. I've showed it to them, they weren't into the specific genre I like, but I will say I watch it with friends and tell them what I like and compare different ideas of what they like sexually.

EMMA. In general, I've seen porn with friends. I have some friends that live in a building with a guy that's a porn star, so I guess he gave them a DVD and we watched it and it was weird in a funny way because it was this weird-, but I definitely have watched with friends but not a turn-on thing, we're more curious so we watched it. And I've watched with my partner, too.

OLIVE. Yeah, I've watched it with friends, um, I think ore often we've watched bad straight porn knowing it was bad, just to shoot the shit and, I don't know, I studied acting and a lot of my friends did too so we'll get really specific about things and we'll pick apart a lot of different stuff. Once in a while we'll watch stuff that we consider good. Just for fun. I'm kind of happy to hear that other people have done it because I was under the impression that it was just me ((Laughter)) and I was like, oh you're so weird. I don't know how to explain it, but it can be this bonding experience and a way to be intimate and be talking or being in a sexual climate without actually doing anything sexual with your friends.

During the October 22, 2011 New York City focus group session, the topic came up during a conversation about viewing with partners:

INTERVIEWER. What about watching with other people?



GRACE. It's usually alone for me, but occasionally it's with a partner depending on if they're comfortable with it because there's partners I've had that are cool with it and there are other partners that I've ah that are not comfortable with it, so it just depends; but mostly alone.

VIOLET. Yeah, I've never watched it with a partner before; I mostly watch by myself, but, I've also-, I've also been to a couple parties where it's been on and we watch together, or like, I know people in San Francisco that were in porn and they would just show me their scene or something. But mostly alone.

ANNA. Mostly alone but I've done some parties, too.

INTERVIEWER. So during the parties, is it on in the background or is it the focus?

VIOLET. Mostly the focus.

ANNA. I've had both experiences.

INTERVIEWER. When it's the focus, do you critique it?

ANNA. Yeah, because in my experience anyway, it's been the purpose of-, it's an educational thing or it's been as a feminist community exercise.

VIOLET. Yeah, same.

The topic of group viewing did not come up during the November 9, 2011 San Francisco focus group discussion, but during the November 13, 2011 session, there was a brief reference, and critique, of group viewing:

ZOOEY. Individually, I tend to watch just scenes and then at the Lady's High Tea and Porn Society<sup>12</sup>, we watch epic porns and we watch the whole thing. There was one time where we watched seven movies – but there was a lot of drinking involved and a lot of yelling at the screen and some other stuff. ((Laughter)) It's very different watching it with a group of women; we're not necessarily watching it to get off, we're watching it to be entertained.

ABAGAIL. The dynamic of watching porn in a group versus watching it by yourself or with a partner is really different. It used to actually piss me off when I watched it with groups because there was always one person who felt they had to be the snob and make wisecracks and separate and create the distance – well, why are you in the room? But everyone else felt obligated to laugh. For a long time I would never watch porn in a group again. It really felt like, you know, like shameful. Now I'm ashamed that this is actually hot because you're laughing at it.

ZOOEY. You need to keep your own discomfort in check.

Focus group responses indicate that viewers consciously work against the initial interpellation (Althusser 1971) of mainstream pornography and re-establish their subjectivity in

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<sup>12</sup> The Ladies High Tea and Porn Society “exists for the pleasure and fulfillment of ladies, devoted to the enjoyment of erotic works and high tea. Attention has been paid to ensure the quality of entertainment available, with educational themes both Sapphic and otherwise. “Ladies” for the sake of this society will refer to those who live full time as women, and FTM/genderqueer/intersex people who feel that they still have a link to the women's/dykes community” ([www.ladieshightea.info](http://www.ladieshightea.info)). Currently, there are chapters in the Bay Area, London, Manchester, UK, and in the New York City area.

their developed taste for feminist pornography. On the other hand, this otherwise agentic re-establishment could *also* be considered an example of interpellation as they have been “hailed” as audiences due to their preferences and trust in feminist directors. However—and as this project illustrates—it is entirely too reductive to cast audiences of feminist pornography as complicit or passive. Although audiences may depend on particular conventions or viewing patterns, focus group discussions reveal various nuances and negotiated readings of feminist pornography, which points toward critical viewing habits and individualized approaches.

While interests in pleasure, exploration, and/or education have emerged as patterns during focus groups, it is important to keep habitus, taste development, and sexual orientation in mind for each viewing subject. In addition to this historical and cultural consideration, the variable of feminism has proven to be a major component during focus group discussions. The management of feminist ideals, definitions of feminism, the discursive emergence of sex positive feminism, and the incorporation of feminism into commercial practice have all emerged as powerful negotiations for directors, performers, and viewers of feminist pornography. The next chapter will focus on these issues, and will attempt to situate *interpretations* of feminism as the overarching variable in the interest and circulation of feminist pornography.

## CHAPTER SIX

“If you don’t think there’s anything wrong with masturbation, and if you think it’s possible for people to make porn without exploiting the performers, which is most certainly true—I’ve talked with enough performers to know this—then what’s the problem? Really I think what this comes down to is asking the question of the justification for porn is the wrong question. The question is, what is problematic about porn and what can we do to change that? Sexual desire, sexual fantasy, again, within the bounds of consent, pleasure and well being needs no other justification” (Charlie Glickman, phone interview, April 12, 2012).

“I think I’ve had to learn to challenge my friends; be like, oh, I can be a feminist and I can like all these things. Feminism is about choice, is what I say when I get in those arguments, is that women should have a range of choices and we shouldn’t be limited. It’s my choice to watch pornography. We can all do what feels good for us. But it’s really complicated” (Arielle, focus group, November 9, 2011).

It comes as no surprise that feminism plays a primary role in the production and consumption processes of feminist pornography. Based on interview and focus groups data, this role is instrumental: orientations toward feminism assist in both the constructive parameters of the production process and act as a facilitator between viewers’ taste, pleasure, and acceptance of the genre. Viewers are able to locate directors’ interpretations of feminism through their privileging of consent, communication, safety, and are then able to introduce portions of that mediated formula into their own sexual practice, in various ways. For some, the devices within feminist pornography inspire a critical awareness of healthy relationship behavior<sup>1</sup>:

I wish I could have discovered it [feminist pornography] when I was younger because I think it could have helped me develop-, like earlier relationships, at least for me, were kind of unhealthy and, not like dangerous or risky—I just didn’t know how to ask for what I wanted and I didn’t know what I was doing and I wish I could have discovered it earlier because it could have made me more confident about that. Where I was on more mainstream pornography earlier and all that negotiation and discussion was obscured (Rosie, focus group, October 22, 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> Focus group participants (especially Grace, Arielle and Sophia) also discussed the positive impact of feminist pornography viewing with their partners, and how it facilitated open discussions of sexuality and increased levels of pleasure.

Field data reveals that feminist pornography is illustrative of a positive communicative process whereby feminist sexual meanings are constructed and successfully received through negotiated terms. Discussions with producers, performers, and consumers illustrate that this constructed intersection between feminism and pornography serves various political functions, including: raising the labor standards for performers, showcasing sexual agency through consent and communication, and carving out a mediated space for feminists (and non-feminists) to find pleasure in sexuality. Nonetheless, this feminist success story has yet to be fully deconstructed. In the this chapter, contextual questions about feminist pornography at the discursive level, and how that discourse is culturally located, will be explored: How do director's interpretations of feminism impact content? How do these interpretations impact consumers?

The goal of the following chapter is to unpack the function of *feminism* beyond its explicit role as the constitutive force behind feminist pornography and further, to situate this otherwise fragmented discourse<sup>2</sup> as part of the project of sex positivity. In order to address these issues, the following pages will focus on director and consumer definitions of feminism and sex positivity, issues surrounding limitations on sexual performance, and the consideration of feminist pornography as a productive sexual discourse.

### *Defining Feminism*

As outlined in chapter one, the current state of feminism—third wave feminism—is both influenced by, but is noticeably disconnected from, the impulses of second wave politics (Snyder 2008; Baumgardner and Richards, 2000). According to her meta-analysis of third wave literature,

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<sup>2</sup> This notion of feminism as “fragmented” is drawn from R. Claire Snyder (2008): “Because it responds to a fragmented postmodern world that has moved beyond grand narratives like Marxism and radical feminism, third-wave feminism does not attempt to present a unified version with which every woman can agree. Consequently, third-wavers do not feel the need to spend a lot of time constructing ambiguous theoretical analyses or justifying on what grounds they are acting; they just do it. Others can either join them or do their own thing” (188).

R. Claire Snyder (2008) summarizes that it is a “wave” of feminism without “women<sup>3</sup>,” foundations, and exclusion. Snyder found that third wave discourse is “prosex,” an outgrowth of the anti-censorship camp during the 1980s feminist porn wars, and focuses on marginalized identities, including the transgender and queer communities. However, this rallying around hyper-inclusion, or “choice” within third wave feminism—highly criticized by Angela McRobbie (2008) and Rosalind Gill (2003) as wedded to capitalism—has led to disengagement between individual sexual practice and their larger, cultural implications. According to Snyder,

While third-waves claim the mantle of being prosex, however, the central issue at the heart of the sex wars—how to create gender equality when women enjoy sexual objectification (pornography), claim the right to make money servicing male sexual needs (prostitution), and eroticize relationships of inequality (sadomasochism)—has never been resolved; it seems to have been dropped from sight. Oftentimes, third-wave feminism seems to have morphed into being all about choice with little examination of how chosen desires are constructed or recognition of how an aggregation of individual choices can have a negative impact on gender relations at large (189).

For men and women of the third wave, the concepts of “gender equality” and “gender relations at large” are largely dealt with at the individual level; a tactic that would seem insubstantial within the second wave feminist politic. Although the third wave is “not yet a social movement”(Snyder 193), it still includes a critical engagement with gender inequality, albeit at the individual or community level. Examples include LGBTQIA-based organizations, websites such as Feministing and Jezebel, SlutWalks<sup>4</sup>, mainstream and scholarly publications, and last but not least, feminist pornography. While each of these projects seek to maintain third wave

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<sup>3</sup> Here, Snyder is referring to the third wave feminist rejection of the unified category of “woman,” and its focus on deconstructing gender and sexual norms.

<sup>4</sup> SlutWalks were part of a viral movement that began in the spring of 2011 after a Toronto police officer told a group of female college students that in order to avoid sexual assault, they needed to refrain from dressing like “sluts.” This incident sparked a 70-city protest where women marched in solidarity, dressed in “bras, halter tops, and garter belts,” to “drain the s-word of its misogynistic venom” (Traister 2011).

discourse at the cultural level, they do so without an interest in bureaucratic organization or a recognizable board of authority.

Snyder (2008) argues that this lack of foundation is a “tactical response to the conditions of postmodernity” (187). She writes, “ ... third-wave feminism is not unequivocally postmodern in its theoretical approach, but it responds to a postmodern, post-Marxist world in which all foundations and grand narratives have been called into question” (187). On the other hand, although third wave discourse promotes fragmentation, localism, and deconstruction, feminist praxis would become irrelevant without the existence of overlapping meanings. In other words, without some level of consensus on the definition and project of feminism, members of the third wave would not have been able to find support for their political actions against gender and sexual inequality (see above). If each third wave feminist has an individual interpretation, yet there have been successful postmodern political projects, what is the discourse inside that venn diagram-like intersection?

In order for the symbolism and filmic devices created by directors of feminist pornography to incite a positive reception from feminist audiences, orientations toward feminism and female sexuality need to overlap in some way. In the preceding chapter, it was highlighted that a feminist identification worked as an intervening variable on the level of acceptance for feminist pornography. Further, audiences picked up on and appreciated the feminist-inspired devices (representations of consent, etc.) that directors used to structure their work. It could be argued, then, that there appears to be a specific feminist discourse circulating in production and reception practices; but it is not descriptive enough to simply label it “third wave.” While third wave feminist discourse offers a framework, an investigation of *lived* definitions offers insight to the specific strains of third wave feminist consciousness that are reproduced within the circulation of feminist pornography. However, it is important to keep in mind that this feminist “strain” is

not the only impulse behind the preference for in feminist pornography. As discussed in the last chapter, focus group participants developed a taste for this alternative form of pornography due to earlier experiences with mainstream productions. Additional identity markers, including sexual identification,<sup>5</sup> race<sup>6</sup>, and education level<sup>7</sup>, also serve as intervening variables that contribute to an interest in feminist pornography.

While the historical project of US-based feminism has promoted the meta-agenda of gender equality, the individual enactment of “being a feminist” is socially complicated, as Arielle admits in the second opening quote to this chapter. Translating a political, often radical, stance into a lived practice vis-à-vis patriarchal structures is a difficult task, whether you adopt a second or third wave mindset. For example, a woman who works at Planned Parenthood during the day, but accepts the domestic “second shift” might not be categorized as a feminist. It could also be argued that a woman who volunteers at a local LGBTQIA resource center, but works in post-production at an advertising agency is not a good feminist. In other words, performing feminism is a task under high surveillance due to the amount of stake involved. For the second wave, this stake (generally) involved advancing women in structural sectors. For the third wave, this stake involves recognizing marginalized identities and breaking through oppressive dichotomies.

For the directors of feminist pornography, a feminist identification has been one that they’ve continually had to justify, whether to journalists, their fans, to anti-pornography activists,

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<sup>5</sup> During focus groups, participants were asked about their sexual identification and the most prominent identification was queer, followed by lesbian and heterosexual.

<sup>6</sup> During focus groups, participants were asked about their racial identification, and the most prominent identification was White, followed by African-American and Asian American.

<sup>7</sup> Education level was a question on the online questionnaire: 45.5% of participants graduated from college, 13.6% completed some graduate work, 13.6% hold a Master’s degree and 100% hold a high school diploma.

or to academics. Each director has adopted a different orientation toward feminism, and their definitions reflect their historical and cultural locations, or, their generational affiliations. Candida Royale and Gypsy Goddess most closely identify, and struggle with, second wave discourse. Joanna Angel and Tristan Taormino represent the cusp of third wave discourse (late 1990s/early 2000s). And lastly, Madison Young, Courtney Trouble, and Shine Louise Houston reflect current third wave discourse and its inclusiveness of queer sexuality. In the end, however, while each director's interpretation of feminism reflects their personal experience and beliefs vis-à-vis normative feminist discourse, their feminist "praxis" (Arendt 1958) (enacted via feminist pornography), when analyzed at the group level, strongly identifies with sex positive ideology. In order to fully grasp how these historically conflicted and experience-based definitions merge into the feminist pornography project, each director was asked to discuss their feminist orientation.

Although Royale and Goddess create pornography from different sub-genres (couples and authentic amateur), both their reactions to feminism reflect a struggle with the debates and limitations emblematic of the second wave. Because they lived within the second wave structure of feeling, both directors experience residual cultural influences on their interpretation of feminism and in their work.

CANDIDA ROYALLE. I am a feminist and I have been since college days. To me feminist means self-determination and choice. As a feminist I am seizing control of the reigns of production and creating adult movies that I as a woman would prefer to see<sup>8</sup>. And, I think I'm taking a prerogative and I'm speaking up for women and so, to me it's a feminist act (phone interview, April 26, 2012).

Here, Royale reproduces the paternalistic tone of the second wave; "self-determination," "control," and "speaking up for women" reflect the need to protect and empower the universal woman. Her focus on "seizing control of the reigns of production" is emblematic of the second

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<sup>8</sup> Before our interview, Candida made it clear that she did not want to answer questions that were already addressed on the website. This particular question about feminism was answered on the website: <http://candidaroyalle.com/>



wave interest in breaking down capitalism-induced structural barriers to equality and success in the marketplace (Hartmann 1997; Barrett 1997). When Gypsy Goddess spoke of feminism, her responses were critical and defensive:

GYPSY GODDESS. I am not a feminist by any means. Feminists always turned me off. When I came to America-, and they will defend women, supposedly, but in such a way, that it almost strips women of all femininity ... Feminists seem to have this attitude, like, that you either have to be submissive or dominating as a woman and I don't want to be either. I'm not interested in either of those roles. They're trying to be like men, which in and itself, you have to believe that women are inferior to want to be like a man if you think that women, you know what I mean, you were born a woman, so why can't you enjoy it? Why do you have to be like a man and ask them permission? (in-person interview, November 12, 2011)

As mentioned earlier, Goddess' categorization as a feminist pornographer was teased out during the interview, although her initial stance toward feminism was noticeably negative. Her above response reflects a narrow understanding of the dynamism involved during the second wave; not all feminists wanted to "be like men" or only "submissive" or "dominating." However, her reaction highlights the highly criticized *exclusiveness* of the second wave, a critique that has had a direct impact on the *inclusiveness* of the third wave (Snyder 2008). Although different in many ways, both Royale and Goddess' responses demonstrate the contextual nature of feminist interpretations.

Joanna Angel and Tristan Taormino's interpretations of feminism mark a departure from the movement-based, organizational structure of the second wave. Both directors are interested in the enactment of agency and the celebration of diversity, two main themes that emerged in early third wave publications (Baumgardner and Richards 2000; Rowe-Finkbeiner 2004). Neither Angel nor Taormino were active during the second wave feminist movement or the porn wars due to their age, but they still appear to demonstrate a consciousness for those debates.

JOANNA ANGEL. I think my idea of feminism has changed over the years because I didn't really get it before and I think I get it more now. Um [long pause] I think that part of-, I think that being a feminist really means that as a woman you have a responsibility to the world to be the most amazing, hard-working individual that you need to be because you already have a

couple strikes against you. I think that you, basically, have to believe-, part of feminism is that you have to believe that we do live in a patriarchy and we do-, men control the world. I meet with owners of companies all the time, one out of every twenty times they are women. That's just how it is. Men kind of run the world and they still do. There are plenty of amazing women in the world, there just aren't as many as there are men right now and I think you have to acknowledge that and if you want to change that, you need to work your ass off and I think you have to know that it's your duty as a woman to go above and beyond what is expected of you just to be considered on the same level as everyone else, if that makes sense (phone interview, October 12, 2011).

Unlike Royale and Goddess, Angel's response exemplifies the feminist shift toward the individual and the recognition that women need to negotiate with oppressive forces rather than struggle against it. Angel's acknowledgement that "men control the world" is not necessarily defeatist, rather, it appears to be related to Butler's (1990) contention that while structure—including patriarchy—will always be present, breaks in repetitive performance can be a form a resistance. For Angel, then, being the most "amazing women" you can under patriarchal constraints represents feminist embodiment. When the feminist question was asked of Taormino, she couched her response in relation to her work as a feminist pornographer. Interestingly, she invokes Royale's work in her response as a both an influence and a contrast to her current portfolio.

TRISTAN TAORMINO. Well, I feel like my vision of what is feminist porn has definitely changed. I feel-, I was really strongly influenced by Candida Royale and um, this early idea of what women wanted to see and what women didn't want to see. I remember when I did *The Ultimate Guide to Anal Sex for Women*; one of the things I announced to all the actors was that there was going to be no facial cum shots. And of course they looked at me like I was insane. They were like, 'but what do you mean, that's what everyone wants'. And to me, I was like, it's this trope and it's really degrading to women and it's horrible and I'm not going to have it in my movie and blah, blah, blah. And, you know I look back on that now, and I'm like, oh my god, me and the facial cum shots – now you will see facial cum shots in my movies. Um, because I'm much more interested in empowering the performers to do the things that they want to do and to ask the about what those things are and why they like them ... And so I think that my whole mission has really shifted and evolved into something different than it was when I did my first movie (phone interview, October 13, 2011).

Both Angel and Taormino interpret feminism as an evolving social and political guideline that inspires them to abandon an essentialist "for women" or movement-based attitude in favor of

empowering themselves and others. For Angel, the social capital of the male gender symbolizes the authority that needs to be negotiated and for Taormino, this authoritative symbolism resides in the work of Candida Royalle. And for both directors, the act of negotiation and empowerment are central; rather than support strict feminist guidelines, they are interested in being a *conduit* to female sexual freedom through their positions as cultural producers.

Madison Young, Courtney Trouble, and Shine Louise Houston, on the other hand, framed their interests in queer sexuality and bodies as highly influential within their pornography projects. These interests, although sometimes found in Taormino's work, are unique to this group, and illustrates the contemporary intersection of feminist and queer praxis. Their approach to feminism reflects the postmodern "response" that Snyder (2008) argues is highly visible in third wave discourse. Overall, this cohort interprets feminism in terms of *individual action* rather than as a political state of mind.

MADISON YOUNG. I understand the philosophy that porn is fantasy, but I also think that it's important to show how that fantasy happens, you know? That all porn isn't fantasy, sometimes it is-, documenting a real couple having sex or two people who have just met that are really into each other and really turned on by each other having the kind of sex they want to have. Um, and I think those are really important things you can communicate through pornography and I think that maybe because I have those philosophies that makes me a sex-positive feminist rather than the other way around and feeling obliged to make a certain kind of porn because I identify as a sex-positive feminist (in-person interview, November 10, 2011).

COURTNEY TROUBLE. I consider myself feminist, among many other things. I think that the time for feminists to be anti-porn and anti-sex-work has passed. Those people are largely seen as outdated and unable to keep up with the current flow of ideas of sex workers rights and awareness, sex positivity, and pornography as a viable form of entertainment, work, education, and as a political platform (email correspondence, February 15, 2012).

SHINE LOUISE HOUSTON. I feel that for my own personal identity that feminist is a little too limiting for me and it also assumes that I feel female, which I generally do not, I do not generally feel 100% male either. I am most certainly an intersection. A lot of my identity is in intersections um, to say that I'm just feminist, in a weird way, negates a lot of other parts of myself. Um, I like the concept of queer because it's all over the place and it's kind of indefinable—I'm not going to get into queer theory (laughs) ... in a lot of ways I find that queer for me encompasses feminist ideals but goes beyond just wanting equality for female-bodied of

female-identified people. It's more like equality for all the freaks, not just heteronormative (phone interview, November 16, 2011).

The language that Young, Trouble and Houston use represents a marked departure from the “for women” interests of Royale or Goddess or the individual “empowerment” goals of Angel and Taormino. Rather, this cohort interprets feminism strictly within sex positive ideology and translates that belief system into their queer-friendly depictions of explicit sexuality. Although this sex positive approach has been linked to anti-censorship and liberal feminists of the second wave (Snyder 2008), one can be sex positive and not identity as feminist. According to Charlie Glickman, the Education Program Manager at Good Vibrations, his working definition of sex positivity is,

... the perspective that the only relevant criteria for expressing a sexual practice or experience is the consent, pleasure, and well-being of the participants and the people affected by it. Everything else is irrelevant. And there are a lot of nuances to consent, pleasure and well-being, each of those is complex. But the short version is that as long as everybody's happy and no one gets hurt. You know? What's the problem? That's sex positivity (phone interview, April 12, 2012).

Due to their interest in involving their performers during the scripting process and their low-level of direction during filming, Taormino and Goddess also support a limited version of sex positivity in their work. Royale and Angel, on the other hand, do not offer such open-endedness during shoots—although they do receive input from performers—and have an obligation to their genres, couples and alternative/punk, which limits their ability to support the framework of sex positivity.

For Young, Trouble, and Houston, once consent is established, the sexual performance is extremely flexible as long as “everybody's happy and no one gets hurt.” For those feminists that have concerns about objectification and commodification of the body, the glorification of violence against women in pornography, and the politics of pornography practice and labor in general, sex positivity could be interpreted as an embrace of patriarchy or as anti-feminist. If an individual—feminist or not—is not familiar or does not understand the meaning behind sex

positivity, the bondage, choking, or other physically compromising actions included in some feminist pornography productions could understandably register as violence. In an interesting twist, it is actually the performance of that otherwise violent behavior that enables some directors and performers to explore female sexual subjectivity on their own terms. Based on interview discussions with directors who consciously reify this ideology on an everyday basis, sex positive discourse represents a release from the social judgment and normativity associated with female sexuality, and in the end, gives women permission to leave sexual politics out of the bedroom.

In both the online questionnaire and during the focus groups, *all* participants admitted that they were feminists. When asked about their interpretations of feminism, consumers supported sex positive ideology as well as discourses of individual or “for women” empowerment. However, only two focus group participants used the word “empowerment” vis-à-vis feminism. When Sophia did, she prefaced it by announcing that she was uncomfortable with the term.

SOPHIA. This is going to sound weird, but I think that through the course of the last several years, just becoming more comfortable consuming pornography and being more comfortable talking about it and um, yeah, building a vocabulary for what I like or what turns me on or what I’m interested in has, um, I don’t want to use the term-, a feeling of empowerment or control for myself and confidence, maybe in understanding my own sexuality and communicating it to somebody else.

INTERVIEWER. Why didn’t you want to use the word empowerment?

SOPHIA. I don’t know. I guess that’s what it is, really. I don’t know, I guess because it’s one of those words that gets tossed around a lot in issues around feminism and it can mean different things and can be used in different ways to make different points, so- (San Francisco, November 13, 2011).

Although each participant identified as feminist, some were reluctant to define feminism, which could be the result of many factors. For those that did respond, the four major themes included: equality, standing up for yourself as a woman, respect for other’s individuality and identification, and proactivity/action. The following are two illustrative conversations:

OLIVE. I don’t know anymore. That’s part of a big paper I did for undergrad. I wrote about BDSM and I had to define feminism. I don’t know what my definition was then and I don’t know if I agree with it anymore (laughs). I don’t know, I guess maybe the thing I can say

with certainty is that feminism fights for equality of women and civil rights issues related to women.

EMMA. I personally think it's like, doing what you want and representing what you believe in and standing up for the things that you feel are right for you instead of like, just being submissive with your own opinions. I work in a very male-dominated company and I can see it being very easy to drown yourself amongst everybody because they're always going on and on-, and I just feel like I make sure that I make myself be heard, even if I have to cut somebody off. I feel like it's just being heard and doing what I want, just making sure I have a presence.

HAZEL. I agree; be yourself no matter what gender you are-, negotiating gender roles. And be active about it- if you see a woman or a man say something that's sexist, educating them, bringing awareness to the matter. But I agree that it's hard to define it now because it's radically changing. Some people think feminists are man-haters. It's a fine line. So it's a loaded question, to find a definition. And a lot of people were saying the whole feminist movement was wrong, they should make guys do women roles I don't remember who this way, it was a long time ago.

MADELINE. Well, I feel like, to a certain extent, feminism does fight for the share of and the fluidity of the gender role, so if someone who identifies as a man wants to be able to take on a more womanly personae and vice versa-, I don't know-

HAZEL. It's not that women want to be men, that's not the point of the cause-

MADELINE. I don't think that was specifically the goal-

OLIVE. If anything, it was to have the same opportunities and I think that's where it got blurred. People wanted to be able to work the same positions that men were working and be like, be in those spaces and that turned into oh, you want to be a man, which is not true (New York City, October 19, 2011).

LILY. I think you should [identify as feminist], if you have any respect for yourself. I think that feminism has more to do with the fact that we should treat others as individuals regardless of gender or sexuality—who gives a shit? You're another individual who has equal rights and ability and power in this world and I should have nothing to say or do about that. It's a non-issue for me, that I should treat anyone differently, for any reason, you know? It's about respecting another person's individuality.

CHLOE. I think also in terms of the proactive thing, um, I feel like it's about having that awareness that, in general, there is a really specific power structure in the world and that, like specifically doing things to empower other people who you know, culturally or socially, are generally disempowered and like, being like, I'm going to go out of my way to make eye contact with other women in a group where none are or go out of my way to make sure I'm hearing this person's voice where other people are passing by because they're quiet. Stuff like that. It's more of a proactive thing (New York City, October 22, 2011).

As both conversations demonstrate, there is a heightened awareness of the individual: her dedication to equality, her dedication to speaking up, her dedication proactivity in fighting sexism, and her dedication to empowering other people who are disempowered. For focus group participants, discussions about global equality for women, the division of labor, and equal pay were either implicit or ignored. Rather, orientations toward feminism supported third wave

discourse's privileging of choice, individuality, and inclusiveness over exclusiveness. This individualistic orientation extended to the issue of sexuality; participants either neglected to explicitly mention sexuality in their definitions or they felt that feminism implied acceptance and respect for the dynamism of sexualities and genders. More nuanced discussions of feminist orientations toward sexuality emerged during discussions about how feminist pornography directors were appropriating feminism in their work: through consent, communication, and safety.

Keeping all of this in mind, the venn diagram-esque intersection of feminist interpretation between producers and consumers appears to be: *Respecting yourself as an empowered woman and respecting other women as agentic individuals*. This feminist mindset circulates between directors, performers and consumers of feminist pornography. Further, this orientation directly intersects with sex positivity, which is evidenced through interests in consent, communication and safety from both directors and consumers. Overall, then, the feminist discourse that circulates in this media practice is one that privileges individual sexual agency, sexual exploration, and sexual diversity.

But feminist pornography is still a mediation, and limitations are inherent in the production practices of any media. While directors seek to privilege female sexual subjectivity in their representations and performances, they must make decisions—based on their individual feminist framework—about what to include and what to limit in their work, which in turn, sets the circulation of a *particular* feminist discourse into communicative motion. Like any other power regime, feminism has the power to legitimate and delegitimize female sexual practice, and feminist pornography, like any other genre of pornography, is circulating a constructed version of female sexual practice.

### *Limitations on Feminist Sexual Performance*

To invoke the claim that directors circulate a premeditated version of sexual practice means that decisions are made—influenced by personal orientations toward feminism—that *frame* the content they’re producing. During conversations with directors, the issue of a “list of don’ts” or “limitations” was discussed in relation to portrayals of sexual activity and it became apparent that this was where the proverbial rubber hit the road regarding praxis. The idea of limitations, for female directors who support individualism, empowerment and/or sex positivity, means that there is a presence of sexual politics within their construction of feminist pornography. Therefore, personal beliefs, as well as distribution issues (discussed below), shape the feminism of feminist pornography. The following are responses to the question concerning limitations or a list of “don’ts” in their portrayals of sexuality.

CANDIDA ROYALLE. No, I don’t have a list, but, you know, people know that my work is fairly vanilla, pretty benign; they [performers] don’t do anything that would surprise me pretty much. And, with me, you know, I go by, like, I feel that when women watch a movie, they can tell if the women are really into it or if they’re doing something they’re uncomfortable with. And I don’t like to be the sex fantasy police. I don’t think politics belong in the bedroom and it’s been a different line for me in terms of how far do we go to portray some of the hottest fantasies women have that might involve forced sex, you know? How far can we go to portray something that is honestly a turn-on for a lot of women without feeling like I’m contributing to negative, violent images? And so, it’s a real challenge, but I think that those fantasies can be very, very exciting and liberating without being degrading. And that’s the thing. You have to really know that the woman, if it’s her fantasy, she’s ultimately in charge – she’s empowered.

INTERVIEWER. It sounds like you have a script and you’re highly involved in the performance. Have you ever had to step in and tell your performers you didn’t like what they were doing?

ROYALLE. Oh sure.

INTERVIEWER. Like facial cum shots? You don’t do a facial cum shot at the end, right?

ROYALLE. Oh no. Oh, god no. No, that was the first thing that Lauren [initial business partner] and I agreed; we would not have cum shots. And the only time you see cum shots is when it’s part of the script or like, poking fun at it (phone interview, April 26, 2012).

GODDESS. I would not be interested in filming an abusive relationship. I would not be interested in people humiliating each other, even if they enjoy it (in-person interview, November 12, 2011)



ANGEL. We definitively have intense sex scenes, but I don't like, you know-, I don't like anything that's too violent, just, over the years, the viewers don't like it either, which is strange, because, as time has progressed, the girls are the ones coming to set requesting more, you know, really violent, sexual things and I have to be like, no (laughs). Do your fucked up shit in your bedroom but I'm not going to sell it (laughs). Sometimes I feel so old, now (phone interview, October 12, 2011).

For Royale, Goddess and Angel, *violence* is a clear limitation on sexual representation, regardless of whether or not the performers are willing participants. While Royale offers the example of the facial cum shot as a “no” and Goddess offers “abuse” as a “no,” the interpretation of violence is left open-ended and up to the director's discretion. In her work *Joanna's Angels 2: Alternative Throttle* (2006), she is shown vomiting during an aggressive oral sex scene. Although Angel doesn't “like anything that's too violent,” this depiction of oral sex may appear violent to some viewers. Likewise, Royale admitted that she did an anal sex scene in *Eyes of Desire 2* (1999), and for some women, this could be categorized as violent as well.

On the other hand, Young and Houston discussed *distribution* limits, specifically, legal and commercial limitations rather than content-based limitations. And in a complete contrast to Royale, Goddess and Angel, Trouble explained that she is open to any form of sexual practice, as long as her performers are interested. The following responses offer insight to these experiences and choices:

YOUNG. Usually it's more about what's allowed as far as distribution goes versus what my personal limits are. My biggest things are consent; I want for it to be safe and consensual and um-

INTERVIEWER. How does distribution interfere?

YOUNG. Uh, there are certain red flags for obscenity, especially when you're dealing with DVDs versus the web, um-, there are certain things like fisting, for one. Fisting and urination, um, bondage in sex has always been a fine line as far as DVD goes because if it passes-, even female ejaculation becomes something. And with a lot of these, I have to talk to, if it's not for my company, it really has to do with what Good Vibes is comfortable with. What are their lawyers willing to defend because that's what it comes down to; how good is your lawyer and what do they say as far as this material being distributed in Alabama, you know, or Florida or-, because when you send a DVD to one of those areas-, obscenity has to do with community standards and the community standard of Florida or Ohio is different than SF and so yeah, it's

dangerous territory that way. With the web, then our boss becomes VISA, is who we worry about on the web for the most part [*laughs*] (in-person interview, November 10, 2011).

HOUSTON. Well, primarily it's, you know, I feel like we have a fairly vanilla membership. I would say, yeah, I'd love to see piercing, but because of the blood, we can't do it. We can't do stuff like that. The passing out I wasn't too sure about [referring to an experience on set], so it was like; this is something we'd have to ask a lawyer. And we have worker's comp and we have medical insurance, but I don't know if I want somebody passing out on my set (*laughs*), you know? ... There are also other types of legal restraints, other types of things that we have to abide by as far as what will get us in trouble. Mostly, no blood, no tears, no urine, um, this is a personal thing – no glitter (*laughs*). Things of that nature and generally, yeah, nothing can turn blue, general safety things with bondage or impact play. We do primarily open-hand impact play; there has been some closed-fist impact play, but it hasn't been in the face. You can push her down, but you can't punch her in the face. No, that gets you in trouble. Knife play gets you in trouble (phone interview, November 16, 2011).

TROUBLE. Nope. If my performers want to do it, there must be some kind of social merit or interest! (email correspondence, February 15, 2012).

Both Young and Houston make references to obscenity and issues related to CC Bill, an online company that handles credit card payments on websites. According to Young and Houston, this company has a team that inspects web content before agreeing to work with a potential website producer, and they, in turn, impose limitations on content, if needed, before they seek a contractual partnership. These limitations are directly connected to making sure that the website cannot be legally deemed obscene. When Young referred to VISA as the boss, she was referencing the way that VISA, and CC Bill, can refuse to offer their services if they don't approve of the content. This issue of web content and the need to partner with credit card companies points to external limitations on content versus personal sexual politics. For Young, Houston and Trouble, then, the issue of limitation extends beyond performances of sexual activity. Their sex positive environment encourages performers to establish consent and then they are given permission to perform any act of sexual activity that they want. Within this framework, imposing additional limits after the establishment of consent and safety would defeat the purpose of their project.

An example of external interferences on sex positive content emerged during *The Crash Pad* Series shoot (San Francisco, November 12, 2011) directed by Shine Louise Houston, as outlined in the introduction. In this moment, although Houston prides herself in the mediation of sex positive, queer sexuality, she was unable to fulfill the wishes of her performers (to be able to choke a partner until she passed out) even though consent, communication and safety were ensured. Legal and commercial issues limited her content in that moment, but she was able to communicate and negotiate with her performers to reach an agreement. In the end, however, the feminist production environment that she constructed was challenged, and ultimately, the legality surrounding her content affected the level of director and performer agency connected to the sexual performance.

During discussions with consumers, the issue of limits came down to individual sexual *preferences* within their developed *taste* for feminist pornography. Participants discussed their distaste for particular sexual acts rather than a wholesale rejection of violence or objectification. The following are examples of responses:

EMMA. I guess if it's just something I'm not into, regardless of who produced it. I don't like hitting, whether it's produced by a male or female (October 19, 2011, New York City).

OLIVE. If it's something I don't like, I'll just turn it off. I just don't like when people are face fucked until they vomit (October 19, 2011, New York City).

ROSIE. I certainly have a 'no' list and things I'm not interested in watching, but I just don't get that material ever and it rarely comes up. I like the extremes; probably what's on everyone's 'no' list—that's not fair to assume, but, like, animals and pooping on someone's chest and—sorry to mock you if that's your thing—so if that comes up-, I guess it never comes up on female-produced pornography because it seems more on the fringes or a little more extreme (October 22, 2011, New York City).

MAURA. For me, no. I'm less involved in the [BDSM] scene than I used to be, but, um, I've seen some really intense stuff in real life and very rarely have I been super disturbed, so, seeing something on the screen-, even BDSM is not really enough. It might not be my thing, but, um, it's kind of like, eh, I've seen that before (November 9, 2011, San Francisco).

Due to consumers' voluntary exposure to mainstream, female-produced, and feminist pornography over their lifetimes<sup>9</sup>, they've developed personal preferences regarding sexual activity, and feel empowered to "just turn it off" if it becomes unbearable or outside of their preferences. Additionally, due the affordances of digital media, viewers are able to manage their viewing experience through fast-forwarding, stopping, deleting, or leaving a website.

There was a sense of tolerance for content that was produced by a feminist director, even if it was out of a consumer's "comfort zone." For example, during the November 9, 2011 focus group in San Francisco, Arielle discussed her increased interest in bondage play after exposure to it via the work of a feminist director. Before that, she had not been particularly interested in this form of sexual performance due to her unfamiliarity and the social stigma. In general, focus group participants displayed more confidence in feminist directors and admitted that they were more apt to explore otherwise abject sexual behavior through the lens of a feminist director than a mainstream director. During the October 22, 2001 New York City focus group, Chloe notes the relationship between her sexual curiosity and her trust in a feminist lens or "perspective":

Yeah, I guess in terms of watching things from a curiosity standpoint, I feel like I really don't have things that I wouldn't be interested in seeing from a more feminist perspective because, yeah, it's just like, I feel like whatever it is, if it's-, I don't know, I guess (pause), I guess if you're bringing up animal things I'm not interested in that anyway, but like, I guess I would be interested in seeing somebody poop on someone from a feminist perspective. No, I guess I feel like there's a divide where there are things I would watch for an arousal thing, but there's things I would watch, for, what is that like?

For Chloe, her feminist lens allows for an exploration of feminist *praxis*. Due to her particular orientation toward feminism, her curiosity in feminist production—of any kind—forces her to suspend her personal beliefs and explore meanings outside of her comfort zone. Although this

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<sup>9</sup> The online questionnaire revealed that 65.2% of participants discovered pornography between the ages of 10-15 and during focus group discussions, those that offered an age typically reported 11, 12, and 13.

interest was not shared, or even discussed, in other focus groups, Chloe's interest reveals the variance that exists between consumers in terms of feminism and viewing patterns. On the other hand, as noted in the previous chapter, the majority of focus group participants reported an increased trust for feminist directors due to their production practices, which is directly related to their self-imposed "limits" during viewing. Due to the fact that feminist directors reify sex positive ideology, viewers are able to enjoy sexual practices outside of their regular viewing patterns. For these consumers, this is a beneficial exchange: feminist directors produce their unique vision of pornography informed by feminism, and in exchange, consumers are able to trust production practices and content, and are ultimately inspired to explore their sexuality through the pornographic medium.

Based on the voices of producers and consumers, the generation and interpretation of feminist pornography is not value-free. Individual interpretations of feminism and sexual practice are foregrounded in the circulation of this media. Through an analysis of personal sexual limitations within this production and consumption process, it is evident that producers experience internal and/or external limits on their portrayals of sexual practice, and a transparency of these limits does not appear to be available to consumers. In other words, besides an acknowledgement of feminist pornography as part of a for-profit industry, focus group participants were generally not interested in discussions of political economy and feminist discursive formations. Although a brief discussion of commodification emerged during the second San Francisco focus group, the participants involved had higher degrees of experiences with the pornography industry, which, in turn, influenced their heightened awareness for political economy. How feminist interpretations become commodified through feminist pornography, how those interpretations "limit" the otherwise "empowering" and "sex positive" project of feminist pornography, how companies like CC Bill impose limits on content, and how consumers

interact with mediations of female sexuality were not issues that focus group participants were interested in discussing.

The reasons for this disinterest may be the result of low comfort levels surrounding this level of critical analysis in a group dynamic or for a number of other reasons, including a disregard for meta-analyses of this viewing practice. As an extension of third wave sensibilities and its partnership with an individualistic orientation toward the consumption of material goods, reflexivity for political economy is beyond the empowerment scope: If a feminist produced it, I'll watch it and enjoy it in negotiated form. If a feminist produced it and I don't like it, I'll just turn it off. In general, participants reported issues with portrayals being too "soft-core" or sometimes too "violent," but didn't label those qualities as limitations or feminist interpretations vis-à-vis production practices. Rather, it was discussed in the realm of *representation*, and left as apolitical choice.

#### *Feminist Pornography as Sexual Discourse*

Drawing from Michel Foucault's (1990) contention that sexuality has been "put into discourse" (299) and Jeffrey Weeks' (2003) observation that pornography is an "existing language of sex," that "sets the horizon of the possible" (6), it could be argued that feminist pornography contributes to the power-knowledge of female sexuality. Rather than feminist pornography remaining relegated the discursive formation of feminism and sexuality, this media practice is best understood as having the capacity to shape the language of female sexuality outside of the feminist population. Although participants in this study all identified as feminist, there is no guarantee that *only feminists* will watch this type of content.

To illustrate this point, during an interview, Joanna Angel reported that she has many male fans and members of her website. Similarly, Candida Royalle terms her project as "couples porn" in addition to feminist pornography. For Royalle, the couples are typically heterosexual,

which means that men—who may or may not identify as feminist—are also consuming her material. For directors that focus on queer bodies (Young, Trouble, Houston), representations include male, gender, male-to-female, female-to male, and everything in between. So, while this project has focused on the discursive circulation between feminist producers and feminist audiences, it is important to note that feminist pornography, as a producer of meaning and knowledge for female sexuality, extends beyond this niche community. With this in mind, it is still necessary to deconstruct the discursive function of feminist pornography qua feminism in terms of its productive qualities.

Although chapter two argued that feminist pornography is, in fact, a reverse discourse, it must also be accepted that this form of media works to “sustain” particular knowledge formations about human sexuality (Foucault 1990, 299). Due to the fact that feminist directors are working with a constructed, conventionalized medium, there are particular symbols and myths that are “sustained” as a result of working within an industry (Williams 1989). The heterosexual “formula” of sexual practice is noticeable in much of feminist pornography, although within girl-girl scenes, there is an alternative formula that involves sex toys rather than male penetration. This framework of sexual practice—positions, acts, etc.—is practiced in lived culture, but the *order* in which they are performed is a direct result of the need for content to become intelligible as *pornography*. Here, feminist pornographers may shift this “formula” slightly, but the inclusion of a progression of particular sex acts (kissing, oral sex, penetrative sex, anal sex) contributes to a sustainability of the discourse on normalized sexual practice.

While the sex positive and queer-identified directors (Young, Trouble and Houston) may aggressively work against the heterosexual “formula,” they still present a patterned performance (kissing, oral sex, sex toys) and in so doing, commodify “abject” sexuality (Kristeva 1984). In other words, feminist pornography is not inventing a new way to enact sexual practice. Due to

industry conventions and cultural constructions, there are limitations on what counts as sexual practice. Feminist pornographers must make decisions based on cultural conventions on sexuality, thus reinforcing and sustaining the ways in which humans interact sexually.

However, while feminist directors of pornography sustain the knowledge of normalized sexual practice, their introduction of communication, consent and safety within these conventional performances breaks with the repetitiveness—or “formula”—of mainstream pornography performance. According to Judith Butler (1990), this break in structured repetition is grounds for the establishment of agentic and resistive discourse. She writes,

... agency then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, i.e., new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, then it is only within the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible (198).

Here, we can apply Butler’s analysis of resistance to gender norms to the production of feminist pornography within the mainstream pornography industry. She would argue that the need for the mainstream industry to reproduce a commodified choreography of sexuality, as opposed to more diverse representations, points toward the instability of this specialized discourse. While feminist directors do experience these “rules governing signification”—or the “formula”—they also break with the repetition of this formula by the introduction of feminist ideals: the filming of interviews that establish consent, the portrayal of communication during the performance, the portrayal of safe sex, and the introduction of non-normative bodies, non-heterosexual sexuality, and sometimes, romance. These devices highlight a form of disruption, or agency, within the commodified patterns of pornography.

As illustrated earlier, there are nuances to these “breaks” for each director, but overall, the inclusion of these “alternative domains of cultural intelligibility” constitutes a form of



resistance to mainstream pornographic discourse. But labeling feminist pornography as simply “resistance” or “reverse” media overstates the project’s function. After all, directors are still interested in pleasure and profit within the established pornography industry. They use mainstream distribution, some have been featured in *Adult Video News*, the standard magazine for the industry, and some of these directors have participated in the *AVN Expo* in Las Vegas, Nevada. It is important then, to categorize feminist pornography as a *variation*—not wholesale resistance—within mainstream pornography that seeks to construct an alternative productive discourse on female sexuality to be used by feminist (and other) audiences. By reifying varying levels of sex positive principles—through pre/post-interviews, communications of consent during the scene, use of protection, etc.—feminist directors of pornography are producing media that provides pleasure-based entertainment, education and a source for sexual empowerment.

In the context of cultural production, the concept of feminist pornography as (D)iscourse needs to be conceptualized along a historical continuum, meaning that *without* the development of the mainstream pornography industry, this discourse could not exist. Much of the impetus and the filmic properties of feminist pornography are a reaction to mainstream pornography; the installation of consent, communication and safety are based on the *lack* of these conventions in most mainstream pornography. Further, except for Shine Louise Houston, all of the directors included in this study were (and some still are) performers at one point, and admit to developing their production policies based on their experiences with mainstream and/or male directors. These directors have been exposed to, and influenced by, the mainstream industry.

Based on focus group data, consumers *also* had direct experiences with mainstream pornography, and commented on how they “discovered” their brother’s or father’s pornography collection in the beginning, then explored the mainstream industry—typically through the Internet—before they arrived at female-produced and feminist pornography. With all this in

mind, it appears that the political power of feminist pornography *relies* on the shortcomings of the mainstream pornography industry. In order for this project to be labeled as “feminist,” while at the same time adhering to most of the mainstream pornography industry’s conventions (sexual practice, distribution, paywall structures online, etc.), it has to project its variance *from* and *against* the mainstream industry as a referent. Without the mainstream pornography industry, and the crisis of representation that accompanies it, the project of feminist pornography would lack *political* intelligibility. In other words, the inclusion of consent, communication and safety would not appear radical; it would not be meaningful<sup>10</sup>. Instead, it would become engulfed within the commodification of sexuality.

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<sup>10</sup> Not only is the inclusion of consent, communication and safety meaningful to individuals, they also work as prompts for conversation between consumers. The online questionnaire revealed that when participants talked to others about female-produced and feminist pornography, the issue of authenticity was the most dominant. “Real” sex scenes, “natural bodies,” “how awesome it is to see something that looks real,” “realism,” etc. are examples of responses. Consumers are able to locate the differences between this style of pornography and mainstream pornography, and this difference is meaningful and relevant in social interactions.

## CONCLUSION

Because of its cultural significance and potential for social change, our understanding of feminist pornography must go beyond generalizations, second-hand accounts, assumptions, and personal essays from the directors themselves. In an effort to contribute nuance and first-hand accounts, this dissertation has provided the first comprehensive account of the production and consumption practices of feminist pornography. By bringing the voices of feminist pornography directors, female performers, and feminist pornography viewers together, this study offers an account of feminist pornography that extends beyond description and focuses on contribution and negotiation within media culture. Through an investigation of a media form that involves female ownership and feminist interpretations of sexual practice, this dissertation also contributes to larger questions regarding the limits of mediating female sexuality.

In order to approach feminist pornography in a more comprehensive manner than previous pornography studies, a feminist/critical cultural studies framework was adopted so that text, audience, and issues of political economy could all be considered (Kellner 2003). These analytic entry points influence one another, and therefore, were not treated in isolation (i.e., political economy issues have a direct impact on content as well as audience reception). The fieldwork for this study was designed to highlight these intersecting relationships, and privileged the voices of those with *direct* relationships to feminist pornography: directors, performers, and consumers. Direct contact was made with members of the US-based canon of feminist pornography and several members agreed to participate in interviews: Candida Royalle, Tristan Taormino, Joanna Angel, Courtney Trouble, Madison Young, and Shine Louise Houston. Gypsy Goddess, a female director, also asked to be involved in this study, and due to her status as an “amateur” director, she was included.

In order to gain a richer understanding of feminist pornography production practices and how they compare with mainstream experiences, performers April Flores, Jiz Lee, Dylan Ryan, and Sinnamon Love were contacted in order to offer comparative insight. Lastly, focus groups were organized so that this study could offer a corrective to the definitive lack of qualitative audience reception research on pornography, and feminist pornography in particular. Recruitment posters were available in female-friendly adult stores, including Babeland locations in New York City, G Boutique in Chicago, and Good Vibrations locations in San Francisco. Participants were self-selected in New York City and San Francisco (Chicago did not yield any participants) and two focus groups were held in each city in late 2011. The interviews and focus groups generated diverse opinion, explanation, and evaluation that worked alongside one another to both reinforce and refute various claims. By choosing to adopt the framework of British cultural studies and shifting it to include the orientation of feminist media studies and the inclusion of political economy (Kellner 2003), the feminist/critical cultural studies framework and feminist methodology developed for this dissertation had a specific agenda: to illustrate process, power dynamics, and relationships within the genre of feminist pornography.

In the first part of this dissertation, the emergence of the feminist pornography field was historically and culturally situated within feminist theory and practice. In chapter one, the issue of sexual subjectivity was used to frame the historical interest in managing female sexuality. A layout of the sexualized condition of women was first offered, via a discussion of compulsory heterosexuality, the sexual division of labor, the treatment of the female body, and violence against women. Next, the feminist response to the sexualized condition vis-à-vis pornography was outlined via the porn wars of the 1980s. Finally, in an effort to illustrate the most recent iteration of the historical movement of feminist (and institutional) concern over sexual subjectivity, the post-porn wars third wave feminist condition is considered, particularly, its adoption of queer

studies, sex work discourse, and feminist pornography. In chapter two, the discussion of feminist pornography continued and the field of non-US and US-based feminist pornography directors is profiled, with more emphasis given to the US-based directors due to the scope of this study. In addition to the brief profiles—based on website discourse, existing literature, and interview data—a brief textual analysis of one scene was offered for each of the US-based directors involved in this study. The scenes were chosen because they received a Feminist Porn Award, and had thus been imbued with symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1998), making them illustrative of “successful” feminist pornography. This chapter is descriptive in its orientation, and combined with the chapter one, offers the contextual and background information needed in order to fully connect with the following data chapters on production, consumption, and feminist discourse.

Chapters four, five, and six are organized based on the methodological and analytical interests of this dissertation: production, consumption and feminist discourse (text). Each chapter puts directors, performers, and consumers into conversation so that the process of engagement is uniquely illustrated. For example, in the production chapter, directors’ comments on their production process are crosschecked with experience-based remarks made by performers and then ultimately, consumers’ interpretations of the production process. In this chapter, which focuses on the production process and political economy of feminist pornography, interview data revealed the intricacies of each director’s production ethic (including pre-production and hiring practices) and patterns emerged based on the treatment of performers, safety precautions, and the importance of consent communication. Interestingly yet unsurprisingly, these interviews also revealed a correlation between higher budgets and higher similarities with mainstream production policies. For example, Madison Young’s lower generation of capital within her project meant that she had more power over allocating agency to the performers. Joanna Angel, on the other

hand, explained that the need to generate a good product and stay within budget caused her to feel less sympathy for her performers:

I guess my sympathy is always going to go with the director, always with the producer and that's just because of who I am and because I'm putting my money out. It makes it very different. If you're going somewhere everyday and you're getting a paycheck for having sex as opposed to my life, where every time I'm having sex on camera or someone else is having sex on camera I'm giving a paycheck, um, you know, it's just-, you think of things a little differently" (phone interview, October 12, 2011).

During focus groups, participants revealed that they could pick up on this enactment of ethical production practices and that those cues improved their viewing experience. Although some viewers engage in critical reception practices—indicated by the conscious use of checklists of reflection on setting, consent, or safe sex—they explained that they notice and are convinced by the ethical markers (i.e., pre/post-interviews, use of condoms, communication and consent during the scene). This is a sharp contrast to their reactions to mainstream pornography, which centered on critiques of formulaic sexuality and homogeneity.

Chapter five is a focused audience reception chapter and argues that viewers consciously work against the initial interpellation (Althusser 1971) offered from mainstream pornography and actively re-establish their sexual subjectivity in their developed tastes for feminist pornography. Drawing from diverse responses, some patterns emerged regarding viewing practices and interpretations. Participants watch to: (1) “get off”; (2) explore and expose themselves to diverse sexual behavior; (3) as an instrument to assist with foreplay and with a partner; (4) to get “turned on”; and (5) as a way to support feminist activity/activism. In addition, consumers primarily view pornography on their computer screens, whether online or not, and do so alone more than with a partner. However, some participants spoke of watching with a partner, and a few participants mentioned group viewing.

Lastly, participants noted that contrary to gender stereotypes, they do not need to engage in additional preparation or “mood setting” in order to enjoy pornography and further, masturbation is not always a result of viewing. Based on focus group conversations, it appears that there is no established “way” of watching feminist pornography; each woman has developed their own viewing rituals and while patterns may emerge for *why* they watch, *how* they watch is too varied to be generalized. Even at the individual level, participants’ viewing frequencies varied weekly and monthly, and depending on their living situation, work situation, or relationship situation, habits shifted. One participant admitted to watching at one particular time every single day, but that was an anomaly.

Chapter six confronts the issue of feminism directly, and reveals that *individual* interpretations of feminism and sexual practice are foregrounded in the circulation of feminist pornography. Through an analysis of sexual limitations within the production and consumption of this genre, it becomes evident that producers experience internal and/or external limits on their feminist portrayals of sexual practice. However, based on focus group discussions, a working transparency of those limits was not available to audiences. How feminist interpretations became commodified through feminist pornography, how those interpretations “limit” the otherwise “empowering” and “sex positive” project of feminist pornography, how companies like CC Bill impose limits on content, and how consumers interact with mediations of female sexuality were not issues that focus group participants were interested in discussing.

This chapter ends with a consideration of how feminist pornography represents reverse discourse. Because this theoretical discursive element exists alongside institutional power, feminist pornography can best be described as an *intervention* on the dominant symbols and performances found in mainstream pornography rather than a “great refusal” (Foucault 1990, 96). Specifically, the work of Judith Butler was used in this chapter to describe how feminist pornography is a

resistive form of discourse that works against the reproduction of the general conventions of mainstream pornography, although some undoubtedly remain. Here, the intersection of feminist theory and pornography production creates a space for directors, performers, and consumers to confront and *play* with female sexual subjectivity outside of mainstream conventions. Because pornography is performative, this space is not transparent or “authentic,” but rather, is a space that offers the ability for women (and men) to reflect on and experiment with agentic and empowered sexuality. Interestingly, this is one of the only “mass” spaces that has been created for this type of confrontational, non-normative discourse concerning female sexuality. Although the HBO program *Girls*, the film *Magic Mike* (2012) and the *50 Shade of Grey* trilogy (James 2011, 2012) offer contemporary alternatives to traditional mediated notions of female sexuality, they fail to provide the diversity and nuance that it takes to cultivate a progressive and dynamic space.

Ultimately, because feminist pornography is a project that explicitly works against particular messages propagated through the mainstream industry—specifically, those related to sexism, violence, and heteronormativity—yet also upholds other filmic conventions related to genre intelligibility, a final evaluation of effective “resistance” obscures its potential as a form of praxis. Because each director uses a different creative lens and feminist orientation to produce their media text, the content itself becomes too subjective to work as *the* site of resistance—some directors include practices that may seem sexist or violent to some consumers. It is the ownership and production practices, then, that offer the most definitive site of resistance: Resistance to exploiting performance labor, resistance to obscuring the consent process during sexual practice, resistance to the exclusion of performers with diversity bodies and gender identifications, and resistance to the domination of male ownership in the pornography industry. Interestingly, the word “resistance” did not emerge in any of the interviews or focus groups for this study. Rather, the participants in this study discussed the ways in which feminist pornography offered various



*potentials* for empowering their own sexual subjectivity, in diverse and personal ways. So while feminist pornography is not intended for everyone, nor is it intended to overturn the mainstream pornography industry or cultural sexism, it can—according to the participants in this study—create a very meaningful space for exploration, education, and desire.

*Feminist Pornography as Feminist Performative Heterotopia*

When asked whether or not they felt responsible for teaching women about sexuality and how they felt their voices were contributing to the way women approach sexuality, all of the directors' responses reflected an *interventionist* approach rather than an interest in providing determinative answers to female sexuality. The following excerpts exemplify the diversity of responses:

COURTNEY TROUBLE. I debunk myths about queer female sexuality constantly, and include trans women as a part of an overall focus on making sure that women are seen as authentic sexual creators that deserve satisfaction as much as men. I hope that when women watch my porn, they feel inspired to be sex positive and vocal, and excited. As for men, I hope that they take away personal notes on how to please women, continue having sex after male ejaculation, and use toys, fantasies, and communication to enhance sex (email correspondence, February 15, 2012).

SHINE LOUISE HOUSTON. No, it wasn't really about helping people. I suppose it was initially for selfish reasons. I just wanted to see stuff that I want to see and, you know, if that changes or opens up the possibility of other people's fantasy life, awesome, but this might be catering to a very small group of people and to me that was all right. Like, obviously the idea-, I wanted different body types and different gender expressions, not because I want to change the world, but mostly because those people who are different gendered expressions, there just wasn't anything out there that was catering to those tastes (phone interview, November 16, 2011).

TRISTAN TAORMINO. So, my thing-, you know one of my goals has always been to be explicit. I have always been explicit in the way that I talk about write about sexuality. So, I don't use euphemisms. I like charts, but in addition to the one-dimensional charts, we need to see the body parts because I think that there's still too much of sex education which people can't connect with because we're using medical jargon, these technical terms, these strange diagrams and we're not actually getting to what is happening with bodies ... We need to stop being really vague and get specific. Because I think that's what people want, they want specifics. They don't want vague, weird, like, Cosmo magazine sex tips (phone interview, October 13, 2011).

JOANNA ANGEL. People have asked me to write sex advice books and want me to speak at colleges about sex education and I always turn it down because I'm not a doctor and I'm

not an expert and I don't like giving people too much advice because I don't want to give them the wrong advice—something that may feel good for me might not feel good for you, you know? I'm in a different-, I'm okay, my body is fine and I have sex with-, I can get gang-banged by five guys with twelve-inch penises and not have to take a break and be fine the next day. I don't know if every girl feels the same way and I don't recommend that to everyone. And I wasn't able to do that a couple years ago. I've explored different things and I've done different things and my body's changed, you know? I'm lucky, I get to have sex with people who are professionals at having sex, like, they might be with someone at home who doesn't know what they're doing and they might get hurt and I don't want-, I'm not trying to spread the word that everybody has to be filthy in order to have a healthy sex life ... So porn doesn't have to be sex education or giving people lessons on you know, how to take dick or give blowjobs or eat pussy or whatever, you know, I hope that I can inspire other girls to believe they're sexy no matter who you are phone interview, October 12, 2011).

Each response reveals a reluctance to assume a position of power or influence over their viewers, but they do identify specific goals, from providing images of differently gendered bodies and inspiring girls to believe that they're sexy “no matter who you are” to offering sexually explicit images so that women can form a more substantial relationship with their bodies (i.e., development of female sexual subjectivity). These “goals” are positively received by consumers and then filtered according to personal needs, tastes, and desires. Because consumers also reported *negotiated* readings of feminist pornography, it can be argued that both directors *and* consumers recognize the limitations of this genre (vis-à-vis structure, personal tastes, interpretations of feminism), and as a result of this reflexivity, feminist pornography becomes a site of productive tension.

By juxtaposing possibility and limitation in the same media space, directors, performers, and consumers are able to actively recognize the presence of resistance in this material form. For example, during focus groups, some participants spoke of the “formula” in mainstream pornography, but then discussed how although feminist pornography used those conventions, they nuanced it by adding discussions of consent around it, or shortened the amount of time dedicated to fellatio, etc. These sites of tension and resistance produce reflexive moments, which allow directors and consumers to confront their own beliefs about female sexuality and feminism.

Following this logic, feminist pornography becomes a site, or space, that promotes the collision of opposing discourses about sexuality. On the one hand, pornography is a site of commodified bodies, filmic conventions, for-profit motivation, and historical discourses about sexual practice. On the other hand, feminist practices of pornography production involve actions toward improved labor conditions, depictions of safe sexual practice, representations of alternative (commodified) bodies, and ethical production practices. Both of these currents exist in the same mediated space but are bound as a set of relations that preserve the intelligibility of the pornography form, while at the same time, offering a recognizable intervention. Another way to name this contradictory spatial system is “heterotopia,” a space described by Michel Foucault (1986) as “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (25).

As a feminist performative heterotopia<sup>1</sup>, feminist pornography provides a space for the exploration of feminist and queer sexuality within the constraints of media production, the pornography industry, and the cultural disciplining of sexual practice. Feminist pornography directors, equipped with varying second- and third-wave interpretations of feminism, translate their vision through production practices and content in the hope that audiences will use these mediations to challenge and empower their own beliefs about female sexuality. So if we return to the main research question of this dissertation—What cultural work is being done when a sexualized group reappropriates a male-dominated medium and uses feminism to renegotiate its terms of discourse?—it could be argued that the cultural work of feminist pornography is its

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<sup>1</sup> In their article about British sex shops, Adrienne Evans, Sarah Riley, and Avi Shankar (2010) use the term “postfeminist heterotopia” to describe the space of Ann Summers, a popular adult store. They write, “As a postfeminist heterotopia, Ann Summers is a space constituted through contradictory discourses which construct the subject in complex ways, producing a heteroglossia of competing meanings” (225). Along with Foucault (1986), this article and its use of “postfeminist heterotopia” inspired the construction of feminist performative heterotopia for this dissertation.

*construction* of a feminist-inflected space that allows for the explicit exploration of female sexuality. In a culture where “patriarchal capitalism” shapes the representation of the female subject and the experiences of women working in media organizations (Byerly and Ross 2006, 75), the construction of this space is culturally significant. Feminist pornography is an effort to correct the “missing discourse of desire,” and offers tools toward the empowerment of female sexual subjectivity. Through the mediation and circulation of diverse examples of female sexual desire, audiences are able to unlock interests and preferences that have been otherwise hidden from mainstream institutional discourses on sexuality. Illustrations of sex toys, sexual positions aimed at female pleasure, communication and consent between partners, and other feminist pornography devices can promote sexual confidence in various ways, as demonstrated in this dissertation.

This feminist performative heterotopia was created by feminist directors to deploy a new discourse of sexuality within the filmic and industrial constraints of pornography, and has successfully provoked audiences to think differently about sexuality, pornography, and female pleasure. But, as this dissertation argues, feminist pornography is not a feminist utopia—it is not a perfect deconstruction of all the misogyny found in mainstream pornography—nor is it meant to be. As Foucault (1986) reminds us, “these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces” (24).

Instead, the project of feminist pornography creates an opportunity for alternative discourses of female sexuality; discourses that, according to consumers, is unavailable in mainstream media and mainstream pornography. As this dissertation demonstrates, this discourse successfully flows from a niche population of ambitious feminist directors to discerning feminist consumers who have developed a particular taste for this content. For this intersecting social segment, feminist pornography offers the chance to engage directly with agentic, explicit representations of female desire from third wave, sex positive feminist perspectives. However, this

dissertation also reveals that consumers read feminist pornography in various forms, depending on their understanding of issues related to feminism, sexuality, and political economy. For those with a heightened sense of awareness for the politics behind these issues, feminist pornography is in danger of commodifying queer bodies and producing a new “formula” for female sexuality, and on the other, feminist pornography produces a contract of trust with consumers who will push their personal, sexual boundaries because they know that a “woman” or “feminist” produced the content. So while feminist pornography operates on the fringes of the pornography industry, and offers alternative sexual discourses, it is still subject to the logics of power and industry. But like all other media forms that contend with a similar conundrum—such as alternative journalism and independent filmmaking—it still offers possibilities for meaning, community, and reflection.

Based on conversations during interviews and focus groups, feminist pornography offers a unique space that thrives as a result of the failures of both mainstream media and the mainstream pornography industry. The most profound failure, in the eyes of participants, is the lack of diversity, fluidity, and creativity that goes into constructing female sexual identities and behaviors. But should pornography be the only filmic genre to directly push sexual stereotypes? While it is certainly the domain of *explicit* sexual representation, soft-core representations and identities that grace mainstream film and television could take a cue from the feminist pornography project and actively move beyond heteronormative, patriarchal, and sexist norms. By extending the mediation of female sexual subjectivity and sex positivity to more accessible mediums and genres, more individuals would have access to a more sex positive perspective. Just because a man or woman does not enjoy pornography, that shouldn’t mean that she or he be excluded from progressive sexual representations. In fact, it is essential that everyone expose themselves to such alternatives in order to promote sexual subjectivity, knowledge, and confidence.

### *Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research*

Due to the fact that this is the first study to use a methodology that involves both producer- and consumer-based qualitative data, previous studies to use as guidance and comparisons were unavailable. Therefore, the use of particular methods was chosen based on methodology, methods, theory, and published pornography research rather than a studies based exclusively on feminist pornography. Although the recruitment and research methods were effective, they did not yield the amount of participants that were expected. Possible issues include a reluctance to speak about pornography consumption in a group setting (consumer focus groups) and a reluctance to reveal information about the pornography industry to an outsider (director interviews). Based on these issues, future research should consider the use of diaries as a methodological tool for directors, performers, and consumers. This way, discussions of sexuality are relegated to personal writing and could create an environment for increased comfort and deeper reflection.

Secondly, time and resources directly impacted the amount and locations of recruitment. If more time and resources were allocated to this study, additional locations would have been chosen for recruitment, thus allowing for additional comparative research. And, if more time was available, the recruitment stage could have lasted longer and more participants may have been able to participate. Time and resources are an issue for most doctoral dissertations, so these issues were anticipated during the design of the study. Future research studies should anticipate the need to involve more women (and men) from different parts of the United States in order to grasp a more diverse, and location-specific, understanding of audience reception.

Lastly, and also related to time and resources, is the issue of limiting research to the United States. Although this dissertation focuses on the US historical and cultural context as it relates to feminism, the regulation of pornography, and the growth of the US pornography

industry, there are notable non-US contributors to the genre of feminist pornography, as discussed in chapter two. Although this is beyond the scope of this particular dissertation, future studies should consider comparative work with non-US based feminist pornography directors, including non-Western directors that may not have websites or public visibility at this time.

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## APPENDIX A

### **Media & Sexuality Dissertation**

Rachael Liberman  
Principal Investigator

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

Producers  
June, 2011

As described in the research protocol, the principal investigator will be conducting structured interviews as part of this research project. As opposed to an open or semi-structured interview protocol, this schedule will remain focused due to its investigation of research questions that center on a sensitive topic. However, if a participant wishes to address a slightly tangential topic – which may rise due to the lack of scholarship on this population – this discussion will be pursued but only while it remains relevant and directly related to this particular interview schedule.

#### **Background and career development:**

When did you first become interested in pornography, in general?  
What did you like most about pornography at this time?  
What did you dislike most about pornography at this time?  
In your opinion, what counts as pornography and what doesn't?  
What is the difference between pornography and erotica?  
Can you tell me about your past work experience? Did it influence your interest in pornography?  
How did you get where you are today?  
How did you become interested in becoming a producer of pornography?  
Can you tell me about your path in becoming a successful producer?  
What were your biggest obstacles? Do you have any examples of help or encouragement?  
How do economic motives play a role in this interest and your career path?  
What are your ambitions as a director/producer?  
Who are your filmic influences both inside and outside of the pornography industry?  
How do you think the experience of being a woman producer/director in the porn industry is different than being a male producer/director?  
Do you have any examples of experiences that led you to this conclusion? Any specific compromises you've made?  
Would you consider yourself successful within pornography industry standards?  
What is your favorite part about your job?

#### **Production practices:**

How would you describe your work to someone that's never seen it before?  
What are you doing differently as a director/producer that others are not?  
How does pornography produced by women differ (content, production process) from pornography produced by men?  
Can you tell me a little bit about your hiring process? Who do you typically hire? What are some of the requirements you place on hiring?  
What do you try to provide for the actors you hire while they work, including changing room, food during the shoot, comfort, etc.?

What is your creative process? Who else is involved at this stage, if anyone?  
 What are your favorite types of scenes to shoot?  
 How do you decide what scenes to film and what is included in those scenes?  
 Are there any positions, activities, or storylines that you refuse to shoot? Why?  
 What is your role while the scenes are being shot? Does this change by scene or production?  
 What is your typical budget?  
 How much do you pay your actors? Does this vary by the individual?  
 What are common problems that occur during the production process?  
 Do you own your own production company? If not, whom do you work for?  
 Is there any tension for creative control with your producers?  
 Who is your primary audience?  
 What kind of feedback have you received from fans, performers, or other in the industry about your work?  
 How do you market your work? Have you embraced social networking? Web page?  
 How has the Internet affected your work?

**On being a female producer/director in the pornography industry:**

What do you tell other women interested in the work you do about being a woman in a male-dominated industry?  
 Do you feel a sense of competition between other women who produce/direct pornography?  
 What does that look like?  
 Do you feel a sense of competition with men in the industry?  
 How do you feel that your voice/vision is contributing to the way women approach sexuality?  
 Do you feel a responsibility to improve women's sexual experiences in any way?  
 What is healthy female sexuality?  
 Do you consider your work educational for women?  
 How does pornography, in general, contribute to healthy female sexuality?  
 Do you consider yourself a feminist?  
 Do you think there is tension between feminism and pornography?  
 Do you consider your work feminist?  
 How would you describe feminist pornography?  
 Do you think that only women should watch feminist pornography or pornography made by women?  
 How do you want your work to be remembered?

## APPENDIX B

### **Media & Sexuality Dissertation**

Rachael Liberman  
Principal Investigator

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

Consumers  
June, 2011

As described in the research protocol, the principal investigator will be conducting structured interviews as part of this research project. As opposed to an open or semi-structured interview protocol, this schedule will remain focused due to its investigation of research questions that center on a sensitive topic. However, if a participant wishes to address a slightly tangential topic – which may rise due to the lack of scholarship on this population – this discussion will be pursued but only while it remains relevant and directly related to this particular interview schedule.

#### **General questions about mainstream media and the depiction/representation of female sexuality:**

What are your thoughts on how female sexuality is reflected in mainstream media?

Growing up, how has media helped you understand your sexuality? What role has it played? Examples?

Do you have any examples of women in mainstream media that represent positive sexuality or an interpretation of sexuality that's close to yours?

#### **General questions about pornography:**

How do you define pornography?

How and when were you introduced to pornography, in general?

How did you feel about pornography at this time?

What do you like about watching pornography?

Have you ever felt ashamed to watch porn? Why?

Have you ever been criticized for watching pornography?

#### **Interest in women-produced pornography and viewing habits:**

How were you introduced to women-produced pornography?

Do you also watch male-produced pornography?

Do you feel that it is different from male-produced pornography? How?

Do you pay attention to who produced the films you watch?

Does it matter that they're women?

If so, who are your favorite directors? Why?

What do you like to see when you watch women-produced pornography? (Clarifying terms to use: aesthetics, sexual activity, actors, and plot)

What do you prefer not to see in porn? What are your limits?

How has watching women-produced porn affected your desires or sex life? Identity? Sexual confidence?

What role does it play in your life?

Who do you watch porn with?

If you watch it with a long-term sexual partner, how does it affect your relationship?  
When do you watch pornography? Weekly?  
Do you watch on television? Computer? How long?

**Beliefs about feminism:**

How do you define feminism?  
Do you consider yourself a feminist? How do your beliefs about feminism influence or not influence your viewing/habits?  
What is feminist pornography? If you haven't seen it, what do you think it is?  
Do you prefer feminist pornography over women-produced pornography?  
Do you think feminism should play a role in women-produced pornography?  
What are some examples of feminism that you see in the pornography you watch?  
What are some examples of anti-feminism that you see in the pornography you watch?

**General:**

What is your current occupation?  
How do you identify your sexual orientation?

## APPENDIX C

### Pornography Consumer Questionnaire *Please Read the Following*

**Note: This questionnaire has been directly informed by the methodology used during Janice Radway's research on romance novels.**

Radway, J. (1984). *Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy, and popular literature*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

I would appreciate it if you would take a brief amount of time to answer the questions on this form. I am conducting a survey to determine the viewer habits of women who watch female-produced pornography. The questionnaire is designed to discover your own personal attitudes and opinion about the films you watch. I ask that you do not identify yourself in any way and that you understand your participation is completely voluntary. Almost all the questions can be answered by placing a check in the appropriate space.

*For each question, please select only one answer unless the question specifies otherwise.*

Thank you very much for your participation  
Rachael Liberman  
University of Colorado at Boulder

1. At what age did you begin viewing pornography regularly?

- ☐ a. 10-15 years
- ☐ b. 16-20 years
- ☐ c. 21-25 years
- ☐ d. 26-30 years
- ☐ e. 31-35 years
- ☐ f. 35-40 years
- ☐ g. 40+ years

2. How many films do you watch each week?

- ☐ a. 1-4
- ☐ b. 5-9
- ☐ c. 10-14
- ☐ d. 15-19
- ☐ e. 20-24
- ☐ f. 25 or more

3. If you view other films besides pornography, which of the following kinds of films are you *most* likely to watch (Remember, select only one).

- ☐ a. Romance
- ☐ b. Comedy
- ☐ c. Documentary
- ☐ d. Historical

- ☐ e. Western
- ☐ f. Horror
- ☐ g. Science fiction
- ☐ h. Thriller

4. Do you watch pornography every day?

- ☐ a. yes
- ☐ b. no

5. Which of the following best describes your viewing pattern?

- ☐ a. I watch mostly in the morning.
- ☐ b. I watch mostly during the day while working around the house.
- ☐ c. I watch mostly during lunchtime.
- ☐ d. I watch mostly in the afternoon.
- ☐ e. I watch mostly on my digital device (cell phone, tablet)
- ☐ f. I watch mostly in the evening.
- ☐ g. It's hard to say when I do most of my viewing since I read every chance I get.

6. Which of the following best describes what you usually do once you've begun watching pornography?

- ☐ a. I watch as much as I can until I'm interrupted or have something else to do.
- ☐ b. I watch a few scenes and then turn it off.
- ☐ c. I only watch one scene at a time.
- ☐ d. I watch the part of a scene that I like and then turn it off.

Comments:

7. How often do you discuss pornography with others?

- ☐ a. never
- ☐ b. rarely
- ☐ c. sometimes
- ☐ d. often

8. Who do you discuss pornography with *most* often?

- ☐ a. my mother
- ☐ b. my daughter
- ☐ c. my husband/boyfriend
- ☐ d. my friends
- ☐ e. other (please specify):

9. How often do you re-view DVDs/web clips that you've already seen?

- ☐ a. never
- ☐ b. rarely
- ☐ c. sometimes
- ☐ d. often

10. Where do you get most of the pornography you view?

- ☐ a. online

- ☐ b. adult bookstore
- ☐ c. borrow from a friend
- ☐ d. borrow from a relative
- ☐ e. other (please specify):

11. Which of the following kinds of female-produced pornography do you like to watch? You may check as many as you like.

- ☐ a. BDSM (i.e., Belladonna)
- ☐ b. alt (i.e., Joanna Angel)
- ☐ c. educational (i.e., Nina Hartley)
- ☐ d. couples
- ☐ e. romance (i.e., Candida Royalle)
- ☐ f. lesbian
- ☐ g. other (please specify):

12. Which of the following best describes what usually makes you decide to view work or not?

- ☐ a. I like the cover.
- ☐ b. I have already seen something by the director and I liked it.
- ☐ c. I like the title.
- ☐ d. The distributor's blurb on the front and back cover/web page makes it sound interesting.
- ☐ e. Someone else recommended it to me.
- ☐ f. other (please specify):

13. Which of the following do you feel should *never* be included in pornographic work? Please select three and rank them by placing a number 1 next to the most distasteful element, a number 2 next to the second most distasteful, and so on.

- ☐ a. rape
- ☐ b. ass-to-mouth
- ☐ c. hitting
- ☐ d. physical torture
- ☐ e. gagging on a penis
- ☐ f. anal sex
- ☐ g. other (please specify):

14. What qualities do you like to see in the women in these films? Please select three and rank them.

- ☐ a. physically dominating the male/female partner
- ☐ b. physically attractive
- ☐ c. large breasts
- ☐ d. verbally dominating the male/female character
- ☐ e. sense of humor
- ☐ f. ability to tell her partner what she likes sexually
- ☐ g. tattoos/piercings
- ☐ h. ability to perform unique sexual positions
- ☐ i. is noticeably in charge of the entire sexual encounter
- ☐ j. other (please specify):

15. What qualities do you like to see in the sexual activity in these films? Please select three and rank them.

- ☐ a. vanilla (traditional) sexual activity
- ☐ b. some rough play and domination
- ☐ c. inclusion of narrative and plot
- ☐ d. woman is/women are in charge of the sexual activity
- ☐ e. woman is/are shown climaxing
- ☐ f. dirty talk
- ☐ g. use of sex toys
- ☐ h. presence of condoms
- ☐ i. other (please specify):

15. How closely do you think the characters in these films resemble the people you meet in real life?

- ☐ a. They are not at all similar.
- ☐ b. They are somewhat similar.
- ☐ c. They are very similar.
- ☐ d. They are identical.

16. How closely do you think the sexual activity in the films resemble those that occur in real life?

- ☐ a. They are not at all similar.
- ☐ b. They are somewhat similar.
- ☐ c. They are very similar.
- ☐ d. They are almost identical.

17. What are your three favorite pornography films or websites? Please give the titles in order.

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_

18. Who are your three favorite pornography directors? Please give their names in order.

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_

19. In what age group are you?

- ☐ a. 18-22
- ☐ b. 23-27
- ☐ c. 28-32
- ☐ d. 33-37
- ☐ e. 38-42
- ☐ f. 43-47
- ☐ g. 48+

20. What is your current marital status?

- ☐ a. single (never married)
- ☐ b. married



- ☐ c. widowed
- ☐ d. separated
- ☐ e. divorced but not remarried

21. Last week, were you working full-time, part-time, going to school, keeping house or something else?

- ☐ a. working full-time (either for employer or self-employed)
- ☐ b. working part-time
- ☐ c. have a job but not at work because of illness, strike, or vacation
- ☐ d. unemployed, laid off, looking for work
- ☐ e. in school (or on summer vacation)
- ☐ f. keeping house and/or caring for children
- ☐ g. retired

22. If you have a full- or part-time job outside the home, what is your occupation or job title?

23. What is your total household income? (that is, not just yours if there are others contributing to the family income)

- ☐ a. less than \$5,999
- ☐ b. \$6,000-9,999
- ☐ c. \$10,000-14,999
- ☐ d. \$15,000-24,999
- ☐ e. \$25,000-49,999
- ☐ f. \$50,000-69,000
- ☐ g. \$70,000 or more

24. How many years of education have you completed?

- ☐ a. less than 8
- ☐ b. through grade 8
- ☐ c. some high school
- ☐ d. through grade 12 (completed high school)
- ☐ e. some college work (less than 3 years)
- ☐ f. graduated from college
- ☐ g. some graduate work
- ☐ h. Master's degree
- ☐ i. Ph.D.

## APPENDIX D

### **Media & Sexuality Dissertation**

Rachael Liberman  
Principal Investigator

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

Performers  
December, 2011

As described in the research protocol, the principal investigator will be conducting structured interviews as part of this research project. As opposed to an open or semi-structured interview protocol, this schedule will remain focused due to its investigation of research questions that center on a sensitive topic. However, if a participant wishes to address a slightly tangential topic – which may rise due to the lack of scholarship on this population – this discussion will be pursued but only while it remains relevant and directly related to this particular interview schedule

#### **Background**

How did you become interested in working within the pornography industry?  
Can you describe your first work experience in the industry? Who did you work for?  
Do you have a philosophy that you go by when choosing who to work for?  
How did you develop this philosophy/ethic?  
What is your favorite part about your job? Why?  
Who has been your favorite director or company to work for? Why?  
How did you develop and negotiate your rates, if you have them? Do you feel that there is a difference in pay from mainstream to female/feminist shoots?  
In Ashley Blue's memoir, she writes, "You cannot hide from what you do when you're doing porn. What I've done is out there for the world to view. Porno is a brutally honest job." What do you think about this statement? Have you ever wanted to hide from your work?  
Has working in this industry changed your sexual orientation? How would you describe your sexual orientation?

#### **Comparison between mainstream and female directors/production companies**

What mainstream companies have you worked for?  
What is the experience like on set during a mainstream shoot?  
What are the commonalities between mainstream shoots? What are the differences?  
What female or feminist companies/directors have you worked for?  
What is the experience like on set?  
What are the commonalities between feminist, queer and female-directed sets? What are the differences you've noticed?  
Can you tell the difference between a feminist set and a general "female-directed" set?  
In your opinion, what is the main difference(s) between working for a mainstream or female director? (Including: treatment on set, payment, treatment during filming, interaction with film crew, feedback from fans, etc.)  
Do you have preference for mainstream or female-produced sets? Why?  
If you have a preference for one, why do you continue to work for the other?  
Have you ever considered directing pornography?

