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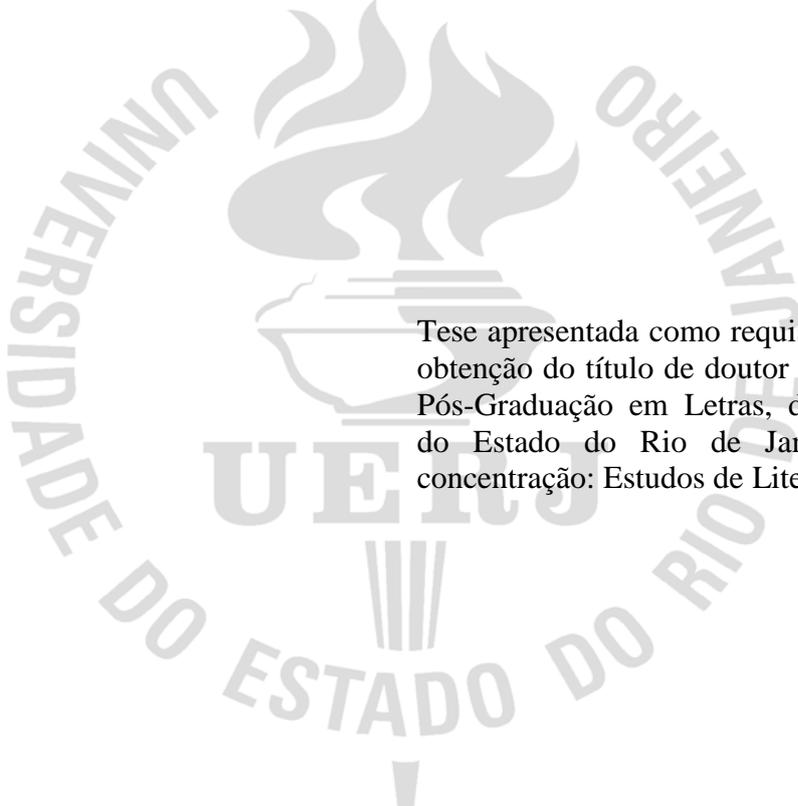
**Metamoirs: fact and fiction in the construction of the pornographic persona  
in autobiographical writings**

Rio de Janeiro

2019

Barbara Lima Madsen

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Tese apresentada como requisito parcial para  
obtenção do título de doutor ao Programa de  
Pós-Graduação em Letras, da Universidade  
do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de  
concentração: Estudos de Literatura.

Orientadora: Prof. Dra. Leila Assumpção Harris

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Rio de Janeiro  
2019

## DEDICATÓRIA

This work is dedicated to

Tina, Jasmine, Chrysta, Robin, Rebecca, Carrie, Melissa, Lacey, Nicole, Kyra, Jane,  
Stacy, Kayla, Oriana, Jenna, Stephanie, Asa

Or

Zoey, Sovereign, Dana, Veronica, Ela, Caroline, Missy, Lily, Lily, Dani, Magdalene,  
Raylene, Kayla, Ashley, Jenna, Stormy, Asa

But, most of all, this is for January.

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À minha mãe, que se foi no meio do caminho, mas que está dentro de mim toda vez que a vizinha diz “Senta e escreve!”

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## RESUMO

MADSEN, Barbara Lima. *Metamoirs: fact and fiction in the construction of the pornographic persona in autobiographical writings*. 2019. 194 f. Tese (Doutorado em Letras) - Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2019.

A presente tese de doutorado tem como objetivo principal a análise da escrita autobiográfica de performers da indústria pornográfica californiana, focando em autobiografias e memoirs publicados entre os anos de 2004 a 2018. Como objetivo central, busco compreender como as autorepresentações de corpos, sexualidades e identidades construídas se distanciam de padrões pré-estabelecidos pelo universo do “entretenimento masculino” e se apresentam como um ato de resistência e de ruptura com este universo. Alguns desses trabalhos apresentam uma representação objetiva, clara, bem definida do sujeito narrado, enquanto outros surpreendem por serem interpretações de si mesmos, distantes de amarras como conceitos de verdade, realidades únicas e discurso regulamentado. A ficcionalização da persona pornográfica dessas performers é um processo de construção claramente elaborado, apresentando ao público uma versão personalizada da indústria. Ainda que a pornografia *mainstream* insista em colocar corpos e sexualidades dentro de padrões normativos, é possível compreender que a análise da subjetividade/subjetificação na escrita de performers femininas a partir de um olhar autoreflexivo ativa um potencial para mudanças e reinvenções múltiplas de espaços e olhares que, até recentemente, apenas objetificavam essas performers de um mundo tido como marginal.

Palavras-chave: Pornografia. Autobiografia. Autoficção. Sexualidade.

## ABSTRACT

MADSEN, Barbara Lima. *Metamoirs*: fact and fiction in the construction of the pornographic persona in autobiographical writings. 2019. 194 f. Tese (Doutorado em Letras) - Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2019.

The main objective of this doctoral dissertation is to analyze the autobiographical writing of performers of the Californian pornographic industry, focusing on autobiographies and memoirs published between 2004 and 2018. As main objective, I seek to understand how the selfrepresentations of constructed bodies, sexualities and identities distance themselves from standards pre-established by the "male entertainment" universe and act as resistance and rupture with this same universe. Some of these works present an objective, clear, well-defined representation of the narrated subject, while others are interpretations of themselves far from constraints such as concepts of truth, single realities, and regulated discourse. The fictionalization of the pornographic persona of these performers is clearly an elaborated construction process, presenting the public with a personalized version of the industry. Although mainstream pornography insists on placing bodies and sexualities within normative standards, it is possible to understand that the analysis of subjectivity/subjectification in the writing of female performers from a self-reflective perspective has the potential to foster multiple changes and reinvention of spaces and gazes that, until recently, have only objectified performers of this marginalized world.

Keywords: Pornography. Autobiography. Autofiction. Sexuality.

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## INTRODUCTION

So much has been written about the issue of pornography and so little about its actual texts.

*Linda Williams*

A photographer told me,  
 “You doing porn is like Mozart parking cars.”  
 I said “No, it’s like Mozart doing porn.”  
 My [limited liability company] is Mozart Parking.

*Sovereign Syre*

In 2010, while in London, I found myself inside the Tate Modern staring at clear photographic representations of sexual acts: Jeff Koon’s series entitled “Made in Heaven” had made a comeback to the Tate since its opening at the Whitney in 1989. Comprising works with titles such as “Dirty Ejaculation” and “Glass Dildo”, the series portrayed the artist and his wife in highly explicit sexual positions – *explicit* being the operative word. A series of sculptures and paintings famously – and flagrantly – celebrating Koons’ nuptials with Hungarian-born porn star and politician Ilona Staller, also known as La Cicciolina, “Made in Heaven” not only secured the artist’s leading role on the international art stage but swept him into tabloid fame.

The initial motivation for the series, Koons justifies, is how the body is often perceived as an object upon which shame and guilt accumulate. Koons wanted to celebrate the acceptance of the self while dialoguing with Art History, clearly alluding to other aesthetics such as the baroque and rococo of Bernini, Fragonard, Boucher and modern masters like Manet and Courbet. However, these references were lost behind the lights cast almost exclusively on the explicit character of the series, which was a fertile ground for numerous controversies. Initially composed of photographs printed on canvas, the series later incorporated sculptures – all of them celebrations of one of the shortest and most mediatic love stories in the history of contemporary art. Koons first contacted La Cicciolina after seeing her in pornographic magazines. The photographs that followed suggest the enactment of a sexual fantasy, which soon became reality as a relationship developed and the couple

were eventually – and briefly – married. For Koons, the images presented the pair as a latter-day Adam and Eve, ‘situated after the Fall, but without the guilt and shame’ (KOON apud TATE, 2009).

The exhibition at the Tate Modern, curated by Catherine Wood, included art by Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst, Keith Haring, Richard Prince, Martin Kippenberger, among others. The premise of the entire exhibition, which was called *Pop Life: Art in a Material World*, was Andy Warhol's silent legacy, carried out in his statement that “Good business is the best art”: the branding of the artist, being marketed as a product amidst a vast array of different media, reaching a spectator that consumed art, artist, and pop culture all with the same spoonful of sugar. In this aspect, Koon's success is undisputable: “Silver Shoes” (oil inks on canvas mounted to wood, 243.3 by 365.8 cm, 1990 – Figure 1) alone was sold for \$800,000 at Sotheby's in 2007. And although the most expensive piece from this series is not even close to the other works that brought Koons the title of the most expensive contemporary artist at the first place, it corroborates with the concept of the exhibition, proving that a well-crafted mixture of artist, art and pop culture can, for sure, sell well.

It was my first personal contact with Koons' work, and while the entire exhibit presented to the audience a myriad of naked bodies, Koons' art – confined to room 9 – was the only one behind closed doors<sup>1</sup>. A sign at the door warned the less aware of visitors that, inside, they would find explicit material – as if the naked female bodies in Cosey Fanni Tutti's “And I Should Be Blue” (1977), or even Richard Prince's appropriation of the 1976 photograph by Gary Gross of a nude 10-year-old Brooke Shields were not explicit content. Yet, the explicit content advisory plaque was destined only to Koons' material, not because it contained nudity, but because it portrayed sex. Controversial as this discussion may seem, it escaped me at the time. I was left alone in a large, high-ceiling room with several 2x3 meters photographs of La Cicciolina's body parts being penetrated by her husband's member; body fluids and faces of ecstasy took over entire walls (Figure 2 to 5). In the center of the room, an oversized realistic sculpture of Koons and Staller engaged on a sexual act witnessed my solitude in that vast space (Figure 6 and 7). I was left to examine the art in peace, undisturbed: the emptiness of the exhibition hall echoing the daring nature of both the act of exhibiting and of witnessing those works, in itself mimicking the voyeuristic exchange which makes pornography such a fundamentally solitary act. How could watching pornography in public change my perspective of the work itself and, even further, how would it change my

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<sup>1</sup> Even though admission to three of the rooms was restricted to over 18s, only room 9 had doors that closed. The other two were guarded by security, who would not object had a minor wanted to walk in, in my opinion.

positioning before such type of art? My musings about the implications of sharing such experience with strangers were soon answered as a couple entered the exhibit: around my age, the American couple held hands in front of the same pictures I had stared at a couple of minutes before. The woman, visibly embarrassed, seemed to refuse to look at any of the artwork directly, although clearly intrigued by what she was seeing. The man, on the other hand, to this day remains a mystery to me: I could not read him at all, but he was not focused on his partner nor on the art work around him, lost perhaps into the same silent and individual moment I had experienced a while back. It was only when the couple was in front of “Ilona’s Asshole” (Figure 8 and 9) – a 228 x 152 cm canvas that zoomed on Ilona’s anus being penetrated by Koons’ penis – that the silence in the room was broken. In a mix of repulse and incredulity, the woman turned to the man next to her and whispered: “What kind of woman subjects herself to this?”

Figure 1 - “Silver Shoes” by Jeff Koons



Caption: KOONS, Jeff. “Silver Shoes”. oil inks on canvas mounted to wood, 243.3 by 365.8 cm, 1990.  
Source: BANKOWSKY; GINGERAS; WOOD, 2009.

Figure 2 - "Exaltation" by Jeff Koons



Caption: "Exaltation", 1991. Oil inks silkscreened on canvas. 152.4 x 228.6 cm  
Source: BANKOWSKY; GINGERAS; WOOD, 2009.

Figure 3 - "Glass dildo" by Jeff Koons



Caption: "Glass dildo", 1991. Oil inks silkscreened on canvas. 228.6 x 152.4 cm.  
Source: BANKOWSKY; GINGERAS; WOOD, 2009.

Figure 4 - Two works from Jeff Koons' "Made in Heaven"



Caption: left to right: "Blow Job-Ice", 1991, Oil inks silkscreened on canvas. 228.6 x 152.4 cm;  
and "Wolf", 1991, silkscreen inks on canvas 229.1 x 152.4 cm  
Source: BANKOWSKY; GINGERAS; WOOD, 2009.

Figure 5 - "Red Doggie" by Jeff Koons



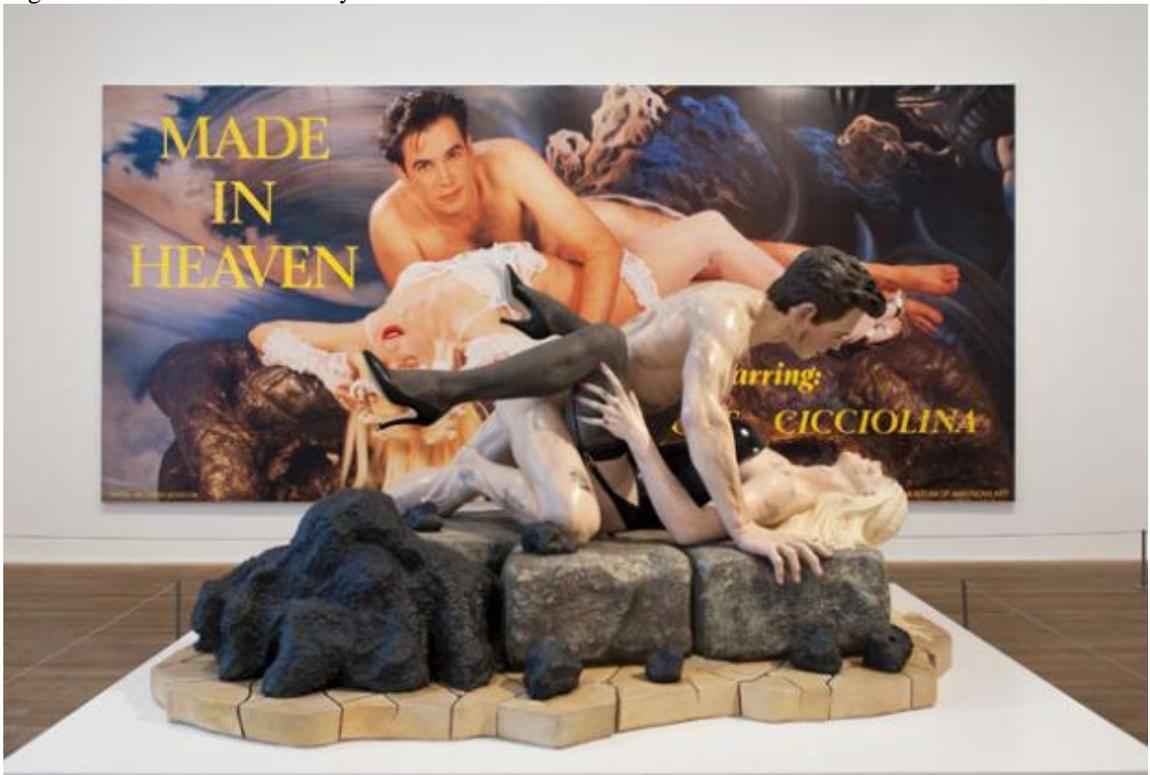
Caption: "Red Doggie", 1991. Oil inks on canvas laid on wood. 152.4 x 228.6 cm.  
Source: BANKOWSKY; GINGERAS; WOOD, 2009.

Figure 6 - "Silver Shoes" by Jeff Koons



Caption: "Dirty – Jeff on top", 1991. Plastic. 139.7 x 180.3 x 278.8 cm.  
Source: BANKOWSKY; GINGERAS; WOOD, 2009.

Figure 7 - "Made in Heaven" by Jeff Koons



Caption: "Made in heaven", 1989. Lithograph on paper canvas. 314.5 x 691 cm.  
Source: BANKOWSKY; GINGERAS; WOOD, 2009.

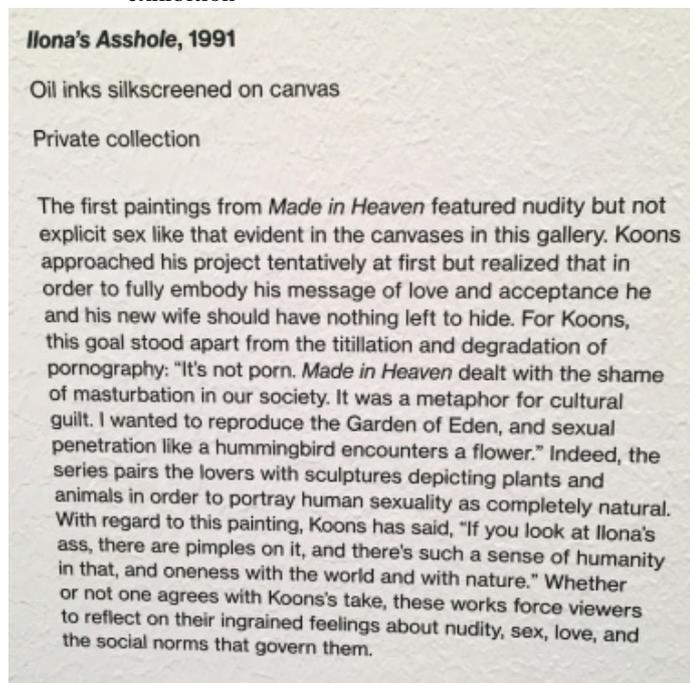
Figure 8 - "Ilona's asshole" by Jeff Koons



Caption: "Ilona's asshole", 1991. Oil inks silkscreened on canvas. 228.6 x 152.4 cm.

Source: BANKOWSKY; GINGERAS; WOOD, 2009.

Figure 9 - Caption of "Ilona's asshole" by Jeff Koons from the exhibition



Caption: "Ilona's asshole" by Jeff Koons' caption from the exhibition.

Source: BANKOWSKY; GINGERAS; WOOD, 2009.

It was on her choice of words that I focused. Had she asked “What kind of woman does not object to this?”, I might have not been intrigued by that question. But on her – unconscious – use of the word “subject” (with its double meaning) lies the genesis of this entire research: it was the first time I could envision a voluntary, intentional, autonomous participation of the female body in the pornographic industry. Embedded in the preconceptions of an impending objectification of the woman by the pornographic eye, I had deprived the female from any possible form of (female) agency: by believing the idea that it would take a special kind of woman to ‘subject’ herself to pornography I was not only perpetrating the same prejudice and stereotypes I had been fighting throughout my entire career but, worse, I was not acknowledging any female action and intent, relegating the woman into the same position of object that bothered me so much. My inability to understand that there is volition and intention in the female participation in the adult industry was preventing women from subjecting – and I use the word here in a play of words – themselves: preventing them from making themselves subjects and active agents, instead of the objects and passive bodies I was led to believe they were. Refusal to acknowledge voluntary female participation in pornography corroborates with the same act of female sexual objectification that the feminist critic of pornography accuses pornography itself of imposing upon women.

So, what kind of woman is the subject of pornography? Who are the (private) personas behind the (public) pornographic performers? What motivates them to enter the adult industry, and what makes them leave or stay? Intrigued by these questions, I embarked in a research which, at first, took place on the internet. The advent of Twitter, most specifically, has bridged the gap between the ‘civilian’ and the pornographic worlds – *civilian* being the term through which people in the pornographic industry refer to outsiders. The possibility of direct interaction with the public, not mediated by studios or printed media, allows pornographic performers an unprecedented modality of self-expression. When, previously, interviews were guided or edited by external agents, the direct interaction fostered by the internet guarantees freedom not only of form, but also of content. The internet made the construction of the social identity of porn performers dynamic and in real time: when new performers ‘are born’, they are born together with profiles on several social platforms, profiles that will be managed mainly by themselves and not by studios or other types of mediators. All interactions or interjections are done by the performers themselves, who will also command their choice of language, theme, and categorization, describing and interpreting contents and contexts chosen from what is intended to be communicated. The discourse used is at the same time self-conscious, metanarrative, and autobiographical, thus fitting my research. The

construction of this pornographic identity happens at the intersection of various lines: fiction, interviews, Twitter and Facebook posts, blogs, lectures, etc. In this way, by inventing themselves through real time online autofiction, pornographic performers become autobiographical writers.

But how do these performers represent themselves? How do they establish what belongs to the civilian persona and what is part of the pornographic one? In which moment – if any – do those two worlds converge, and to which extent?

I, then, moved on to autobiographies and memoirs<sup>2</sup> written by pornographic performers in order to understand how they worked around the personal representation of this dichotomized identity. My interest was on how the basic concepts of autobiographical writing could manifest in the autobiographic works of authors who were, in reality, narrating a persona that had been purposefully created by themselves and, yet, did not (at first) represent them outside a specific social sphere. Undoubtedly, if empirically studied apart from others, (auto)biography theory does not sustain itself, for it comes accompanied of complexly weaved typologies that foster a possibility of analyzing (auto)biographical works although not fully encompassing every single manifestation of (auto)biographical writing. But the more I read into these autobiographies and memoirs, the more I understood that they do not function under the same precincts of ‘civilian’ autobiographies. While immersed in the works of Paul John Eakin, Phillipe Lejeune, Sidonie Smith, and Julia Watson – among others –, I could not help but notice that, while their theories seemed to cover a vast majority of the scopes of autobiographical writing, the particularities in the case of pornographic autobiographies were never addressed. How could one approach an autobiography in which the *bio* described belonged not to the author themselves, but to a public profile conscientiously created by said author, a profile that only functions under specific circumstances and, yet, possesses its own name, characteristics, and even ‘personal’ history – all this while sharing the same physical identity as the author?

The proposal here is to construct a boundary space, based on existing theories that bring along elements to be considered and questioned through the activation of certain new reading pacts that appropriate and expand some models of (auto) fictional writing interpretation, seeking through this critical operation to draw new parameters for the understanding of a possible new literary sub-genre, in which creation and identity narrative bend over themselves, thus creating **metamoirs** – my body is my text, and my text comes

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<sup>2</sup> My choice for both terms is because both were used in the corpus of this research.

from the other that inhabits this very body; the construction of my autobiography and memoir unfolds at the same time that I am conscientiously constructing the narrative of my life. Although not a closed concept, **metamoir** can be approached as an inductive theoretical frame of reference, deriving from the specificities of elements found in porn performers life-writing which, when applied to a broader concept of auto-fiction, embraces the idea of plural, separate identities serving different social roles while hosted by a single body. The **meta** aspect of this approach, therefore, would manifest both *above* and *about* critical components of the autobiographic act of self-writing: self-refuting, incredulous, skeptical but, at the same time, acknowledging the (it)(self)narrative as the taxonomic, empiricist, utilitarian and sovereign truth about its own existence.

In this context, the problem that guides this research is: what is involved in the autobiographical narrative of pornographic performers? What elements are chosen by any given writer when they propose to register their autobiography or memoir, and which of those elements will also be present when the autobiographical record is that of a pornographic performer? As secondary questions, I intend to explore to what extent the unfolding of a personal history presents itself as more intimate than the exposure of the body itself, since the exposure of the physical body to the lenses and public eye is often perceived as the highest level of identity disclosure. Will the presented body be the narrated body, and vice versa? Would a narrative exposition be a lesser form of exposure for those who are already “fully” exposed? According to Hélène Cixous, the body is present, and the body is the source of writing, but this writing comes from another realm of the body where the author is not in control. (CIXOUS; CALLE-GRUBER, 1997, p. 88). The autobiographical practice, then, may constitute one of those cultural, political, personal and discursive instances when the history of the body intersects with the implantation of feminine subjectivity. (SMITH, 2010, p. 271) The act of autobiographical writing, in itself, is performance; the narrated image of the self is, at the same time, auto representation and auto interpretation, specific because it is a creation while it is general because it repeats the same gesture of all autobiographical discourses. But is the body autonarrated by pornographic performers exclusively the pornographic body, or does the civilian life carry more importance when the process of an auto-graphic discourse is initiated? How much control over the pornographic identity, consciously created and worked through speech – be it linguistic or physical – is really in the hands of the performer, and how much of this control is the result of social-political expectations that come from their position as pornographic performers? Is the authorial framework able to escape the scope of pornography, or is it restricted to it?

Undoubtedly, the social construction of the subject implies a constellation of ideologies: I am what I can think of, and what I can think of is relatively determined by the ideologies under which I operate. But how much of the multiple discursive ideologies that surround the pornographic product influence the creation of pornographic subject / body, and to what extent will such ideological elements determine the façades narrated in autobiographical processes? As Foucault points out, these choices "are not disturbing elements which, superposing themselves upon its pure neutral, atemporal, silent form, suppress its true voice and emit in its place a travestied discourse, but, on the contrary, its formative elements." (FOUCAULT, 2008, p. 75). The moral panic that surrounds the traditional definition of pornography, directly linking it with debauchery, immorality, criminality, and indecency, prevents not only the voice of women within the industry from being heard but also promotes a narrow range of moral concepts and a specific pattern of behavior that certainly leaves out self-expression. It is against such formative elements that performers write, since they vocalize an inner reality that does not always correspond to what is expected of them, thus creating a space of resistance in which "the body functions as a powerful source of metaphors for the social" (SMITH, 2010, p. 269) Even when incorporating the standards expected by normative discourse into one's own body, there is conscious resistance in the appropriation of such behaviors by pornographic performers when they choose to narrate their persons and personas in a constricted and regulated environment such as an autobiographical work.

Nonetheless, what can be found in the texts written by pornographic performers is exactly the opposite of what is expected: the simplification of the relations between the female subject and the pornographic product, precisely through the questioning of the elements that could conceal feminine identities if they are considered exclusively imposed and not voluntarily chosen. It is through the inclusion of diverse bodies into the pornographic universe, including bodies formed by the regulatory discourse, as well as the inclusion of feminine / feminist narratives, that one deconstructs the myth that women are objectified by pornographic desire. She now owns the same pornographic desire in which she is inscribed, and about which she writes in first-person narratives, shifting her voice from the invisible edge to the center of the scene. As subject. Subjecting herself by registering her own agency, despite of what others may think: a self-objectification that does not carry the negative connotation embedded in this latter concept, because it is chosen, controlled and performed by the same subject that becomes object in its own discourse.

The final objective of this work is to establish a new approach to the understanding of autobiographies and memoirs written by pornographic performers by developing the concept of **metamoir** as a new paradigm into autobiographical and autofictional studies. To do so, I intend to develop the concept based on three key axes which will, in their turn, guide the direction of each chapter: autobiographies / memoirs, autofiction, and metanarratives. My premise is that porn performers' autobiographies present themselves as a completely separated literary and theoretical category, as they act as a double mirror for two perpendicular duplicities of personal vs private: just like porn is a "private moment" filmed to be watched, autobiographies and memoirs present an "intimate" façade of a public persona while it is being written to be read by someone else. Additionally, because they are narrating a clearly constructed identity – the pornographic one, opposite to the 'civilian' one carried out in daily life – autobiographies and memoirs written by pornographic performers could disappear in the gap between the realms of autofiction and autobiographical narratives for the same reasons that set them apart from those which make up the bulk to autobiographical writings published every year. It is because it unfolds in itself, in a twice constructed narrative, that the autobiographies and memoirs by pornographic performers do a mirror play upon their own image, making it impossible for the spectator / reader to distinguish between what is the real image and what is a mere reflection, therefore generating a game of unending unfolding, of false imagery, which cannot be deciphered, making for a permanent transit between illusion, fiction, and realistic imagery, as it intentionally dissolves the boundaries between fictional and real.

In the first chapter, I will approach the theoretical aspect of this work, focused on exploring the current theories of autobiographical writings and how they can be implemented only to 'civilian' autobiographies, without discarding the pact between reader and author. This theoretical delimitation owes much to postmodern field theories and to identity representations that form the instrument of priority analysis, without interdicting "other" voices that explicitly and implicitly take part in this dialogical reading of authors and languages which, although apparently distinct, intercept in different ways. Starting from the premise that autobiographical production – like any other consecrated paradigm – is resumed, deconstructed, and reconstructed in many ways in contemporary times, I propose (re)categorizing the autobiographical production of pornographic performers into a new theory of **metamoirs**, based on the analysis of fictional and / or metanarratives through which the pornographic identity is established, narrated, and (un)written.

The second chapter will address the issue of the female position inside the contemporary pornographic industry, as well as the social construction of the pornographic persona and its implications on 'civilian' life. The task of working self-expression in the context of the representation of feminine identity, of subalternity, of empowerment, and of power relations in previously unassimilated settings is therefore fundamental. Undoubtedly, the universe of pornography is seen as belonging almost exclusively to the masculine, both in its production and its consumption, an idea reinforced by the inference that pornography objectifies the figure of the woman to the point of transforming it into a mere simulacrum of male desire. However, the significant increase in the number of women working in the production of pornographic material in the San Fernando Valley in California has generated numerous articles in the media about the role and place of women in the production and consumption of pornography and erotic material. "For the first time, cinematic works that contain hard-core action have been reviewed by entertainment media and viewed by a broad spectrum of the population, including, most significantly, women" (WILLIAMS, 1999, p. 99). In this way, the production of pornography made by women, regardless if aimed specifically at women or not, becomes exponential in an industry that is permanently threatened by the free dissemination of its product through the Internet. With this, I hope to contribute to a better understanding of the importance of issues of gender, identity, sexuality, and self-expression in contemporary pornography, outlining the opportunities for debate that these elements create.

The third chapter and fourth chapters will explore the intersection between literature and pornography manifested in the autobiographies and memoirs of pornographic performers, in which the identities narrated were created exclusively for public presentation of sexual character. Such works used to act as an alert against the porn industry, or simply be a list of humorous scenes and comments about quirks that happened on the film sets. More recently, however, a shift in the demographics of pornographic performers has boosted a new trend in the publishing market, and some of the recently published autobiographies and memoirs present a deep debate about the process of identity creation, performance, political positioning, and gender in and out of this industry. The active participation of women in the San Fernando Valley, in California, not only in front of the cameras, combined with a change in the profile of the performers entering the industry, a greater standardization of the pornographic product, and the legislative regulation on procedures for filming scenes transcended the boundaries of the "green door" and entered the scope of public discussions about the elements that make up this universe. Thus, the new autobiographies and memoirs of

pornographic performers no longer merely portray a history of sexual obscenity, but give readers a personal history blended into public history, allowing a broader perspective on the actual political role of the pornographic performer, which ensures greater understanding of this universe that used to take place exclusively away from public eyes, even if the product was primarily destined for consumption. More importantly, however, is the possibility of hearing a voice that was not perceived before because it was not present: that of the very person behind the sexual persona that presents itself to the cameras. The autobiography and memoirs of pornographic performers not only narrate the personality / identity of the public persona; it also encompasses issues related to the private identity of performers, focusing on a dual identity that inhabits the same address / body, but which may or may not differ completely from one another, even though dividing the same "place of existence" (NANCY, 2000, p. 16).

In the Afterword, I point towards the potential of studies around two trends in self-writing of pornographic performers. First, a good number of recently published works revolving around discussions related to several areas of contemporary life from the perspective of sex workers but without drawing attention to the nature of their labor. Second, the male side of the industry, with new paradigms of masculinity that will undoubtedly impact the pornographic product.

Salman Rushdie, in "The East is Blue" (2004), reminds us that pornography is everywhere, and it has an enormous subversive potential, becoming a political act of rebellion in Western societies in which the relationships between genders is severely regulated. Pornography was inside the Tate Museum. It can now also voice the political bodies of those who act upon in, broadcasting those voices from the inside out, reminding us that the personal is political. And nothing is more personal than being public about sex.

### **I think some personal history is in order here**

In October 28, 2011, I set up a blog on wordpress.com. It was meant to be a space to publish literary musings – like so many others all over the world wide web. By mid-December, I started to post my reviews of pornographic films that were coming out, and that attracted the attention of some producers and performers due to the "academic" (their word, not mine) nature of my texts. It was clear that I was after a serious debate about pornography

as art form and as entertainment, opposing the view of porn as a sexual educational tool, which does nothing but demonize the industry.

In January 2012, after some consideration, I decided to accept one of the many invitations I had received to write a column for an online magazine that dealt with issues of contemporary American sexuality. The manifest for the magazine reads as follows:

Welcome to Darling House.

Think of us as the Factory 2.0 — A collection of high and lowbrow art and artists. While we'll be focusing on sexual and sensual art, images and ideas, we'll be embracing a wide variety of flavors from passionate creators.

We are in Beta phase, but we aim to be in full manifestation in Autumn of this year: 2011.

The Darling House is a collective of creative spirits from many walks of the sexy life: Photographers, Models, Fetishists, Painters, Writers, Burlesque Dancers, Mentalists, Gamblers, Tattoo Artists, Strippers, Escorts, Pornstars, Musicians, Designers and other Wildflowers we may collect in our journey. Many of them are highly regarded in their fields, some are professionals, some are celebrities within their genres, and just as many are, wonderfully, brand new in life and their pursuit of happiness.

Think of Darling House as a magazine of regular contributors from writers, photographers, models and more as well as visiting artists who also show you what they do LIVE. See an erotic photoshoot live, see an interview in real time. While there will be a healthy amount of existing content such as articles, photosets and webisodes to enjoy on our site, there will also be this streamed material for you to see.

Darling House has been created in reaction to the anonymous, commercialized, and frankly, occasionally passionless tone that has overtaken so much of the erotica and pornography we consume. We want to create a more humanist and positive space for pornography to exist. Like all other parts of human culture, sexuality deserves to be treated with the same intellectual curiosity and celebration.

We aim to be specific, personal and in communication with you, our friends and fans.

Literally thousands of sites, most of which you pay for, have profiles (most likely fake) of hundreds of models with small bios, collections of stats, and a few uninspired photosets and HD "gonzo" videos.

But who are these beautiful, erotic creatures you're most likely fantasizing to? And moreover, who took it upon themselves to find these subjects, and make take these photos? What kind of person, (be it model, photographer, writer, dancer, painter, sculptor etc) dedicates themselves to creating art or projects about sex or desire? Is this acceptable? Who is an eroticist in 2011? The faces of these creators might surprise you.

On our site, you will get to know the Darling Family and the many beautiful and talented people who inhabit it through direct video chats and interviews with our contributors, or private one on one time with some of our gorgeous personalities: women and men both.

Also, we're not going to shy away from "showing the strings" as they say, in that, we're going to show us growing, good days and bad-to give you a glimpse into the experience of a creator (or group of creators) trying to make something new and hopefully, valuable. You'll see downtown, behind the scenes interviews, live photoshoots that include the photographer, and hopefully people like our editors, soundsmiths and webmaster.

It's like Big Brother Mixed with Andy Warhol's Factory mixed with 2011. Online.

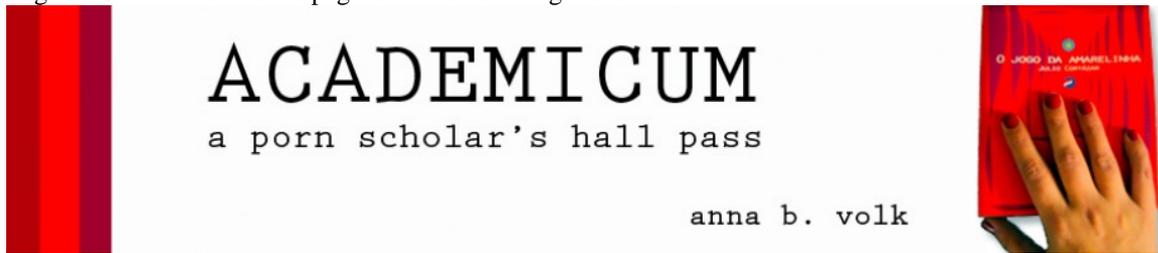
So thanks for spending your time with us, stay tuned, and Welcome to the Darling House.

Sincerely,

JM Darling, founder Darling House (DARLING HOUSE, 2019).

And this is how Anna B. Volk: a porn scholar, came to be. An internet identity to cater to my need of anonymity while writing about porn. Between January 2012 and March 2014, I wrote bi-monthly articles for this online magazine – “a candy store for the intelligent eroticist” – ranging from porn movies reviews to interviews with camgirls, also going through my take on some pornographic manifestation in popular culture (Figure 10). Some articles were also written to other online media, but the bulk of my work was published in Darling House.

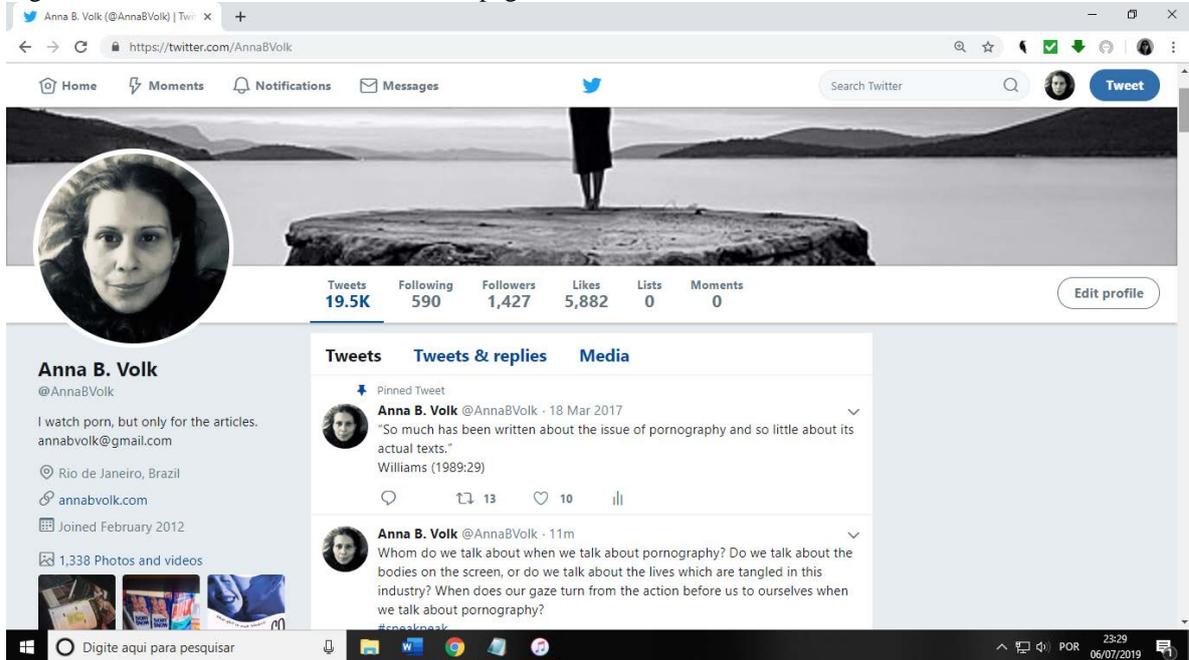
Figure 10 – Anna B Volk’s page header on Darling House



Source: VOLK, 2019.

*Darling House* – A Live Salon Chronicling the E-rotic Renaissance – has since been discontinued. But Anna B Volk remains active on Twitter (Figure 11) and on her own webpage. It is through her that I was granted access to the backstage of the Californian pornographic industry, taking part in some of the events they host and doing some light work in porn productions. Nothing important. Nothing in front of the cameras. But granting me a place that allows me to observe and enquire with sometimes curious, sometimes mesmerized, but always trusting eyes, the dynamics of what unfolds behind some of these new green, electronic doors.

Figure 11 – Print of Anna B Volk’s Twitter page



Source: The author, 2019.

## Why California?

[P]erception is often more important than truth – especially in the land of smoke and mirrors known as Porn Valley.

*Nica Noelle*

I would like to establish here the parameters that lead me into focusing my research exclusively on the Californian pornographic industry.

The 1960s and '70s were the Golden Age of Porn. Back then, adult movies were shot on film and the business of producing pornographic movies was decentralized, operating primarily out of New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Since the 1970s, however, the San Fernando Valley has been the main host to the pornography industry. Most American sex films are shot there in warehouses and private homes – helping the San Fernando Valley rake in \$4 billion in annual sales in the 1990s (ROBINSON, 2017). “According to the HBO series *Pornucopia*, at one time, nearly 90 percent of all legally distributed pornographic films made in the United States were either filmed in or produced by studios based in the San Fernando Valley” (SAN FERNANDO VALLEY, 2019). Cheap rent made for an ideal location. Hollywood’s proximity also offers crossover opportunities and resources for porn actors interested in the mainstream film industry. They draw from the same pool of off-screen workers, including lighting crews, production assistants, set designers and caterers, to name a few.

The valley grew to become home to a multibillion-dollar pornography industry, earning the monikers Porn Valley, Silicone Valley (in contrast to Silicon Valley, nickname for the center of technologic industry in Santa Clara Valley), and San Pornando Valley. The leading trade paper for the industry, AVN magazine, is based in the Northwest Valley, as are a majority of U.S. adult video and magazine distributors and movie production companies.

But California did not become the global mecca of porn by coincidence; it is the result of two Supreme Court cases: *Miller vs. California* in 1973 (UNITED STATES, 1973) – that established that the definition of obscenity was to be defined upon local “community standards”, and *California vs. Freeman*, in 1988 (CALIFORNIA, 1988), that established a

legal distinction between making pornography and criminal activities. The ruling has been cited to support similar cases in other states like New Hampshire, but California remains the only state where it is explicitly legal to produce and shoot pornographic movies; though porn is certainly filmed elsewhere in the United States, the legal gray area beyond California has some producers hesitant to cross state lines, establishing California as the pornographic Mecca as explained by journalist Lynsey G.:

When the Supreme Court's 1973 *Miller v. California* ruling made the definition of obscenity reliant upon local "community standards," the Golden Age of Porn was curtailed, but the advent of home video was not far behind. Porn workers continued doing business with lower budgets and less refined technology, skulking around without explicit legal protection. By the release of Reagan-backed Meese Commission's report on pornography in 1986, many Americans were investing in home viewing systems to consume their sexy films in private, and the market expanded accordingly. Since the establishment of an explicitly legal and wildly profitable industry in California in the late eighties, our voracious appetites for smut haven't let up. The nineties witnessed a proliferation in the medium, with hundreds of independent companies springing up in the San Fernando Valley (G., 2017b, p. 20).

According to Michael Weinstein, president and founder of the AIDS Healthcare Foundation, "Both California and New Hampshire have supreme court rulings calling [porn production] free speech, and even though there is a big business elsewhere in the U.S. — particularly in South Florida — technically it is considered prostitution. It's illegal" (MILLER, 2013). It is a question with serious implications for South Florida, where the adult film industry has been booming (companies such as Bang Bros and Reality Kings are giant production companies based in Florida). However, the truth about the legality of porn in Florida is much murkier. Diane Duke, chief executive officer for the Free Speech Coalition, a nonprofit representing the adult film industry, claims that "[w]hile New Hampshire and California have been proactive in [protecting porn production], it doesn't mean it's illegal in the rest of the states" (MILLER, 2013). Mary Anne Franks, a law professor at University of Miami, counterargues that

[b]y holding that at least some pornography is protected by the First Amendment, the Supreme Court has implicitly declared that the performance of sex for money that occurs in pornography is different from the performance of sex for money in prostitution. It hasn't addressed this distinction explicitly, however, and the few lower courts that have done so resort to some fairly convoluted reasoning to reach their conclusions. The distinction seemingly turns on the fact that prostitution is a bilateral exchange of sex for money, making the physical act of sex the 'product,' while in the production of pornography, the 'product' is the recorded act of sex (MILLER, 2013).

Still, the legality of the production of pornography in Florida is a controversial issue. As a direct consequence of the legality of filming pornography in California, most of the

associations that represent and fight for the interests of adult performers – such as the Free Speech Coalition, the Adult Performers Actors Guild, and the Adult Performer Advocacy Committee (APAC) – is based in California. They advocate for all matters pertaining to the adult industry environment, mostly aiming at ensuring the performers’ safety, “to provide representation for performers in the adult film industry and to protect performers’ rights to a safer and more professional work environment” (ADULT PERFORMER ADVOCACY COMMITTEE, 2019). This promotes a better working environment, eliminating possible threats of coercion and poor working ethics within the pornographic industry - and as a result guaranteeing a product that is made under unquestionable moral conditions.

## 1 METAMOIRS: PORNOGRAPHIC (AUTO)BIOGRAPHIES AND PLURAL IDENTITIES

There is no gender identity  
behind the expression of gender.

*Judith Butler*

If there is a consensus is that there is no consensus  
about what autobiography looks like or does.

*Broughton*

### 1.1 On the issue of gender

Tracing the history of the definition of autobiography as a literary genre is navigating the slippery boundaries between self and other, between reality and invention, and between marginalized and legitimized discourses. The belief from the late 70s throughout the mid-80s poses St. Augustine as the 'first' 'real' autobiographer and moves on through a selection which inevitably includes Abelard, Petrarch, Descartes, Montaigne, Franklin, Hume, Gibbon, Rousseau, Goethe, Stendhal and John Stuart Mill. Historical overviews from such autobiographies present eclectic mixtures of 'representative' authors, but few women are mentioned in the canons of the great autobiographers. Delaney's justification for the inclusion of a small number of women's autobiographies in his *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (1969) is the following:

Autobiographies by women, whether secular or religious in emphasis, merit separate treatment. In general, female autobiographies have a *deeper revelation of sentiments, more subjectivity and more subtle self-analyses* than one finds in comparable works by men. The sociological reasons for this difference are obvious and have existed since antiquity; yet it is not until the seventeenth century that what we now call the 'feminine sensibility' enters the mainstream of English literature (DELANEY, 1969, p. 5, my emphasis)

The subject of history is not universal but, in fact, very specific: it is “the straight white Christian man of property”, to quote Gayatri Spivak (SPIVAK apud SMITH; WATSON, 1992, p. xvii). Similarly, the autobiographies called upon to describe this

supposedly “universal subject” have also been written by men. As Laura Marcus remarks, “by denying women writers a place in the history of autobiography, critical work in the field, for all its insistence on mirroring universals, has presented a distorted reflection of the autobiographical genre” (MARCUS, 1994, p. 221). As a result, the description of both the genre of autobiography and the history of the self will inevitably be lop-sided.

Feminist theory has, since, begun to rebalance the field. The first necessary move was to include women’s autobiography into the cannon, either by finding, publishing or critiquing texts by women which had, until then, been ignored. This first movement recovered works of female writers, acknowledging the autobiographical character of some of the pieces produced by those artists<sup>3</sup>. Following up Estelle C. Jelinek’s argument of the pattern of discontinuity in women’s autobiographies (JELINEK, 1980), for example, Mary G Mason, in “The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers” (MASON, 1980), addresses the issue of differing agendas for women versus men who write autobiographically, giving as examples four women writers – Julian, Margery Kempe, Margaret Cavendish, and Anne Bradstreet. Mason states that nowhere in women’s autobiographies do we find the patterns established by the two prototypical male autobiographers, Augustine and Rousseau; and conversely male writes never take up the archetypal models of Julian, Margery Kempe, Margaret Cavendish and Anne Bradstreet (MASON, 1980, p. 210). Mason’s study of these four early women autobiographers establishes a radical difference between men’s and women’s autobiographical writing when she argues that women recognize another consciousness in their search to establish their own identity; “the grounding of identity through relation to the chosen other, seems, if we may judge by our four representative cases, to enable women to write openly about themselves”. (MASON, 1980, p. 210)

Secondly, it was imperative to look for historical evidence of women writing the self by broadening the definition to include forms such as diaries, journals and letters (forms which were traditionally more accessible to women), as well as fragmentary and unfinished pieces. Explaining and expanding the definition of autobiographical writing requires

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<sup>3</sup> I would like to point out the importance of Margery Kempe, author of the first autobiography known to have been written in the English language. Born in Norfolk around 1373, Kempe was illiterate and dictated her autobiography to three different amanuensis - which made her autobiography be written in the third person, recording ‘hyr felyngys and revelacyons and the forme of her levyng’ [her feelings and revelations and the form of her living]. In 1934, the only surviving manuscript of her work was found: written by a scribe named ‘Salthouse’ in the 15th century, *The Book* is an account of her life from her first pregnancy, when she was around 20, until she was in her mid-sixties. Not written chronologically, the work demands reconstructing the story of her life by putting together pieces of information to form a coherent narrative. It describes Kempe’s spiritual inclinations, pilgrimages, and even her examinations for heresy (WATT, 2017).

rethinking its formation outside a male tradition. Perhaps the best example of this approach can be found in the works of Nancy K Miller and Domna Stanton (MILLER, 1988; STANTON, 1987), when they argue that the guiding principles of theorizing women's life writing should be mapping women's autobiographical writing with a history of self-representation as a negotiation with their invisibility in history. Miller critiques, in "Toward a Dialectics of Difference" (1980), the universalization of maleness as *humankind* in the literary canon and calls for a gendered reading of genre. Domna Stanton's anthology *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century* (1984), a collection described by her as "a collage of pieces representing different disciplines and fields, different cultures and eras, different 'genres' or narrative modes" (STANTON, 1987, p. vii), reinforces the idea of women's strategies for writing the self as "constructing the female subject through autobiography, memoirs, letters, and diaries" (STANTON, 1987, back cover).

Thirdly, feminist theorists have focused on the differences between men's and women's writing in autobiography, evolving around female and male subjectivities in relation to philosophical, literary, historical and scientific texts. While the male subject was masqueraded as universal, feminists have been keen to point out the differences between men's and women's experiences by exposing the vast amount of material that has been systematically excluded from histories of writing the self under the argument that women's texts do not conform to given 'male' standards and expectations of what a 'model life' is, or how it should be described. On this topic, I would like to take the discussion to the analysis of Georges Gusdorf's *Conditions and Limits of Autobiography* (1956), believed to be a milestone in the history of critical literature of autobiography because of (or, as I argue, despite of) his concept based on the model of a self that is Western and individualistic. Gusdorf provides a definition and explanation of autobiography as a genre that writers have chosen and still choose as a way for "reassembling the scattered elements of a destiny that had been worth the trouble of living" (Gusdorf, 1956, p. 39). Therefore, autobiography becomes the means for a "personal justification...not revolution but reconciliation" (*ibid*). Although the article provides an interesting perspective on the definition of autobiography, it is also true that it focuses on a unique, rigorous and standard type of autobiography: male, white, Western and of a certain class, implying that only one kind of pattern and canon of autobiography is possible. By narrowing it down to the individualistic character of autobiographies, and by implying that autobiography has been one of the favorite ways of the great men of the past for transmitting the memories of their lives (*ibid*, p. 31), Gusdorf limits his definition to the activities and intellectual abilities from which women were traditionally excluded.

Conversely, in *Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice* (1998), Susan Stanford Friedman takes the question a little further, by proposing that Gusdorf's "individualistic concept of the autobiographical self" should be refuted in favor of a reversal of the standard definitions of autobiography. By discussing that a definition that stresses interdependent identifications within a community is a starting place for the analysis of women's autobiographical writing - Friedman talks here about the "marginalized cultures of women" - and based on the works of Sheila Rowbotham and Nancy Chodorov, Friedman opens the possibility for a more collective trait of autobiographical writing, this "collective identity" being a "source of strength and transformation." Friedman argues that historically, predicated on the self as a privileged, "isolated being," individualism discarded women and minorities' life writing from the genre for their interest in collective identities.

The cultural categories MAN, WHITE, CHRISTIAN, and HETEROSEXUAL in Western societies, for example, are as significant for a man of the dominant group as they are for a woman at the margins of culture. Isolated individualism is an illusion. It is also the privilege of power. A white man has the luxury of forgetting his skin color and sex. He can think of himself as an "individual. Women and minorities, reminded at every turn in the great cultural hall of mirrors of their sex or color, have no such luxury (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p. 72-73).

Estelle Jelinek, in *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography* (1986), summarizes the timeless and oppositional characteristics of men's and women's writing in autobiographies as follows: while the male "identity image" is "self-confident" and "one-dimensional", women display a "multidimensional, fragmented self-image" which is "coloured by a sense of inadequacy and alienation" (JELINEK, 1986, p. xiii). Similarly, she argues that the style of men's and women's autobiographies reflects this different self-image, men writing "progressive and linear narratives" while women's narratives are "episodic and anecdotal, nonchronological and disjunctive" (JELINEK, 1986, p. xiii). Sidonie Smith described the birth of the male bourgeois individual as "the certitudes of well-defined, stable, impermeable boundaries around a singular, unified, and atomic core, the unequivocal delineation of inside and outside" (SMITH, 1993, p. 5). This self "positions on its border all that is termed the 'colorful'" (SMITH, 1993, p. 9). Domna Stanton similarly describes how women have been defined in opposition to the (male) "totalized self-contained subject present-to-itself" (STANTON, 1987, p. 15). These feminist critiques can be paraphrased as follows: the male subject of autobiography is unitary and autonomous; the female subject of autobiography is his exact opposite: fragmented and non-individuated, regardless of the time and place she is writing from.

Of course, there are problems in this analysis, especially when the frontiers of gender are blurred. The postmodern subject can receive the same qualifications as the female self ('multi-dimensional, fragmented, [...] episodic and anecdotal, nonchronological and disjunctive', to use Jelinek's phrase again). This is where the "poetics of difference" come in. Shirley Neuman has described the feminist approach outlined above (typified by the Jelinek-Mason approach) as a "different poetics" (NEUMAN, 1992, p. 213-30): the characteristics of one group are defined against another rather than looking for differences within groups. While acknowledging "the exceptional usefulness of these different poetics of group-identified subjects for challenging hegemonic notions of the self, for giving us detailed studies of some particular autobiographies, and for revising the canon of autobiography", she advocates instead a "poetics of difference" (NEUMAN, 1992, p. 213-30). In looking for the differences between subjects described in and through their autobiographies, critics are not restricted to monolithic categories of male and female that override time and place: on the contrary, each text is contingent on numerous variables. This is not to say that there are no differences between men's and women's texts, but that these differences are subject to constant change depending on the specific location or positioning of the man or woman in question. Other feminist critics who identify with the "poetics of difference" and who have focused specifically on the genre of autobiography are Nancy K. Miller, Françoise Lionnet, Liz Stanley, Regenia Gagnier, Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Marcus. Working within a framework of a "poetics of difference" it becomes possible to re-read the canonical texts of autobiography. Laura Marcus argues that it is "crucial [...] that we stop equating autobiographies by men with their idealized representations in conventional autobiographical criticism, and look again at the autobiographical texts, not least in terms of the way they represent the construction of masculinities" (MARCUS, 1994, p. 220).

Political contemporary identities are essentially constructed based on gender matters (KRAUSE; RENWICK, 1996). When gender is liquid, it becomes impossible to be contained in one or two receptacles, giving birth to new identities which are as fluid as they are interchangeable. Since a neoliberal politics aiming at inclusive societies would be a contradiction, as the differences which defy the universalization of consumption patterns constitute one of neoliberalism's most dreaded nightmares, such identities pose as a threat to the maximization of profit, creating new groups of consumption directed at the ratification of such newborn identities. In other words, what Ruth Benedict foresaw becomes reality: the market depends on marginalized groups to form new areas of consumption which, by their

turn, will demand new products aimed at what it expects to be an inclusive social tool, at the same time that said products solidify the marginal aspect of such groups and demands.

Nevertheless, some “outcast” groups have found in pornography a way through which they can challenge social stigmas such as compulsory heterosexualization and binary gender dichotomy. Having operated for ages on the assumption of the existence of two genders and multiple sexualities, the porn industry now faces a plurality of genders being presented not as complementary or secondary identities, but as the core for a large number of groups and consumers without any hint of the system of punishment and reward expected to be found in stereotypes which are reproduced and repeated. No longer does being “different” mean remaining unknown, secluded, made mute by normative expectations; nor is it to be celebrated as a “positive” mark of difference which, nonetheless, still keeps the different at bay. On the contrary, it is to be dealt with as if there was no difference at all. This identitarian normatization happens not as a result of mainstream oppression, but as a true form of inclusion: by eradicating differentiation strategies, it has become possible to promote “alternative” gender identifications inside the pornographic industry and market it not as different, but as same. The neoliberal dilemma, thus, is solved: these new fluid identities have found a loophole in the system and returned to society a product which society is unable to refute as marginal.

And it is under this light that works of artists such as Jiz Lee, Chelsea Poe, Buck Angel, Nica Noelle’s TransRomantic studio, Loren Rex Cameron, to name a few, have found space inside the pornographic industry to exist without being excluded. Ironically, it was the suppression of the mark which distinguished one group from all others that originated a new space of resistance, inclusion, and valorization of such identities. Not only the porn industry has a lot to gain – and to learn – from the newcomers: society as a whole must understand that different means equal, after all.

I prefer to forgo the labels 'masculine' and 'feminine' since they can be applied only as general rather than specific terms. Instead, I adopt the term 'gendered self', and although I do take the gender of the author into consideration, my focus is on the specific time and place from which the author writes, and what those elements represent for the author and for us, as readers, in any given historical moment.

## **1.2 On the definition of autobiography**

The difficulty in defining the literary genre 'autobiography' stems from constant adaptations to new perspectives that often emerge in a fast-paced society, to the extent that there are numerous and different formal and informal instruments – often situated on the frontiers that separate the literary from the non-literary – that take on the (dubious) task of separating reality from fiction. Besides that, the definition of autobiography is in itself highly problematic and the source of much theorizing: the thesis as a whole continually struggles with the consequences of various conflicting definitions, ranging from what seems to be specific scientific formulae (“autobiography = self + life + printed or written”<sup>4</sup>) to more poetic definitions (“it is not merely a collection of anecdotes – it is a revelation to the readers about author’s self-discovery.”<sup>5</sup>) Philippe Lejeune, in *On Autobiography*, attempts to present a clear definition of the genre, arguing that the autobiography is characterized by a pact in which the reader should be able to rely on the author of an autobiography to tell the truth about (the identity of) the protagonist (LEJEUNE, 1989, 12). He proposed that author, narrator and protagonist had to be identical, using the proper name of the author as reference (LEJEUNE, 1973, p. 298). As Paul John Eakin notes, since the 1970s "the pervasive initiative has been to establish autobiography as an imaginary art, with special emphasis on its fictions" (EAKIN, 1992, p. 29), and even though the idea that autobiographies are closer to fiction than to non-fiction remains current, some literary theorists are keen to point out people's "intuitive notion that autobiographies do not feel ... precisely like fiction" (EAKIN, 1992, p. 30).

I would like to approach primarily two of Lejeune's texts: "The Autobiographical Pact" (1973) and "The Autobiographical Pact (bis)" (1982). In the first, Lejeune centers on his definition of autobiography as a genre, distinguished from both fiction and other forms of autobiographical writings, such as memoirs, diaries, autobiographical novels, or autobiographical poems. To do so, he begins his essay with a definition of autobiography that places the reader at the center, making “The Autobiographical Pact” innovative because it deals with reference as a question of reading, not writing. However, his position resonates with the cannon of autobiographical writings established since the 1700s, concentrated in

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<sup>4</sup> LITERARY DEVICES (ed). Autobiography. In: Literary Devices: Definition and Examples of Literary Terms. [S.l.]: LiteraryDevices.net, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://literarydevices.net /autobiography>>. Accessed on: 23 May 2018.

<sup>5</sup> LITERARY DEVICES (ed). Autobiography. In: Literary Devices: Definition and Examples of Literary Terms. [S.l.]: LiteraryDevices.net, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://literarydevices.net /autobiography>>. Accessed on: 23 May 2018.

white male European literature written by white males, although Lejeune never clearly states that these are the only texts he is interested in. He, then, proposes a modified definition of autobiography: "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality." (LEJEUNE, 1973, p. 4)

By focusing on the four elements of his definition (form of language - narrative prose, subject treated - individual life and story of a personality, situation of the author - both author and narrator are identical and have a name to be referred to, and position of the narrator - narrator and principal characters are identical, and a retrospective point of view is predominant), Lejeune classifies as autobiography a texts that contains most of the elements, as long as two conditions are met: the author and the narrator must be identical, and the narrator and the principal character must be identical. He does address the problems raised by his use of "identical" and "identity" by questioning how the identity of the narrator and the protagonist can be expressed in the text, and how identity and resemblance differ. However, it is important to distinguish between the grammatic inscription of a personal "I" and the actual individual outside the text. That is where Lejeune's central argument comes to light: it is the name of the author, narrator, and protagonist that distinguishes autobiography generically. The veracity of the existence of such person can be verified by official records ("the possibility of some kind of verification" (LEJEUNE, 1991, p. 3), but Lejeune's simple criterion of the proper name as marker of identity ignores that there are different markers of personal identity in a text. A name on the title page that identifies a same person as author, narrator and protagonist in an autobiography implies that the reader trusts the referential reliability of the authorial identity: if the name exists, the identity exists.

However, in a contemporary society that accepts birth names, social names, official names and internet handles as a group composing an identity - and here I am not only addressing the aspect of transgendered identities, but also the incorporation of a spouse's last name, the suppression of middle names, or even the inclusion of pen names in official documents - the arbitrary aspect of Lejeune's definition falls to earth, breaking the pact derived by his attempt to define autobiography as genre having as starting point the unity of identity of author, narrator, and character. The reader no longer believes the triad must carry on the same name: on the contrary, the reader accepts the differences in the nomenclature of the parts involved, no longer leaving to "the text itself" to offer "this last word at the very end, the proper name of the author, which is both textual and unquestionably referential" (LEJEUNE, 1973, p. 21).

In 1982, Lejeune published "The Autobiographical Pact (bis)", in which he deconstructs and questions some of his own statements from the earlier essay. At the same time, however, he insists on the idea that referentiality is essential to autobiographical writing. While he gives in on the notion that the self is more than a fiction, he reinforces the point of view that the autobiographical space is one formed by a pact between reader and author, in which referentiality is established by the act of publication of a discourse with a proper name, even a pen name or pseudonym, on the first or on the last page, claiming that "the definition is useful" because it "corresponds to a need" (LEJEUNE, 1982, p. 212). It seems that Lejeune is giving way to the notion of resemblance rather than identity in his definition of autobiography as genre.

Writing in the beginning of the 90s, significantly impacted by post-structuralist theories, Paul Eakin changes the perspective from fact to fiction in autobiography studies, as well as on the concept of the unified self, making "reference in autobiography [...] a rather forbidding subject" (EAKIN, 1992, p. 29). For him, the self "which we take to be experimental fact, is also finally a fiction, an elusive creature that we construct even as we seek to encounter it" (EAKIN, 2008, p. 125). Autobiography, for Paul Eakin, "is not only something we read in a book: in fact, as an identity discourse, delivered slowly in the stories we tell ourselves day by day, autobiography structures our lives" (EAKIN, 2004, p. 122). He writes that "[i]n the age of poststructuralism we have been too ready to assume that the very idea of a referential aesthetic is untenable, but autobiography is nothing if not a referential art" (EAKIN, 1992, p. 28). Eakin does not deny the reconstructive nature of autobiographical writing, but he still thinks that there is an important line to be drawn between fictional and non-fictional genres, especially because, as he notes, autobiographies "do not feel to the reader precisely like fiction" (EAKIN, 1992, p. 30). Referring to Lejeune, Eakin also notes that "the most successful attempts to date to establish a poetics of the genre ... focus precisely on the reader's recognition of a referential intention in such texts and its consequences for their reception" (EAKIN, 1992, p. 29). In other words, the focus when dealing with autobiography can be turned away from the author's intention and from the evasive reality of the here and now, and toward the reader's inclination to separate the imagined from the factual.

In the past two decades, three terms have become central in autobiography criticism: performativity, positionality and relationality. Performatively, identity is no longer seen as an essential and fixed attribute of the subject, but as "enacted and reiterated through cultural norms and discourses"; "an effect of storytelling" (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 214).

Positionality focuses on the cultural and historical placement of the subject, and "subject positions" are viewed as "effects of social relations whose power is distributed unevenly and asymmetrically across difference" (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 215). Finally, relationality refers to the idea that "the narrator's story is often refracted through the stories of others" (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 216) and emphasizes the subject's lack of autonomy. According to Smith and Watson, these three terms disestablish the concept of a universal, stable and autonomous individual, focusing instead on the idea that the subject is an ongoing process that happens in a given context. In contemporaneity, the possibility of referentiality is still being questioned by autobiography critics. Mary Evans, for instance, wrote in 1999 about the "impossibility of auto/biography" and argued that the genre was in "urgent need of reclassification; that its place on the library shelves is not with non-fiction but very much closer to fiction" (EVANS, 1999, p. 202). Smith and Watson do not go so far as placing what they call "self life writing" in the category of fiction. They imply, however, that the idea of the unified and stable core self remains powerless, at least in theory:

Readers often conceive of autobiographical narrators as telling unified stories of their lives, as creating or discovering coherent selves. But both the unified story and the coherent self are myths of identity. For there is no coherent "self" that precedes stories about identity, about "who" one is. Nor is there a unified, stable, immutable self that can remember everything that happened in the past (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 61).

Autofiction, as conceived by Doubrovsky (1977), would be a postmodern variant of the autobiography, since it no longer believes in a literal truth, in an undoubted reference, in a coherent historical discourse, and recognizes itself as the sparse arbitrary and literary reconstruction of fragments memory. (FIGUEIREDO, 2012, p. 63), although the concept still bases itself in Lejeune's triad of homonyms. By imagining a genre between fiction and autobiography, in which the author, protagonist and narrator share the same identity, Doubrovsky explain, in the backcover of his novel, *Fils*<sup>6</sup>:

Autobiography? No, that is a privilege reserved for the important people of this world, at the end of their lives, in a refined style. Fiction, of events and facts strictly real; autofiction, if you will, to have entrusted the language of an adventure to the adventure of language, outside of the wisdom and the syntax of the novel, traditional or new. Interactions, threads of words, alliterations, assonances, dissonances, writing before or after literature, concrete, as we say, music<sup>7</sup> (DOUBROVSKY, 1977, back cover.)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> In recent editions, the extract has become part of the introduction to the novel.

<sup>7</sup> "Autobiographie? Non, c'est un privilège réservé aux importants de ce monde, au soir de leur vie, et dans un beau style. Fiction, d'événements et de faits strictement réels ; si l'on veut autofiction, d'avoir confié le langage d'une aventure à l'aventure d'un langage en liberté, hors sagesse et hors syntaxe du roman, traditionnel ou nouveau. Rencontres, fils de mots, allitérations, assonances, dissonances, écriture d'avant ou d'après littérature, concrète, comme on dit musicale" (DOUBROVSKY, 1977, back cover.)

Historically, the evolution of the concept into autofiction (in comparison or opposition to the concept of autobiography) arrives at the essential questioning of the need and usefulness of such a concept, and answers the question posed by Philippe Gasparini in 2008: “Is autofiction the real name of a genre or the name of a contemporary genre?”. Nevertheless, Gasparini himself fails to escape the constrictions of terminologies, when he defines autofiction as

An autobiographical and literary text that presents numerous traits of orality, formal innovation, narrative complexity, fragmentation, alterity, nonsense and self-commentary, which tend to problematize the relationship between writing and experience (GASPARINI, 2008, p. 311<sup>9</sup>).

Probably the most common definition of autofiction places it as a genre that is defined by an asymmetric pact or contradictory contract involving two opposite types of narratives: as autobiography, it is a narrative based on three identities (the author is also the narrator and main character), which however claims to be fiction in its narrative and in terms of its peritextual allegations (title, back cover). Vincent Colonna's opinion is that the autobiographical phenomenon presents "neither a codified genre, nor a simple form, but a sheaf of joined and joining practices, a complex shape, nobody is altogether wrong: each grabbed a “piece” of autofiction, a blow of the great whirlwind that inspires him or her” (COLONNA, 2004, p. 15), pointing out to the plethora of interpretations that the new literary genre can receive. Autofictional representation as a literary genre, therefore, finds itself in need of a rigorous systematization, so that the first critical research operation – which consists of defining the object of study – could become a relatively simple task. It is a paradoxical, complicated explanation of a genre that continues to elude classification. Similarly, other attempts to define autofiction often avoid forming strict boundaries for the genre. Autofiction.org, for instance, defines the style as:

Subtle notion to define, tied to the author’s apparent refusal of the autobiography, roman à clés, of the constraints or delusions of transparency, enriched by its many extensions all while solidly resisting the incessant attacks of which it is the object. It comes from posing questions that challenge literature, shaking notions of reality,

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<sup>8</sup> All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>9</sup> “*texto autobiográfico e literário que apresenta vários traços de oralidade, inovação formal, complexidade narrativa, fragmentação, alteridade, falta de unidade e autocomentários, que tende a problematizar a relação entre escrita e experiência.*” (HIDALGO, 2013, p. 223 apud GASPARINI, 2008, p. 311).

truth, sincerity, fiction, plowing through the unattended galleries in the field of memory<sup>10</sup> (GENON; GRELL, 2018).

However, the plurality of realities that one can witness in contemporary society hinders any process of simplification because it admonishes any possibility of simplistic dichotomization in concepts which involve human beings. Nevertheless, an overview on the available titles covering the (ample) spectrum of autobiographical writing – or autofiction, or whatever new terminology might emerge – proves that the academic world is still intent in its search for a closed, unitary and finite definition of the genre, as it has done with most – if not all – of the other literary genres that have come before this one.

### 1.3 On the issue of pornography

Society does not talk about pornography because it cannot place pornography in any sphere. Clearly it is not "only" cinema; nor is it prostitution. It is not art, but it can be art, and it is art without being able to be art. Pornography is that space in the corner of the room that we do not know what to do with, and that goes unnoticed unless someone claims it. Lately, as a result of a new movement of female activism in social networks, issues such as sex work and pornography have figured more in discussions, be they academic or not. It is as if society has finally understood that ignoring pornography will not make it disappear, and so it is better to address it and take from it what it can offer – as in these discussions about social relations at the present time, for example. The cross-contamination between the two spheres occurs not only in online social medias, but it is also noticeable in all contemporary popular and artistic expressions of culture, from MTV videos to high-brow architecture. We are finally unable to ignore the (naked) elephant in the room.

It bothers me, however, that many of these discussions are those closed in the 1970s, or in a feminist pseudo-activism that refuses to lower the posters and hear those who actually participate in such issues about pornography and sex work. My departure from the feminist movement is in fact a refusal to participate in closed-text dialogues with thinkers such as Andrea Dworkin, who was averse to pornography and can no longer review her work. Or

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<sup>10</sup> *Notion subtile à définir, liée au refus qu'un auteur manifeste à l'égard de l'autobiographie, du roman à clés, des contraintes ou des leurres de la transparence, elle s'enrichit de ses extensions multiples tout en résistant solidement aux attaques incessantes dont elle fait l'objet. Elle vient en effet poser des questions troublantes à la littérature, faisant vaciller les notions mêmes de réalité, de vérité, de sincérité, de fiction, creusant de galeries inattendues le champ de la mémoire.* (GENON; GRELL, 2018).

repeat Robin Morgan's belief that "pornography is the theory, rape is the practice" (MORGAN, 1980). In 2019, economic issues present a different configuration from 1980. I need a feminism that looks around and understands the issue of pornography, prostitution, and abortion – to start – as current socioeconomic issues, and that need to be addressed with a view to improving the situation of contemporary women without burning it in a new inquisition fire kept alive through the repetition of discourses that have already long expired.

Pornography is not yet fully treated as a discipline by the academic world either, although it points to several aspects of gender, race, economic, class, and very important social relations for discussions of cultural studies, for example. The major challenge for pornography, therefore, is to uncover that – beneath all the prejudice in which it is submerged – there is a wide range of possibilities for spaces of discourse and discussions that can elucidate contemporary issues relevant to various areas of knowledge from a perspective so peripheral (or marginal) that it actually allows for the emergence of new questions from completely unexpected places. I was recently asked how I would deal with the vocabulary issue in my thesis – because the academy is apparently unprepared for words like 'double penetration' – and I was amazed that, as the second decade of the 21 century draws to a close, there are worries about linguistic conservatism that restricts which discourses have access to academic thinking and which have not.

The discourse of the performers, for example, places pornography under a new prism of discussion, even because for the first time the "object of desire" becomes the "subject of discourse", and this completely changes the point of view from where pornography is observed. The pornographic performer nowadays is no longer narrated in the third person, but in first, with real-time statements about what happens and how it is perceived not only within the porn discussion, but also within the "civilian" world. They no longer need a spokesperson: they speak *of* their place, *through* their place, and their place is directly connected with the public eye over them, bringing in the new threshold into the plurality of existing social discourses. This is one of the most precious things happening in pornography today: the free positioning of performers in the social sphere, completely changing the way they are perceived by society. And regardless of how they think, the fact that they are spelling out their positions about any subject matter solidifies them as subjects within a discourse that, until then, had only objectified them.

Pornography is not about sex: it is about sexuality. Although most commonly defined as any material (both pictorial and written) that has explicit description or graphic display of sexual organs or activity meant to cause sexual excitement, the problem with defining

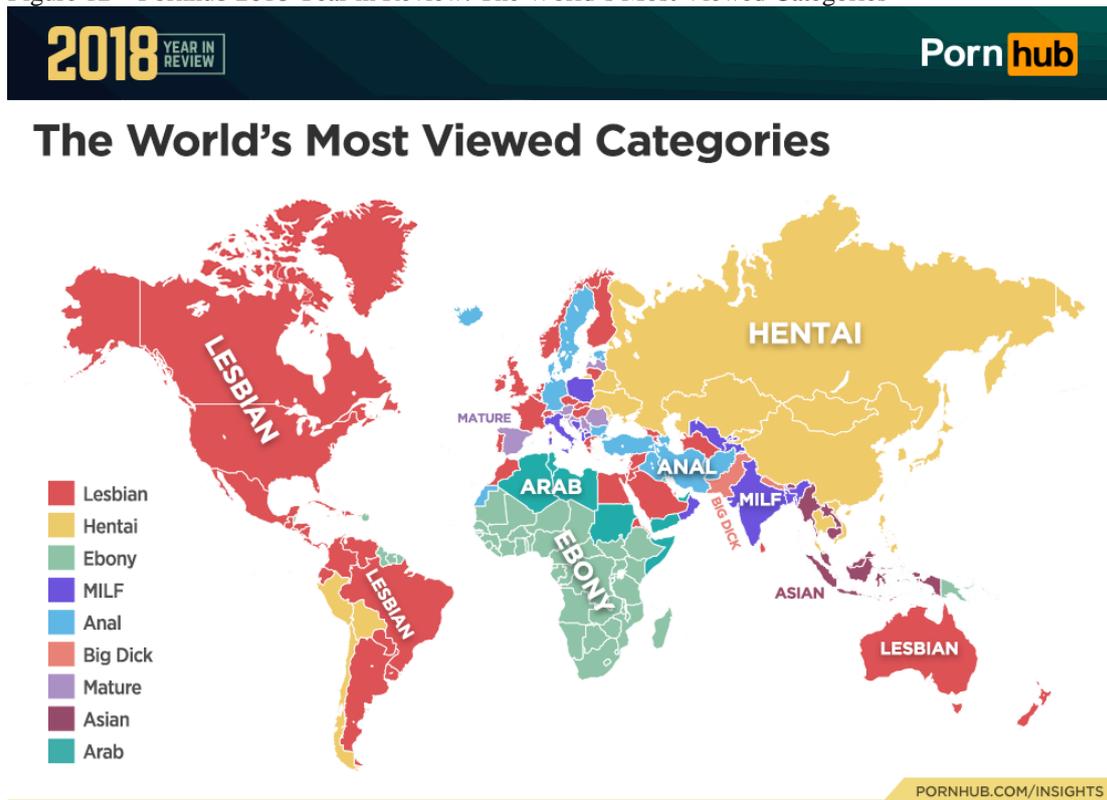
pornography is obvious: what about material that has explicit content but does not intend to sexually excite a person, or material that intends to do so, but only has subtle descriptions of sexual activity? The possible variations of the sexual act are finite and would be extinguished if pornography only dealt with sex. Sexuality, however, is shaped in such a plural way that it allows us to film and rephrase the same subject (and, again, I play with words here) in infinitely different ways. When I look at a pornographic film, I am much less concerned with the sexual act itself than with the discourse that such a sexual act promotes – even if we speak only of a scene, a vignette, not of an entire film. It is not the graphic part of pornography that excites; it is what it says, even if veiledly, about ourselves, about our sexuality, our desires, our interests, our social role, our points of view.

As a pragmatic example of how sexuality is directly connected to cultural practices and identities, I would like to bring up the statistic results of Pornhub – internet’s most prominent umbrella porn company, comprised of over ten pornographic videos websites – 2018 year in numbers. With a database of over 100 categories, the website received 33,5 billion visits in 2018, had nearly 5 million new videos uploaded, and transferred a total of 4403 pentabytes of data (as a comparison, that is more data than the entire internet consumed in 2002). The compilation of the website traffic statistics presented makes a disclaimer that,

While search terms can be more easily influenced by current trends and differing international terminologies, Pornhub’s 100+ video categories are the same throughout the world. So whether compared internationally or on a local level, categories can give a solid indication of the types or genres of porn that people are most interested in viewing (2018 YEAR IN REVIEW, 2018).

Pornhub's statistics also group searches by gender, age and geographic location. It is not by chance that the demographic statistics about porn-related searchers vary so drastically according to the area they cover. There is an undeniable link between sexuality and all other aspects of cultural life that surround us: gender, ethnicity, religion, economic status, etc. The following map illustrates which categories are most popular in different parts of the world (Figure 12). ‘Lesbian’ dominates much of North, Central and South American, along with many parts of Europe, Australia and New Zealand. ‘Hentai’ is more popular in Russia throughout Eastern Europe and Central Asia, as well as parts of South America like Chile and Peru. ‘Arab’ is searched more often in Northern Africa, while ‘Ebony’ is the most viewed through the Central, West and Southern Africa regions.

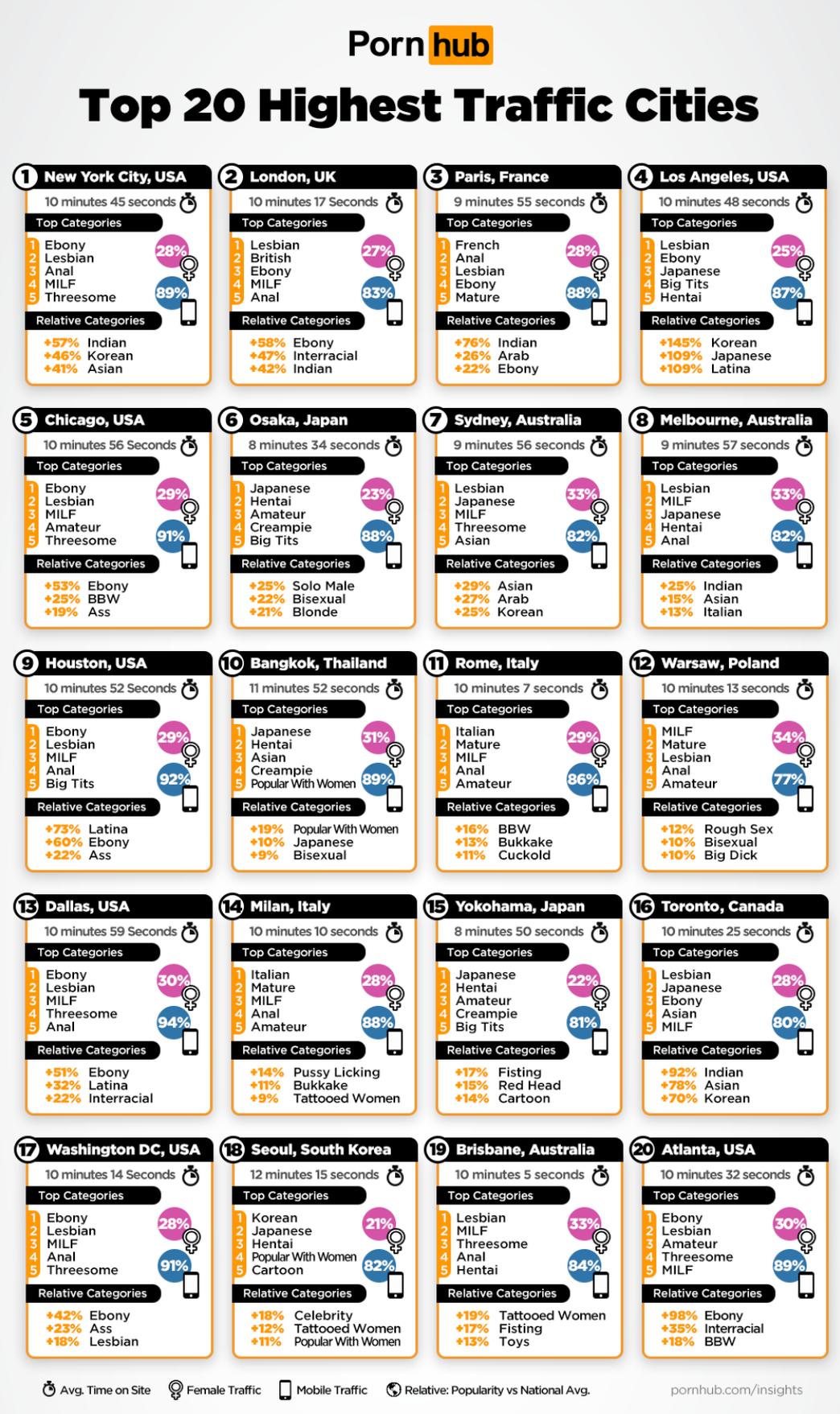
Figure 12 – Pornhub 2018 Year in Review: The World’s Most Viewed Categories



Source: 2018 YEAR IN REVIEW, 2018.

However, the influence of geographic location becomes even more explicit when we zero in on cities. “The categories per city are a nice piece of minutia that show some clear trends in what the populations prefer”, claims Forbes’ writer Curtis Silva. “These cities make up 16.8% of Pornhub's daily traffic and each one, just like the denizens of any city, have its particular proclivities when it comes to the type of content being consumed on the site (Figure 13). These sensibilities often mimic the overall feel of each city, for instance New York (number one on the list) prefers ethnic categories. “This makes sense, as New York is a great representation of all brands of human and desires to match” (SILVA, 2019). Big cities like New York, London, Paris and Toronto have diverse multicultural populations, so it’s no surprise to see that ethnic categories are relatively more popular when compared to their national averages. *Indian* is 57% more popular in New York, 42% more popular in London, 76% in Paris and 92% in Toronto.

Figure 13 – Pornhub: Top 20 Highest Traffic Cities



Source: Pornhub's Top 20 Cities, 2019.

On an even more pragmatic level, this can be expressed on the most searched terms in any porn site: in 2018, Pornhub's statistics pointed towards a clear influence of what was happening in the United States, when "pornstar (and alleged pre-presidential mistress) "Stormy Daniels" came in first on our list of the searches that defined 2018. Beginning in January, each time she was in the news the public's curiosity would peak and searches for Stormy surged", pointing out that Pornhub's top searches are often influenced by mainstream media and pop culture events<sup>11</sup>. According to Dr Laurie Betito, Director of the Pornhub Sexual Wellness Center, "searches like these serve as an indication that people use this site to not only satisfy sexual urges but also to get a different angle on something they are already interested in. To see a famous character or hot topic in a sexual context"<sup>12</sup>.

The obvious influence of pop culture is also expressed in results which mirror cultural manifestation trends such as videogames, music, cartoons, films and the Internet itself. Searches referring to the dating app 'Tinder' grew by 161% among women, 113% among men and 131% by visitors aged 35 to 44. It was also a top trending term in many countries including the United Kingdom and Australia. Searches for actress Meghan Markle topped 2.5 million for the year and increased by 2812% on May 21st when she wed Prince Harry and became British royalty. The game *Red Dead Redemption* became a top search on Pornhub after it was released in October, leading to over 1 million searches and a 745% increase in 'Wild West' and 489% in 'Western' related searches. As the website itself posits, "Life imitates art, and eventually porn imitates everything."

For 2019, the statistics already reveal themselves to be quite insightful. During the polar vortex that hit the Midwest during the dates of January 30-31 – when temperatures dropped well below freezing – of the 11 states surveyed, only Michigan logged a decrease in traffic. Minnesota and Wisconsin led the charge with a 22 and 12 percent increase in traffic, respectively. During the government shutdown in America between January 7 and 10, In Washington D.C. alone, visits were up as much as 12 percent from typical viewing statistics. The biggest bumps in viewership happened between 10pm and 1am. Even more revealing is

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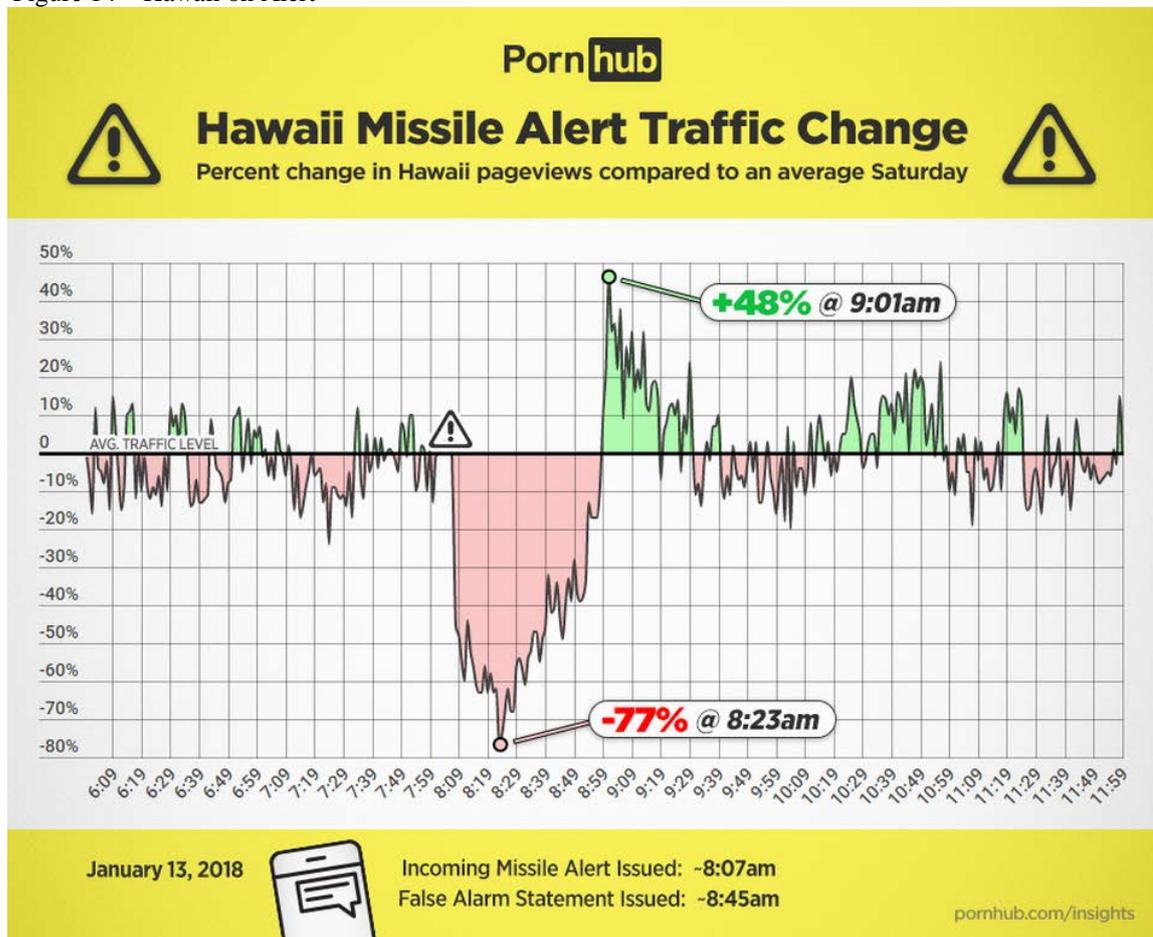
<sup>11</sup> 2018 Year in Review. Pornhub, [S.l.], 11 Dec. 2018, Insights. Retrieved from: <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2018-year-in-review>. Accessed on: 5 May 2019.

<sup>12</sup> 2018 Year in Review. Pornhub, [S.l.], 11 Dec. 2018, Insights. Retrieved from: <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2018-year-in-review>. Accessed on: 5 May 2019.

that the categories of Outdoor, Threesome, Old/Young, Small Tits, Squirt, and Solo Female all saw at least 50 percent increases in traffic<sup>13</sup>.

But perhaps the most emblematic example of the connection between current events and Pornhub numbers happened in Hawaii, on January 13, 2018. After a missile alert was issued at 8:07 am, traffic in the website dropped vertiginously to a -77% at 8:23 am. After the false alarm statement was issued at 8:45 am, traffic peaked at a groundbreaking high of +48% within sixteen minutes, compared to an average Saturday<sup>14</sup> (Figure 14). All jokes aside, it is undeniable that there is a connection between the numbers exposed by Pornhub's statistics and whatever is happening in the world, be it on real time or related to cultural trends.

Figure 14 – Hawaii on Alert



Source: HAWAII ON ALERT, 2018.

<sup>13</sup>KIRKLAND, Justin. Pornhub's 2019 Insights Show That When the Going Gets Tough, People Watch Porn. *Esquire*, 19 Feb. 2019. Lifestyle, sex. Retrieved from: <https://www.esquire.com/lifestyle/sex/a26409934/porn-trends-government-shutdown-winter/>. Accessed on: 20 Feb 2019.

<sup>14</sup>LIEU, Johnny. Very relieved Hawaiians went straight to Pornhub after getting missile alert all clear. *Mashable*, New York, 18 Jan. 2018. Culture. Retrieved from: <https://mashable.com/2018/01/17/pornhub-hawaii-spike-traffic/>. Accessed on: 20 Jan. 2018.

But although pornography has always been and will continue to be part of people's lives – pending nuclear catastrophes –, this industry changes daily. The focus changes daily, performers come in and out of the industry, new directors, new niches... It is almost impossible to stay current with everything that happens, and I end up seeing myself circulating within the same media – which are the ones that interest as research material – and I am surprised by everything that appears again. It is very important to me how much clearer and more accessible this speech is nowadays compared to five, ten years ago. In 2013, in conversation with Cindy Gallop<sup>15</sup>, I was asked by her about my interest in pornography. My response explains my constant struggle for social restructuring based on the inclusion of women as agents: it is our last space for struggle, the only one we have not yet explored. We have conquered space in the academy, the political life, the labor market: everything denied to us before the feminist movement is now within our reach. The only corner we have not yet conquered is pornography. It is still understood as being made exclusively for men, even though it is consumed equally by men and women. It's time to claim our place. And this time in Porn Valley.

I also want to talk about the gaze, this underestimated, underrated tool which can be the most powerful sexual lure between two people. More specifically, I want to talk about the feminine gaze. It was directed to the ground in Victorian times, is hidden behind the veil in eastern civilizations and still struggles to find a space into today's society. The way the gazer has control over the subject that is being gazed at raises questions on empowerment, behaviorism and voyeurism, issues which are perceived differently depending on the different types of gazing. Lacan's appropriation of the term<sup>16</sup>; the dichotomization of the gaze into male and female, perpetrated by Laura Mulvey in 1975<sup>17</sup>; Teresa de Lauretis' discussion on

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<sup>15</sup> English advertising consultant, founder and former chair of the US branch of advertising firm Bartle Bogle Hegarty, and founder of the IfWeRanTheWorld and MakeLoveNotPorn companies.

<sup>16</sup> The gaze is a state of awareness in which a person realizes that one can be "watched". According to Lacan, the gaze can be seen as a "blind spot" of the acuity of detectible reality of the subject (LACAN, 1981, p.84). This generates a precipitous anxiety which is necessary for the existence of the gaze. 'It surprises the viewer, disturbs him and reduces him to a feeling of shame' (LACAN, 1981, p. 96). This could be explained by its voyeuristic and exhibitionistic substances that also generates a form of pleasure at the same time (LACAN, 1981, p. 181-183).

<sup>17</sup> According to Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" there are two modes of looking when it comes to the spectator and his gaze. She differentiates voyeurism and fetishism. Voyeuristic viewing, as Mulvey states, involves a controlling gaze and has a connection with sadism (MULVEY, 1999, p. 840). She writes: 'Pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt – asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness' (MULVEY, 1999, p. 840). She also distinguishes fetishism, which involves 'the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous' (MULVEY, 1999, p. 840). This in a way shows the physical attractiveness of the object which makes it satisfying in a simple form.

the adoption of the gaze by male and female spectators (1984); Jackie Stacey's question: 'Do women necessarily take up a feminine and men a masculine spectator position?' (STACEY, 1992, p. 245); Bracha Ettinger's "Matrixial Gaze" (1995): none of these theories approach a topic I am interested in, which relates not to the spectator, but rather the gazer themselves. Perhaps what comes closer to the object of this research is the intra-diegetic gaze: the gaze of one performer at another within the film (BURGIN, 1982, p. 148), although in film studies this type of gaze is directly related to the spectator's gaze. Through point of view shots from the camera, the intra-diegetic gaze lets the viewer "see through the eyes" of the personae within the film. This generates a form of relation between spectator and performer which could alter the spectator's gaze. According to Christian Metz this relationship is easily constructed as the spectator re-enacts what Lacan called "the mirror stage" (METZ, 1975, 49). Spectators identify with the gaze of the camera and see themselves as 'other', since they are not part of the filmic world. Metz claims that the spectator is "entirely on the side of the perceiving instance: absent from the screen, but certainly present in the auditorium, a great eye and ear without which the perceived would have no one to perceive it, the constitutive instance, in other words, of the cinema signifier (it is I who make the film)" (METZ, 1975, p. 51). This viewing is important as "cinema practice is only possible through the perceptual passions: the desire to see (= scopic drive, scopophilia, voyeurism)" (ibid, p. 59). As Nadine Meanwell, network manager at Dusk, a channel that broadcasts porn for women, says:

Voyeurism is an important key aspect of cinematic viewing as it has an erotic and exhibitionistic touch. The gazer is seemingly active and the passive actor (gazed at) is cooperating as he is present and accepting this look. When it comes to gazing, both concepts are important aspects but are very dissimilar. Mirroring while gazing is usually done as an identification process when it comes to filmic experiences. The spectator places himself in the shoes of the character and perceives the filmic world and the narrative through his perspective. When it comes to voyeurism on the other hand, it gets a little more complicated. Voyeuristic viewing with its connection to exhibitionism and erotic entanglements, is a different type of gazing. When taking the point of view of the spectator while gazing voyeuristically, he or she looks at a filmic character with great pleasure but does not necessarily identify him/herself with this person. As discussed earlier, Laura Mulvey argues that the female characters on screen are being objectified through voyeuristic processes and this is how the division between active male/ passive female comes to light (MEANWELL, 2017, p. 10)

What gender is the gaze that comes from female XXX performers? To what extent are they participants in the scene in which they perform, and to what extent are they mere spectators? How much objectification really takes place in girl/girl porn scenes, and how

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much of that is a response to a feminine gaze being masculinized by the demands and expectations of the industry itself?

Throughout the world, there are plenty of social rules against "staring" and deep-rooted cultural taboos which forbid us from looking too closely at other people. The cinematography experience seems to be a rare exception, being one of the only spaces where it becomes both safe and acceptable to observe the lives of others. While the cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, it feeds on us the hope of seeing the more basic side of human nature. More recently, the proliferation of reality TV shows proves that such quest for scopophilic pleasure does not have to be restricted to the two-hour movie experience only: we are now able to partake on the events around someone's life 24 hours a day, thriving on observing what unfolds before us as if a game which does not depend on our participation or opinion but, at the same time, is being played to please us as audience.

And scopophilia is not a male only pleasure. Reality TV is aimed at a female audience the same way soap operas are, and some might even argue there is no difference between them, not even in terms of fictionalization. Psychologically, the popularity of these shows is due to viewer's identification with the ordinary people who are chosen as participants, and viewer watch tantalized by the voyeuristic thrill they get from peeking in. According to Robert Thompson, director of the Center for the Study of Popular Television at Syracuse University, reality TV represents

a new way of telling a story which [is] half fiction — the producers and creators set up a universe, they give it rules, they make a setting, they cast it according to specific guidelines as to who they think are going to provide good pyrotechnics. But then they bring in non-actors with no scripts and allow this kind of improvisation like a jazz piece to occur (THOMPSON apud BALKIN, 2004, p. 10).

The voyeuristic pleasure derives from objectifying a character, and narcissistic pleasure from identification with a character in film. But what happens when there is both objectification and identification? And in a world where the cult of celebrity has already surpassed that of gods, the concept of being able to witness celebrities' private moments shines like gold. As a result, the once unauthored pornography might be replaced by celebrities' sex tapes which mirror reality TV in several ways, including the level of fictionalization that is present in such videos. Therefore, by objectifying myself through the image of the other, I am able to embody both the passive and the active agents of sex, this way subverting commonly held notions which establish a said order in what I know as the world. Moreover, if the other in question is a celebrity, there is the possibility of overlapping narcissistic pleasure with identification; therefore, creating a new paradigm in which I am

aware I am not the other but, nonetheless, I am able to forge a temporary bond in which my own needs for self-assurance will take place on the same figure I refuse to leave, but cannot identify with.

When it comes to pornography, the voyeuristic fetish already so exacerbated takes an even bigger form because what is being watched resembles genuine personal footage, or reality porn. The *cinéma vérité* set ups enable the audience to elaborate a new level of perception in which the boundaries between reality and fiction are blurred precisely because there is no previous agreement between the audience and the film about what is real and what is not: at the same time it all rings true and false, giving spectators room to pretend (or fantasize) that what they are watching is, in fact, lost footage which was supposed to be private but, somehow, is at that moment allowing them to observe the intimate moments of a porn star.

Sex as power, as a space for dominance and social interaction, as an economic trading mode, does not exist in the love making format; it comes raw, violent, basal, instinctive, anonymous, and primary as a biological need. It takes places not in the Victorian bedroom we still reproduce in our bourgeois households, but out on the streets, where it can be noticed and acknowledged, accepted or repudiated. From the latest Nic Minaj video to Cronenberg's (failed) attempt to portray female hysteria, through the endless flirt between Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy: it is all about PORN, not about sex. It is about pleasure, and not about sex. Sex is what happens when nobody is looking: porn is its embodied version into something that exists to be noticed, this way positioning participants in a given social economic *loci* by subjecting them to classification by observance. Sex is to be whispered about, barely noticed, while porn is this oversized, grotesque body singing loud from TV screens in the broadcasting of cooking shows, soccer games, dance theater: it is all in the body, the human form, the assembling of limbs and muscles and skin, and it is all about pleasuring the taste buds, the eyes, the ears. Pornography is not about sex: sex is about pornography. Pornography is about delighting senses and can manifest in several areas of life: culinary, visual arts, music, social gatherings. The term "food porn", for example, defined as

a glamourized visual presentation of cooking or eating in advertisements, infomercials, blogs, cooking shows or other visual media. These may be foods of a high fat and calorie content, or exotic dishes that arouse a desire to eat or the glorification of food as a substitute for sex. Food porn often takes the form of food photography with styling that presents food provocatively, in a similar way to glamour photography or pornographic photography.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> FOOD porn. In: WIKIPEDIA: the free encyclopedia. Florida: Wikimedia Foundation, 2019. Retrieved from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Food\\_porn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Food_porn). Accessed on: 1 Oct. 2019.

has been fully incorporated by the English language since 1977, corroborating with the idea that 'porn' is not about sex, but about pleasure. Music porn. Food porn. Book porn. All widely found on the internet to satisfy the need for a term that would encompass the (exaggerated) satisfaction of a desire.

Eventually, the two get to interact: sex and porn join together when the pleasure to be quenched is that of a sexual nature (as we are used to understanding it), whether requiring a partner or not, and manifest themselves in the various categories, niches and formats of pornographic material available on the internet, which generates the highest traffic of information on the world wide web. In the privacy of our own devices – game consoles, desktops, notebooks, tablets or cell phones – we are granted access to our desires and fantasies in the privacy of our own screens, and the choice of enjoying it privately or sharing it with other(s) is left to our own volition.

The private history of the subject has long become focus of the academic world, inasmuch as it is the primary configuration, the archetype of every process of come-to-being. The limits between the public and private, which appear to be the founding structure of our society, is being now constantly questioned by the use of social medias and the internet: no longer am I able to "be" without "being seen". And, aware of that, one can choose which façade to display: never, or quite rarely, there is a window that allows a peek into their fondness for pornography. While that eroticism is moderately accepted, pornography is dealt with as if deriving from twisted, darkened sexualities which are to be hidden – all this while the world wide web, the same frame which in current society locates the self, continuously bombards users with pornography in its most varied forms.

And while I was thinking about this, it dawned on me that the porn industry might be the most inclusive, most open, and most accepting of all industries, since it allows all sort of minorities to establish in a niche created specifically for them. While that some may argue that there is a ranking system, a price tag which differs the products of each niche – as in this performer versus that performer, or this category over that one – it is society and consumers, not the porn industry, who ranks them. By allowing all forms of fetish to be equally represented, for example, pornography would be able to bridge private and public on a non-judgmental way, was it not for its consumers denying its consumption. The irony is amusing.

It is in the tension between what is done (inside) and what is spoken (outside) that a solution for the demystification of porn lies. As Michel de Certeau poses, "Through stories about places, they become inhabitable. Living is narrativising. Stirring up or restoring this narrativising is thus also among the tasks of any renovation. One must awaken the stories that

sleep in the streets and that sometimes lie within a simple name" (CERTEAU, 1984, p. 142-143). Let's make it named: porn.

#### **1.4 On the academic world and pornography**

The academic world seems to think that pornography is too unrefined, too raw, basic, instinctive, too primary and not rational enough for "men and women of letters". What they fail to see, however, is that any form of art, any format of art as cultural manifestation has passed pornography at some point in history, be it writing, sculpture, dancing, painting, cinema, music. Yet, pornography is erased from all art forms that involves nudity and sex the minute the academic world requires justification to allow it in: think of Rubens, and his naked chubby ladies, and how we are immediately taught that it is not about nudity and sex, but about female body adoration; Michelangelo's David and the denial that there is any sexual intention in the portrayal of the masculine body, the work being justified as a semi-mathematical ode to human form and proportion; Rodin's Kiss being deployed of sexual content, explained as belonging to a sphere which goes beyond the physical one, at some point even sublimating his relationship to Camille Claudel by restricting it exclusively to the artistic realm. By eliminating pornography from art pieces, it becomes acceptable to observe them, to debate them, to enjoy them, because an art which aims (exclusively) at sexually arousing people is immediately regarded as less valid than arts which appeal to, say, less carnal senses.

Carnal relationships have always been understood as being less noble than love, spiritual or intellectual ones, because they require nothing more than 'mere' existence: it is the impulsive, naturalistic, instinctive type of relationship that can manifest itself even among the most irrational of beings, for it is dedicated only to the perpetuation of the species and requires little – if any – intellect or sensibility. However, while for one person a relationship might belong exclusively to this more 'primal' realm, for another the same relationship might blur boundaries and penetrate more than one of those territories, this way working in double reference and functioning as sexually arousing at the same time that it holds some other significance, be it artistic, spiritual, or religious. For these people – to whom sex and sexual desire are intrinsically connected to other less "mundane" aspects, such as relational skills, intellect, or even religious experiences – to characterize an arousal as exclusively sexual, void

of other values, becomes impossible. What would be considered the secondary aspect (the artistic, social or religious intention) of this desire when manifest in art can work as a solvent to the pornographic tone of the artistic matter, if so they wish, and thins out the most 'naturalistic' aspect of the work, therefore enabling them to justify the sexuality in their art under the scope of other sciences. It is as if this secondary nature of the sexual desire excused the existence of the carnal aspect itself, giving desire a justification that transcends the more 'simplistic' and 'basic' manifestation of sexual intention that exist without any 'noble' objectives

This is why sexual art holds its place inside the academic world as a matter to be approached only under the lenses of other disciplines: sociology, psychology, history, for example, are all disciplines that can harbor pornographic art under their scope, if this means securing the place of those works inside the academic debate. Therefore, photographs by Nan Goldin, for example, are constantly justified as being an account of contemporary sexuality, often being taken only as registers of the sexual atmosphere of a certain time and place. Di Cavalcanti's mulatas are supposed to represent an emerging Brazilian culture, which intentionally promotes the Brazilian woman as a means of reinforcing a national identity. Dash Snow's "F\*\*\* the Police" should represent the ever-going clash between power and sex. And, if everything else fails, the naturalist argument that "there is nothing wrong with flesh" comes into action, as to eliminate any underlying meaning of sexual provocation existing alone, without having to lean against other forms of discourse. It is as if the idea of sex or nudity as sexual arousing tools used precisely and only with that intention tinted any art piece, draining its artistic value and relegating it to a category of intentionality that does not comply with that which is expected from the "fine arts". After all, art's objectives should tangent exclusively spiritual elevation, and never, ever inflict body reactions to its observers – or at least not physical reactions which would remind them of their own condition as irrational, impulsive, instinctive animals.

In a Platonic concept of ideal world, where arts is a threat permanently confronted with the necessity to be censored and regulated in order to formulate good citizens – remember, Plato proposed sending poets and playwrights out of his ideal Republic – the state's interference in artistic endeavors would work more like a tool to eliminate or belittle the power of the arts to influence, and potentially to corrupt. In a Foucauldian analysis of all "neoliberal governmentality" and the institution of inner-regulatory strategies, aligned with the standardization and normatisation of sexuality, sexual acts, expectations, and what is acceptable to desire, would function as a much more solid regulatory tool. In other words, it is

by installing a regulatory apparel inside each active citizen that a system is able to secure that any threat is immediately eliminated by the same subjects it intends to corrupt. Therefore, to perpetrate ideas of what is “normal” or “healthy” sexuality and, at the same time, to impose specific places in which the expression of sexual desire should be delivered is a way to make sure that people would reprimand any form of artistic expression which does not comply with said rules.

The academic world, therefore, presents itself as a perfect space for the categorization and dissection of erotic and pornographic art, although embedded in (pre)concepts of what is art and what only mediates social discourse. It is about time the academic community worldwide understands that pornography in itself is as valid an art form as any other, and the fact it emerges so instinctively to all societies should, alone, advocate for the need to face pornographic artistic expressions as valid and subject to deep intellectual analysis without, I beg, over extending it to find hooks in other disciplines in which to peg moral issues in order to hide it from the faint-hearted.

### **1.5 On the autobiographies and memoirs of pornographic performers**

None of the published theories on autobiographies and memoirs— not even Doubrovsky's more flexible proposal – fully embrace the meaning of autobiography and memoirs written by pornographic performers. Defying Bakhtin’s concept that the writer should become another in relation to themselves to write autobiographically (BAKHTIN, 2003, p. 13) because the “aesthetic momentum, to take place, requires two participants, two consciences which do not coincide” (BAKHTIN, 2003, p. 20)<sup>19</sup>, for pornographic performers there is an “other” who is still the same: the other life is distinctly separated from the “original” life, although lived in/by the same body. Thus, the text/body of pornographic performers is metanarrative; it is written by, through, and based on the same (body), while dialoguing directly with the new configurations of the contemporary subject, separated in its fragmented and contradictory identity, which "arises in tune with the narcissism of

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<sup>19</sup> “acontecimento estético pode realizar-se apenas na presença de dois participantes, pressupõe duas consciências que não coincidem” (BAKHTIN, 2003, p. 20).

contemporary media society, and, at the same time, produces a critical reflection on it" (KLINGER, 2007, p. 47)<sup>20</sup>.

The concept of a “retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (LEJEUNE, 1989, p. 4) is multifaceted when the real person is distinguished from the narrated person, but the writing is still autobiographical. What, a priori, breaks Lejeune’s writer = narrator = protagonist formula would characterize the autobiographical writing of pornographic performers outside the scope of autobiography: the identity narrated is not the same as the narrator, starting with an alias that is constructed as a body, as disclosed by pornographic performer Lorelai Lee (2016). By choosing a different name from their given name to identify the persona that will be presented to the pornographic industry, performers challenge Lejeune's classification of the pseudonym functioning simply as a differentiation that does not affect identity; there is, undeniably, a difference between the civilian identity and the performer identity, even though both inhabit the same narrated body and the same narrator body. While one is naked – literally – in front of the cameras, the other is hiding in a “civil” world, often preoccupied with the social repercussion that the unveiling of their professional activities may cause to their physical security and family life. The porn name, therefore, acts as a protective alias which grants its holder both anonymity and a new identity, as discussed in the passages below:

Ori became Ashley that day, and Tyler became Trent - our new porno identities (BLUE, 2011, p. 25).

I even upgraded my name. My given name, Linda Ann Hopkins, wasn't going to cut it in this industry, so after trying out a few stage names, I settled on Tera Patrick (PATRICK, 2010, p. 86).

If you talk to a performer – say her name is Lily Black (remember, I am making this up) – at some point, Lily might say, ‘Sometimes I have to take Maria out for the night. Sometimes Maria needs a night out.’ When she says that, she’ll be talking about herself. She isn’t crazy or confused. She knows exactly who she is (LEE, L. 2015, p. 230).

We’d left World Modeling with our porno names Ashley and Trent to protect our true identities. Everyone jokes around with the idea in grade school, like how it has to be your street name and a pet name or middle name. I toyed with the technique, which would have been Rene Sorrento—pretty good, except that I have a cousin named Renee, and I just couldn’t do that to her. I was Ashley Blue, for no deep reason other than that it was different from my own name. Honestly, I thought that using the alias would keep me anonymous. I truly believed that people wouldn’t know it was really me if I changed my name. If anyone asked or accused me of

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<sup>20</sup> “surge em sintonia com o narcisismo da sociedade midiática contemporânea, mas, ao mesmo tempo, produz uma reflexão crítica sobre ele” (KLINGER, 2007, p. 47).

doing a porn, I could just say, “No, look at the name. My name is Oriana Small. That video says Ashley Blue. It’s not me (BLUE, 2011, p. 28).

Catherine Viollet, researcher at the Institute of Modern Texts and Manuscripts (ITEM, CNRS-ENS) and one of the founders of the “Genesis and autobiography” group, considers that the identification of "referential" information and mechanisms of fictionalization of the self in a given author and their work to situate the places and moments of this textual elaboration and to increase the possibility of knowledge of linguistic, poetic and stylistic criteria proper to autofictional writing, allows autofiction to function as an important filter for studies of the genesis of a work (2007). However, we must still remember that the process of the pornographic performer self-fictionalization begins long before the writing of the autobiographical text itself, starting in fact when they become performers. It is in the prewriting of their autobiography, when writing or fictionalizing their own sexual/pornographic identity – external and public – that the metanarrative process of pornographic identities begins. Therefore, the invention of the pornographic alias announces the birth of a pornographic identity which, in fact, initiated long before the decision to rename oneself, as exposed by Australian performer Monica Mayhem, in her autobiography: “I was going to start anew in Southern California and reinvent myself as Monica Mayhem.” (MAYHEM, 2009, p. 51). Using my Twitter profile (@annabvolk), I asked some performers through Direct Message (DM) “If you were to write "The Autobiography of XX", how would you start it? (not the actual words, but where in time would you start?)”. Here are some of the answers I received.

Alana Evans (@alanaevansxxx) - I've already started writing my book and I began at the beginning of my life. The things of been through (sic) are what lead me to porn, so I started with my childhood. (03/26/2017)

Arabelle Raphael (@ArabelleRaphael) - Depends if I was retired already or not. I would probably share more of pre-porn like when I'm not trying to sell sex, you know? [...] Take for example a performer had a drug addiction people don't want the darkness when they jerk off.

- But then you would see the autobiography as a marketing tool for Arabelle Raphael, the brand?

Arabelle Raphael (@ArabelleRaphael) - A highly edited and modified version yes  
- And an unabridged and raw version?

Arabelle Raphael (@ArabelleRaphael) - After I retired not during, no. I also escort so it is more complicated. And have a very colorful life hahaha  
- So after you retire and you write that autobio where will it start? At what point in your life?

Arabelle Raphael (@ArabelleRaphael) - Probably childhood.

- Why?

Arabelle Raphael (@ArabelleRaphael) - Because the past isn't separated from the present. (03/25/2017)

Courtney Trouble (@courtneytrouble) - Oh damn, I guess 1996? 10th grade?

- How come?

Courtney Trouble (@courtneytrouble) - I got put on emergency expulsion at my high school because I wrote a few riot grrrrrl zines. And transferred to an alternative high school across the street from queer youth group, where they let me publish. So age 16. (03/25/2017)

Dana Vespoli (@danavespoli) - In May 2003, which is when she was born. That is when Dana Vespoli was created - when I started in the business. It's funny, because I have had so many names having been a stripper for many years and then now my porn name. It reminds me of the T.S. Elliot poem @the naming of cats. (03/25/2017)

Ela Darling (@eladarling) - I have no idea. Probably around my transition from libraries to porn and flash back to earlier stuff as needed. (03/24/2017)

Kayla-Jane Danger (@KJDangerDoll) - It would start with the first time I met "DJ Jess" when I was 17 years old and living in NYC. Jess is a long story in himself, but the short story is that he gave me a ton of regular gigs gogo dancing in parties he DJd... he was friends with Joanna Angel, and told me we had to meet... it was the year Burning Angel was launched but I had no idea about that at the time... He introduced me to Joanna and as soon as I turned 18 I did my first shoot for Burning Angel (just topless). Jess was always a support, cheerleader, friend - until he passed away in April 2015... He was the beginning of "Kayla Jane Danger" the persona, the adult actress/model, etc... although it took moved to LA to add "Danger" to my name. (03/25/2017)

Missy Martinez (@MissyXMartinez) - It would actually be an A-Z and would start with A IS FOR ANAL. [...] Missy was always someone I always was but didn't have the courage to embrace. I now say the things that everyone thinks but doesn't say. I'd say Missy was born 4 years ago. Whether someone hates or loves what I say, I'm at least making them feel something. (03/26/2017)

Sovereign Syre (@SovereignSyre) - Probably 6th grade. Getting in trouble for having a seance. I was new in school, so I was blamed. It was the first time I understood how far out I was from good. (03/24/2017)  
(VOLK, 2017b)

If the genesis of the pornographic identity lies in the personal life of the performers – clearly linked to the elements which have led said performers into finding it necessary to forge a new identity, and distinctively marked by an initial date which is connected to the discovery of a bordered sexuality which does not fit heteronormative social patterns – it would be easy to assume that the exposure of the physical body to the lenses and public eyes would preach a maximum unveiling of identity. But to what extent is the unfolding of a personal history more intimate than the exposure of the body itself? The two following quotations, extracted from the works analyzed in this research, clearly point towards this question.

The following, then, is a true story. It is more naked than I have ever allowed myself to be seen. (JAMESON, 2004, p. iii)

The world has seen every fold of my most private body parts, and yet, I feel this book is my most exposing venture yet. (AKIRA, 2015, p. ix)

This discussion is conveniently embedded in a peculiar moment in the literary / textual production of women writers: the recent and thunderous editorial success of erotic love novels has brought to the public eye an explicit, active, verbal, and narrative female sexuality. Although still linked to a potential "happily ever after", the female erotic body has taken a new shape in these new writings by verbalizing desires and a sexual subjectivity that surpasses the barriers of regulatory discourse, being narrated in more explicit and instinctive ways, distancing itself from the format which previously presented sexuality veiled by linguistic artifices that suggested - without showing - what some women really want after all.

When we take into account the new parameters of sexual writing introduced by novels of erotic love, we come closer to the border between erotic and pornographic. Undoubtedly, these distinctions are based on cultural notions of morality, aesthetics and religious values. Some argue that the fundamental distinction is that pornography depicts sexually explicit scenes, while the erotic seeks to tell a story that involves sexual themes without explicit elements of human sexuality. For others, although both the erotic and pornographic intend to arouse the sexual interest of the observer, the goal of pornographic production is commercial only – a difference that falls apart when you consider an erotic literature production with an exclusively commercial purpose. For Roland Barthes, the pornographic is the erotic fragmented. While the pornographic fetishizes and focuses on the sexual organs, Barthes argues that the erotic does not make the sexual organ its main focus (BARTHES, 1980, p. 41). What, in my opinion, separates the erotic from the pornographic is an attitude towards sex and human sexuality that can be inferred from the look (dare I use the word "objectively") released towards the finished product, the focal point where the view of the observer converges its expectations and intentions. The veiled speech hides what could be explicit if not under the threat of having its position relegated to the realm of pornography: a masculine space that remains mined territory for women. The distinction between erotic and pornographic, then, becomes the differential space for the separation of genres within the production of sexual discourses.

Since autobiography is positioned as one of the main strands of identity process and political resistance among narrative genres, a self-narrative written by women presents itself as study material with great potential for the restructuring of social relations by encompassing gender, class, and race issues, as discussed below:

If women's personal narratives both present and interpret the impact of gender roles on women's lives, they are especially suitable documents for illuminating several aspects of gendered relations: the construction of a gendered self-identity, the relationship between the individual and society in the creation and perpetuation of gender norms, and the dynamics of power relations between women and men. Since

women's life stories recount a process of construction of the self, these narratives are potentially rich sources for the exploration of the process of gendered self-identity (THE PERSONAL NARRATIVES GROUP, 1989, p. 5).

It becomes fundamental to observe *self-expression* in the context of the representation of female identity, of subordination, of otherness, and of power relations in areas previously considered exclusively male. For sure the self-writing of pornographic performers have already ventured into this sphere, as illustrated in the passages below:

Adding body dysmorphia to all the other complicated intersections between women and pornography - including preexisting ideas about performer agency, choice, and social shame - the resulting experience *could* complicate a woman's interaction with porn so as to adversely affect her self-image (RYAN, 2013, our emphasis).

Though watching porn may seem degrading to some women, the fact is that it's one of the few jobs for women where you can get to a certain level, look around, and feel so powerful, not just in the work environment but as a sexual being. So, fuck Gloria Steinem (JAMESON, 2004, p. 325).

I'm not ashamed that I've worked at an S&M dungeon, stripped, escorted, or that I currently have sex for Money every Day. On the contrary, I AM proud of myself for having the guts to indulge in my desires (AKIRA, 2014d, p. 15)

Porn has shaped me, is shaping me, into a woman I had always hoped I would be. I've become more confident, more empowered, more sure of myself than I've ever been (AKIRA, 2014d, p. ix).

At the risk of sounding overly dramatic, almost every time I shoot a sex scene, I fall a little bit in love. It's the only way I can describe it. Not necessarily with my partner, but just in general. With the situation. In love with being watched. In love with being on display. in love with being the center of attention, for those precious thirty-five minutes. many people say they disconnect themselves when they have porno sex; I'm the opposite. I'm more present than ever. I try to take in everything and let it turn me on more. Rather than dumb myself, I take advantage of the situation and take in as much as I can. A producer set this up for me - to have sex with one of the top talents in the world, in front of a camera, giving me this opportunity to take the world on; why would I remove myself? Why would I try to mentally put myself anywhere but here? I look into my partners' eyes, and try to portray how much I want them. I tell them how much I like the way they fuck me. I show them how desperate I am for them to feel the same (AKIRA, 2014d, p. 17).

The possibility of direct, unmediated interaction with the public brought about by the Internet and social media platforms presents itself as a more dynamic and fluid way of persona construction: interjections about identity and memory, made in digital media – more specifically Twitter, blogs, Instagram and Facebook profiles – have guaranteed for pornographic performers a modality of self-expression unheard of until now. As Italo Moriconi points out: "The discussion of the work today is a triangulation between the author's protagonist of the public space media (author, actor: mask), the reference text he wrote, and

the general public.” (MORICONI, 2006, p. 161)<sup>21</sup>. The internet has enabled this triangulation to happen both dynamically live and in *real time*. The construction of the social identity of pornographic performers takes place without external mediators, even though it is explicitly directed to the public eye, and it takes place online, obeying the fragmentation of a subject, echoing the impossible single truth questioned by Doubrovsky, as Ana Cláudia Viegas points out when she states that

[i]n contemporary self-writing such as self-portraits circulating on the web and the autofictions of first-person novels, the subject creates fictionally and enacts this empirical dimension. The creation of self-images brings life and art, fiction and reality together, establishing with the reader, instead of an "autobiographical pact", a "phantasmatic pact" with a reading contract that does not promise the revelation of truths, but the unfolding of the author in several characters (VIEGAS, 2007, p. 21-22<sup>22</sup>).

Pornography can be – and should be – approached not as a one-dimensional destructive force, but rather as a collection of the many ways in which various groups have (re)presented their own sexuality. To deny the existence of objectification and over sexualization of the female body is impossible. However, to deny the possibility of a self-subjectification to the woman who engages in it, by not recognizing her own discourse, means to (re)construct her as *tabula rasa* liable to contamination by wrong fantasies and by wrong desires when, in reality, the acceptance of (female) sexualization promotes a greater agency and freedom in sexual representation.

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<sup>21</sup> *A discussão da obra hoje é uma triangulação entre o autor protagonista do espaço público midiático (autor, ator: máscara), o texto de referência por ele escrito e o público em geral* (MORICONI, 2006, p. 161).

<sup>22</sup> *Nas “escritas de si” contemporâneas, como os auto-retratos que circulam na web e as autoficções dos romances em primeira pessoa, o sujeito se cria ficcionalmente e encena sua dimensão empírica. A criação de auto-imagens aproxima vida e arte, ficção e realidade, estabelecendo com o leitor, em vez de um “pacto autobiográfico”, um “pacto fantasmático”, cujo contrato de leitura não promete a revelação de verdades, mas o desdobramento do autor em diversos personagens* (VIEGAS, 2007, p. 21-2).

## 2 HERSTORY

The debate about pornography should not be controlled only by academics, politicians or religious groups; a voice should be given to the performers and their complex experiences.

*MILLER-YOUNG*

The pornographic industry takes up a quarter of the internet, and more online traffic is derivative of quick peeks at pornography than the three biggest social media interfaces together. It officially generates 13,000 movies and 15 billion dollars in profit every year, opposing the 600 movies and 10 billion brought in by Hollywood's mainstream productions. The entire industry is believed to have a net worth of 97 billion dollars, meaning that the porn industry makes more money than Major League Baseball, The NFL and The NBA combined<sup>23</sup>. As of 2018, CNN reported that between fifty and ninety-nine percent of American men, and thirty to eighty-six percent of American women, consume pornography. A popular pornographic website alone logs about 2.4 million visitors per hour – more than an estimated 6,000 visitors per second<sup>24</sup>, in a total of 28,5 billion views in 2017 (BENES, 2018).

With these figures, it becomes undeniable that it is impossible to ignore the massive presence of pornography in contemporary society. The popular influence of pornography has even reached lexicon, altering the meaning of the word:

Porn is different than erotica, which may also feature sex but has more artistic merit. And it's different from a mainstream movie with a few sex scenes. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart famously said about porn, "I'll know it when I see it." *People can also use the word porn to describe anything singular in focus that's meant to stir the senses: food porn, for example, features endless, excessive pictures of amazing looking food*<sup>25</sup> (our emphasis).

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<sup>23</sup> STRANGE BUT TRUE. How Big is the Porn Industry?. 19 Feb. 2017. Medium: @Strange\_bt\_True. Retrieved from: [https://medium.com/@Strange\\_bt\\_True/how-big-is-the-porn-industry-fbc1ac78091b](https://medium.com/@Strange_bt_True/how-big-is-the-porn-industry-fbc1ac78091b). Accessed on: 31 May 2019.

<sup>24</sup> KERNER, Ian. Is there such a thing as 'good porn'? CNN, 13 Mar. 2018. CNN Health, International. Retrieved from: <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/11/07/health/ethical-porn-ian-kerner/index.html>. Accessed on: 31 May 2019.

<sup>25</sup> PORN. In: Vocabulary.com. New York: Vocabulary.com, 2019. Retrieved fom: <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/porn>. Accessed on: 31 May 2019.

However, talking about pornography is still regarded as either very low or very highbrow, as if this discussion belonged exclusively to extreme segments of society: pornography is viewed as either a mundane product to be consumed by the masses or as disguise for an elaborate, rebellious offspring of the erotica art form, porn being a field of studies which must sanitize the element of pleasure (GABRIEL, 2017, p. 308). “It’s the crazy aunt in the attic,” an AT&T official told the New York Times. “Everyone knows she’s there, but you can’t say anything about it” (EGAN, 2000). Indeed, pornography is not nearly as discussed as it should be, given the space it takes up in contemporary culture, and different groups discuss pornography from different points of view. From internet forums to academic debates, nearly all segments of society have something to say about pornography, be it supporting or condemning it, as if it were not “possible to conceive of a version of pornography which would not force us to make such a stark choice between sex and virtue – a pornography in which sexual desire would be invited to supper, rather than to undermine, our higher values” (SMITH, L., 2012) As a phenomenon that, although massive in numbers, is very little owned by its (secretive) consumers, pornography surely configures as one of the most debatable issues of contemporary culture, and not rarely do we find someone who claims to be an expert about it, even never having actually participated in it in any form.

But what about the people who are inside the pornographic industry? What have they to say about the industry that hosts them? Who are they? Whom do we talk about when we talk about pornography? Do we talk about the bodies displayed on the screen, or do we talk about the lives which are tangled in this industry? When does our gaze turn from the action before us to ourselves when we talk about pornography, and how much of it is understood as a materialization of inner, personal desires?

## 2.1 A little herstory of pornographic films

The first porn films were produced in the mid-1890s, more or less simultaneously with the advent of the moving picture. The earliest known surviving explicitly pornographic film, *À L’Écu d’Or ou la Bonne Auberge*, dates from 1908. In America, the first pornographic film reported is a ten-minute vignette, *A Free Ride* (1915), originating what were then called stag films, presented by their producers to small groups of men at Elks lodges, bachelor parties, brothels and the like, well into the twentieth century. Stag films (also known as Blue movies

or Smokers) were short in duration – about 12 minutes – and silently depicted explicit or graphic sexual behavior intended to appeal to men. They were produced illegally and anonymously, with anonymous performers, usually prostitutes and their johns, who did not mind displaying their genitals but sometimes masked their faces, and presented no narrative coherence or continuity, never failing to grant the viewer with what Linda Williams called the "meat shot" (WILLIAMS, 1999, p. 73), which was a closeup, hardcore depiction of genital intercourse. "The films were essentially documents, documentaries, of two or more people satisfying their urgent desires. The furtiveness was part of the kick for the all-male audience at a Rotary meeting or frat-house smoker.", said journalist Richard Corliss (CORLISS, 2005). Scholars at the Kinsey Institute believe there are approximately 2000 films produced between 1915 and 1968 (KINSEY Institute, 2019).

In Europe, stag films were often screened in brothels, and the films were more explicit than in the United States. Around 1961, Italian pornographer Lasse Braun was able to accumulate funds from the profit gained with so-called *loops*, ten-minute hardcore movies which were distributed to 60,000 American peep show booths (SCHLOSSER, 2004, p. 143). In 1969, Denmark became the first country to abolish all censorship laws, enabling pornography – an example soon followed in the Netherlands. There was an explosion of pornography commercially produced in those countries, including, at the very beginning, child pornography and bestiality porn. Now that being a pornographer was legal, there was no shortage of businessmen who invested in plant and equipment capable of turning out a mass-produced, cheap but high-quality product. Vast amounts of this new pornography, both in magazines and in film, needed to be smuggled into other parts of Europe, where it was sold "under the counter" or (sometimes) shown in "members only" cinema clubs<sup>26</sup>.

The arrival of legalized hardcore pornography on 8mm film imported from Europe sparked the American crave for production, and American filmmakers soon followed suit, initiating the pornographic film industry in the new world. As the Supreme Court passed down a number of rulings that more closely pinpointed the definition of prosecutable obscenity in 1973, full-scale adult theaters began to pop up, and big-budget, full-length feature films showing explicit sex were played on the silver screen. In 1960 there were about twenty theatres in the U.S. that exclusively showed erotic movies. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, they spread to the rest of the country, and by 1975, 750 pornographic theatres existed

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<sup>26</sup> PORNOGRAPHY: The Secret History of Civilization. Directed by: Chris Rodley; Kate Williams; Dev Varma. Produced by: World of Wonder for Channel 4 Television Corporation. New York: Koch Vision, 2006. 2 DVD (312min), color, widescreen.

in the U.S. (WILLIAMS, 2004). "There was something exciting about pornography," Norman Mailer says in the *Inside Deep Throat* documentary<sup>27</sup>. "It lived in some mid-world between crime and art. And it was adventurous." Mainstream newspapers and notorious movie critics (the NY and the LA Times, even Chicago Sun-Times' Roger Ebert) and magazines (Time and Newsweek) reviewed the more ambitious soft-core movies in the 60s and then the hard-core pornography of the 70s, when it was legally exhibited or, in other words, had been approved in the three-prong standard test (or the Miller test), the United States Supreme Court's test for determining whether speech or expression can be labeled obscene - lacking "serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value" -, in which case it was not protected by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and could be prohibited<sup>28</sup>.

Andy Warhol released *Blue Movie* in July 21, 1969, the seminal film in the Golden Age of Porn and the first adult erotic film depicting explicit sex to receive wide theatrical release in the United States<sup>29</sup>. *Blue Movie*, according to Warhol, was a major influence in the making of *Last Tango in Paris* (1972), an internationally controversial erotic drama film, starring Marlon Brando, and released a few years after *Blue Movie* was made. Journalist Vincent Canby, in his article entitled "Screen: Andy Warhol's Blue Movie", published in July 22, 1969, describes the feature the following way:

ANDY WARHOL'S "Blue Movie" is heterosexual pornography, somewhat more cheerful than the sort of thing shown at smokers, much longer (105 minutes) than the usual stag films, and fitted out with lots of random talk about such subjects as athlete's foot, Vietnam, cops, Nixon, Lindsay, termites and praying mantises. In its crucial moments, it's just as cold and mechanical as any conventional blue movie, principally because it's impossible to be a third party in such circumstances and not feel slightly absurd, aware of physical details that — once seen — really aren't very interesting in themselves (CANBY, 1969).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> INSIDE DEEP THROAT. Written and directed by: Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato; Produced by: Fenton Bailey, Randy Barbato and Brian Grazer. USA: Imagine Entertainment in association with HBO Documentary Films, 2005. 1 Video (90 min). Black and white and color.

<sup>28</sup> UNITED STATES. Supreme Court. Miller v. California [Marvin Miller v. State of California], 413 U.S. 15 (1973). Argued January 18-19, 1972. Reargued November 7, 1972. Decided June 21, 1973.

<sup>29</sup> CANBY, Vincent. Screen: Andy Warhol's Blue Movie. *The New York Times*, New York, 22 July 1969. Digitized version of an article from The Times's print archive Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/1969/07/22/archives/screen-andy-warhols-blue-movie.html>. Accessed on: May 31, 2019..

<sup>30</sup> CANBY, Vincent. Screen: Andy Warhol's Blue Movie. *The New York Times*, New York, 22 July 1969. Digitized version of an article from The Times's print archive Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/1969/07/22/archives/screen-andy-warhols-blue-movie.html>. Accessed on: May 31, 2019.

In reality, the unscripted 105 minutes of *Blue Movie* were filmed in 1968 and portray Viva (playing herself) and Louis Waldon (playing himself) spending an idyllic afternoon together in his apartment in New York City in bed, discussing social issues before engaging in a sexual act. They later shower together and prepare to leave the apartment. About the lack of script, Warhol stated that

[s]cripts bore me. It's much more exciting not to know what's going to happen. I don't think that plot is important. If you see a movie of two people talking, you can watch it over and over again without being bored. You get involved – you miss things – you come back to it ... But you can't see the same movie over again if it has a plot because you already know the ending... (...) I still think it's nice to care about people. And Hollywood movies are uncaring (BOCKRIS, 2004, p. 326-27).

Unlike *Blue Movie*, *Mona* (1970, also known as *Mona; the Virgin Nymph*) had a plot and helped pave the way for other pornographic productions that later appeared in theaters. *Mona* (Fifi Watson) is engaged but wants to remain untouched until she is married as promised to her mother (Judy Angel). However, since her childhood she has had a fascination for blow jobs, which her fiancée (Orrin North) benefits from during a picnic party. Afterwards, *Mona* also has cunnilingus performed on her by a prostitute (Susan Stewart). In a movie theatre, *Mona* masturbates and provides oral sex to a nearby male patron (Gerard Broulard). The movie ends when Jim ties *Mona* to a bed, and all her previous partners surround her and engage in a very long, intense oral sex party. The first film containing unsimulated non-penetrative sex scenes to be released in the theaters in America, *Mona* was produced by Bill Osco and directed by Michael Benveniste and Howard Ziehm, but the film was screened without credits for both producers and performers due to legal concerns. Shot in three days, *Mona* set the pattern to be followed by the 70s porno chic productions: it had the boy/girl scene, the girl/girl scene, the orgy scene, and then the kiss-off.

In 1972, director Gerard Damiano's film *Deep Throat* changed the universe of pornographic movies. Filmed in six days and having cost around 23 thousand dollars, the 62 minutes of *Deep Throat* not only established a new way to cinematographically portray sex – Damiano invented the “money shot”, or “cum shot”<sup>31</sup> – but it was also the first pornographic production to receive attention from mainstream media, even being mentioned by Johnny Carson on his popular TV show *Tonight Show*<sup>32</sup>. Ironically, the film premiered three days

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<sup>31</sup> A cum shot is the depiction of human ejaculation, especially onto another person. The term is typically used by the cinematographer within the narrative framework of a pornographic film and, since the 1970s, has become a leitmotif of the hardcore genre. A cum shot may also be called a cumshot, come shot, cum blast, pop shot or money shot.

<sup>32</sup> CORLISS, Richard. That Old Feeling: When Porno Was Chic. *Time*, New York, Tuesday, 29 Mar. 2005. Retrieved from: <https://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1043267-1,00.html>. Accessed on: 31 May 2019

before the break-in at the Watergate Hotel in Washington D.C., and the appropriation of its title by the unravelling of facts that culminated in Richard Nixon's subsequent resignation casted *Deep Throat* permanently into American history, making it the first pornographic film to "burst on the public consciousness" (WILLIAMS, 1999, p. 98).

*Deep Throat* is the story of a young woman (Linda Lovelace) who is disappointed to find herself surprisingly indifferent to sex. After a sex party provides no help, her friend Helen (Dolly Sharp) recommends that Linda visit a psychiatrist, Dr. Young (Harry Reems). Upon examination, the doctor solves the mystery: because of an eccentricity of her anatomy – her clitoris is located in her throat – Linda finds oral sex more gratifying than conventional intercourse. Linda settles for a job as the doctor's therapist, performing her particular oral technique – thereafter known as "deep throat" – on various men, until she finds the one to marry. Meanwhile, the doctor documents her exploits while repeatedly having sex with his nurse (Carol Connors). Linda finally meets a man who can make her happy, agreeing to marry him. The 62-minute film depicts 15 sex acts, including seven of fellatio and four of cunnilingus. The movie ends with the line "The End. And Deep Throat to you all".

The movie was surrounded by legal problems, from being banned in 25 states to Harry Reems being indicted with 11 other individuals and four corporations for conspiracy to distribute obscenity across state lines in April 1976. His conviction was overturned on appeal in April 1977 because his activities in making the film occurred before a U.S. Supreme Court ruling on obscenity in 1973 (*Miller v. California*), and Reems was granted a new trial. The charges against Reems were dropped in August of 1977, but the movie had already basked in the spotlight casted upon it for five years by that time. *Deep Throat* was chosen as one of 100 landmark films of all time in the new *Radio Times Guide to Films 2007*. The list was selected by the magazine's film reviewers and staff. *Radio Times'* editor Andrew Collins justified the selection by saying their list is not about cinematic quality, but more about the influence a film had on society. "*Deep Throat* is not necessarily recommended for everyone. It's a quite badly made film, but to deny its influence would be pure snobbery," Collins said (WEST, 2006).

The importance of the cum shot in pornographic movies is indisputable. The film *Behind the Green Door*, which opened in December 17, 1972, featured a six-minute-long sequence described by Linda Williams as "optically printed, psychedelically colored

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doublings of the ejaculating penis” (WILLIAMS, 2008, p. 141). Williams explores the importance of the money shot in the expanded paperback edition of her 1989 book:

As a substitute for what cannot be seen, the money shot can be viewed as yet another form of cinematic perversion – as a fetish substitute for less visible but more "direct" instances of genital connection. As a shot whose name derives from mainstream film industry slang for the film image that costs the most money to produce (porn producers pay their male performers extra for it), the money shot can also be viewed as an ideal instance of commodity fetishism. Finally, as the most blatantly phallic of all hard-core film representations, the money shot can be viewed as the most representative instance of phallic power and pleasure (WILLIAMS, 1999, p. 95).

Steven Ziplow's *The Film Maker's Guide to Pornography* (1977) states: “There are those who believe that the come shot, or, as some refer to it, the "money shot," is the most important element in the movie and that everything else (if necessary) should be sacrificed at its expense. Of course, this depends on the outlook of the producer, but the one thing is for sure: if you don't have the come shots, you don't have a porno picture.” (MILLS, 2001, p. xix). The money shot has become a personage in the pornographic industry itself, as furtherly discussed by Williams:

For the first time in the history of the American cinema, a penis central to the action of a story appeared "in action" on the big screen of a legitimate theater. (...) Thus with the money shot we appear to arrive at what the cinematic will-to-knowledge had relentlessly pursued ever since photographer Eadweard Muybridge first threw the image of naked moving bodies on the screen of his lecture hall and ever since Thomas Edison ordered his technicians to photograph a sneeze: the visual evidence of the mechanical "truth" of bodily pleasure caught in involuntary spasm; the ultimate and uncontrollable - ultimate because uncontrollable - confession of sexual pleasure in the climax of orgasm (WILLIAMS, 1999, p. 100-101).

Damiano's contribution to the dissemination of pornographic references inside American culture, however, goes beyond this: it was his film that transformed Linda Lovelace into the first pornographic household name in the American mainstream culture, and if the 70s is known as the Golden Age of Porn, it is much due to this construction of this porn star persona. As Damiano himself poses, “In the very beginning, there were no porno actors and actresses. So everybody had to be taught. Not-- not taught in the sense of taught. Taught how to be natural”<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> INSIDE DEEP THROAT. Written and directed by: Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato; Produced by: Fenton Bailey, Randy Barbato and Brian Grazer. USA: Imagine Entertainment in association with HBO Documentary Films, 2005. 1 Video (90 min). Black and white and color.

## 2.2 How far does a girl have to go to untangle her tingle?

Faster than Raquel Welch, more powerful than Gloria Steinem, able to swallow tall men in a single gulp. Look! Up on the screen! It's a sword-swallower! It's a vacuum cleaner! It's Linda Lovelace! Yes, Linda Lovelace, strange visitor from Bryan, Texas, who came to the World Theater with powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal women. Linda Lovelace, who can change the course of film history, bend flesh in her bare throat, and who, disguised as a mild-mannered nymphomaniac for a small metropolitan film company, fights a never-ending battle for free speech, free love, and the French way!

*Richard Smith*

Born in The Bronx, New York in January 1949, Linda Susan Boreman passed away on April 22, 2002 at 53 years old due to trauma and internal injuries, consequences of an automobile accident. But Linda Lovelace had long been gone: Boreman retired from the industry in 1974, having made several loops (short movies which were illegally sold, much similar to the stag films) but only five pornographic features (*Dogarama* (1969), *Piss Orgy* (1971), *Deep Throat* (1972), and the R-rated sequel *Deep Throat Part II* (1974) and *Linda Lovelace for President* (1975), rated X). She wrote or co-wrote four biographies including *Inside Linda Lovelace* (1974), *The Intimate Diary of Linda Lovelace* (1974), and *Out of Bondage* (1986), and later went on to become a Christian and a spokeswoman for the anti-pornography movement. In her third autobiography *Ordeal* (1980), she claimed that her abusive husband, Chuck Traynor, had threatened and coerced her into performing in the movies. A film about Lovelace's life and career, entitled *Lovelace* and starring Amanda Seyfried as the famous porn star, was released in 2013. Directors Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman teamed up for the film, which focuses on Lovelace's life from age 20 to 32 and is based on the screenplay by Andy Bellin.

Lovelace became the first poster child for the entire *Porno chic* industry – a term coined by journalist Ralph Blumenthal in his 1973 article for *The New York Times*<sup>34</sup>, in

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<sup>34</sup> BLUMENTHAL, Ralph. "Hard-core" grows fashionable – and very profitable. *The New York Times*, New York, 21 June 1973. Digitized version of an article from The Times's print archive. Retrieved from: <https://www>

which he analyses not only the film, but also the cultural and political impact of *Deep Throat* throughout America, resulting in “Chambers, in *Behind the Green Door*, and Lovelace, in *Deep Throat*, [being] the first hard-core female stars to reach a mixed-sex mass audience in the new wave of pornographic features that started in 1972” (WILLIAMS, 1999, p.156). Journalist Richard Smith wrote, in 1973, that

[t]he skillfully orchestrated public image of Linda Lovelace that began to emerge cast her as a candid, totally liberated small town girl from Texas just having a ball doin' a-what comes natcherly. Asked by Richard Hill of OUI Magazine why she made porn flicks, Linda answered, "Because I am an exhibitionist. I dig doing it. I want everybody to see it. And I make good money."  
 Time magazine good-naturedly described Linda as a "MAD magazine cloning of Little Annie Fanny and Mary Marvel" in an article about the trial entitled "Wonder Woman".  
 Playboy described her as "The all-American girl without the all-American hang-ups. Bright as a button, sweet as honey, carnal as hell." In a full-length, pictorial feature called "Say 'Ah!,'" she revealed a "warm, friendly personality that falls short of being gregarious" and a "free and easy sensuality that seems healthy, natural, spontaneous."  
 (SMITH, R. 1973, p. 20)

“In short, Linda and *Deep Throat* had become part of the national vocabulary and mythology” (WOLFF, 1973, p. 18). Although the entire movie was written around her, Lovelace was paid US\$ 1,250 for her role in *Deep Throat*<sup>35</sup> – and claimed Traynor took all the money. However, the Linda Lovelace brand was once worth over US\$ 100,000<sup>36</sup> – while the movie itself is considered to be the most profitable movie ever made, adding up to a (claimed) gross of 600 million dollars. The success of *Deep Throat*, which generated millions of dollars worldwide, encouraged the production of more such films and the ascension of more such stars, such as Marilyn Chambers (*Behind the Green Door*, 1972), Georgina Spelvin (*The Devil in Miss Jones*, 1973), Gloria Leonard (*The Opening of Misty Beethoven*, 1976) and Bambi Woods (*Debbie Does Dallas*, 1978).

It is interesting to point out the obvious change on the theatrical posters of pornographic films promoted by Lovelace’s popularity (Figures 15 to 17). While before *Deep Throat* there was little – if any – attention given to the name of the performer, the Lovelace phenomenon instigated producers to give emphasis to the main performer’s name in the movie poster. Suddenly, the unnamed female protagonist was no longer unnamed: her alias

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.nytimes.com/1973/01/21/archives/porno-chic-hardcore-grows-fashionable-and-very-profitable.html. Accessed on: 31 May 2019.

<sup>35</sup> It is important to mention that Harry Reems, on the other hand, received a 300 dollars stipend to play the doctor in the film.

<sup>36</sup> LINDA Lovelace Net Worth. Celebrity Net Worth. Retrieved from: <https://www.celebritynetworth.com/richest-celebrities/actors/linda-lovelace-net-worth/>. Accessed on: 31 May 2019.

was known as a potential brand that would attract the audience to the movies and, therefore, deserved to be highlighted in the movie poster, sometimes even coming in the marquee.

Figure 15 - Protest in front of a cinema



Caption: a protest in front of a cinema that was screening *Deep Throat* and *The Devil in Miss Jones* in New York City. Notice that the marquee does not bring the name of Marilyn Chambers.

Source: RETRO HOUND, 2010.

Figure 16 – Outside of Pru Cinema



Caption: First Boston showing of *Deep Throat*. Notice that Lovelace's name appears, although still not fully highlighted.

Source: WCVB Collection, 1974.

Figure 17 – Pru Cinema’s marquee



Caption: Photo by Charles B. Carey. The marquee advertising the film "Deep Throat" is pictured outside the Pru Cinema on Boylston Street in Boston on March 12, 1974. Lovelaces's name comes before the name of the film.

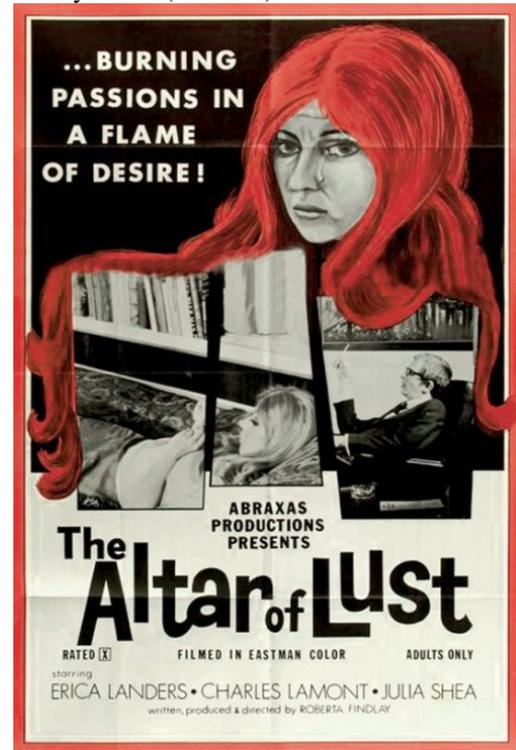
Source: THE BOSTON GLOBE, 1974.

Figure 18 shows posters from adult features, from a pre-*Deep Throat* 1970 to an early 1980s production. Notice how the female performer's name gradually gains more visibility in the posters.

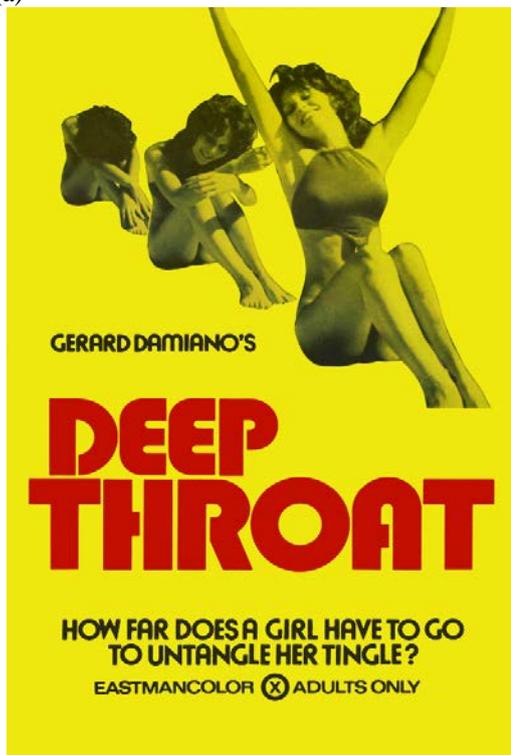
Figure 18 – Posters from adult features from 1970s to early 1980s (continue)



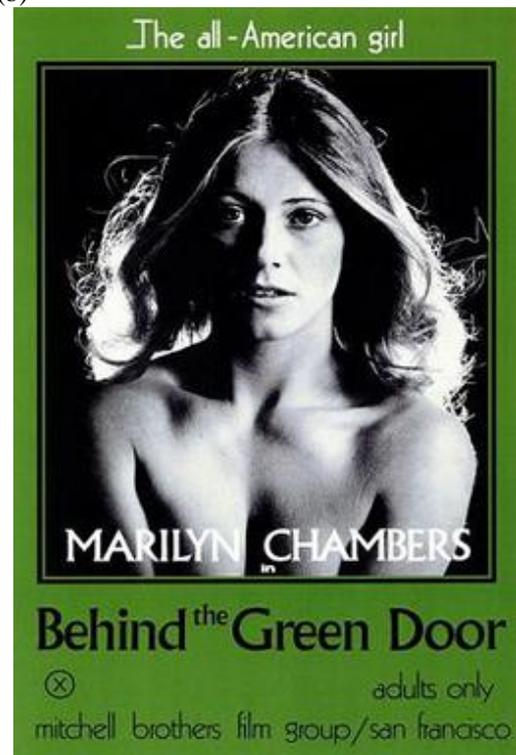
(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

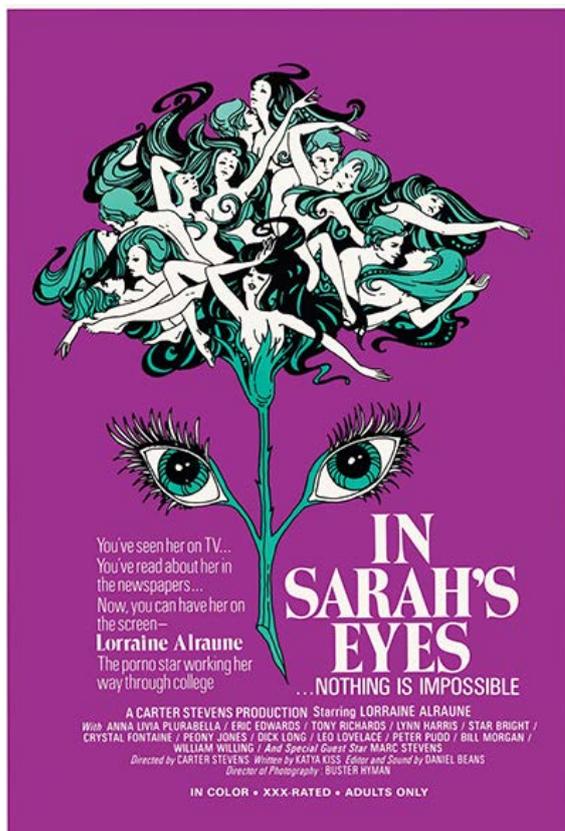
Figure 18 – Posters from adult features from 1970s to early 1980s (continuation)



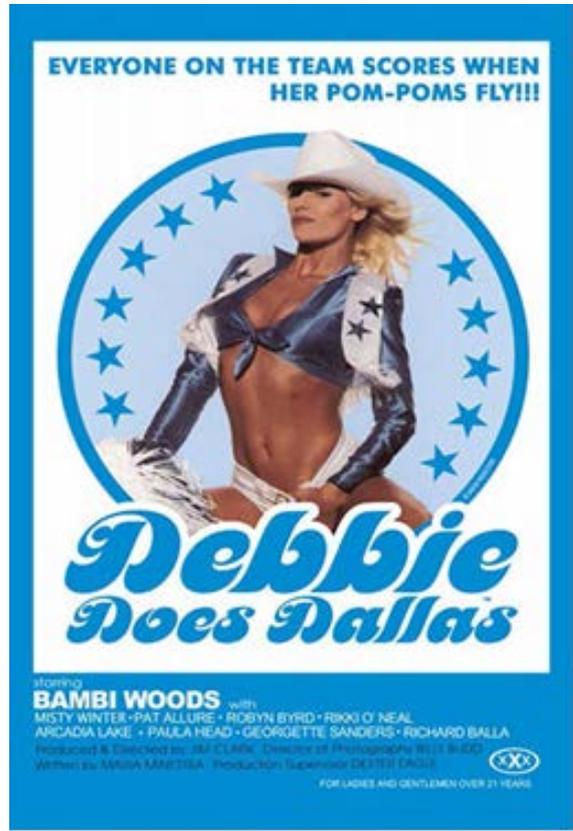
(e)



(f)



(g)



(h)

Figure 18 – Posters from adult features from 1970s to early 1980s (conclusion)



(i) (j)  
Caption: Caption: (a) – 1970; (b) – 1971; (c) – 1972; (d) – 1972; (e) – 1973; (f) – 1974; (g) – 1975; (h) – 1979; (i) – 1980; (j) – 1981.

Source: IMDB.COM, 2019.

Another interesting fact worth mentioning is related to the Wikipedia's entry "List of pornographic performers by decade". The obvious increase in the personification of the pornographic performer is explicit in the number of entries, which increase exponentially throughout the decades<sup>37</sup>:

Table 1 – Compilation of the Wikipedia's entry "List of pornographic performers by decade"

Decade	Female	Male
1950	1	0
1960	1	4
1970	30	44
1980	29	40
1990	156	93
2000	198	72
2010	44	6

Source: The author, 2019.

<sup>37</sup> LIST of pornographic performers by decade. In: WIKIPEDIA: the free encyclopedia. Florida: Wikimedia Foundation, 2019. Retrieved from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_pornographic\\_performers\\_by\\_decade](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_pornographic_performers_by_decade). Accessed on: 31 May 2019.

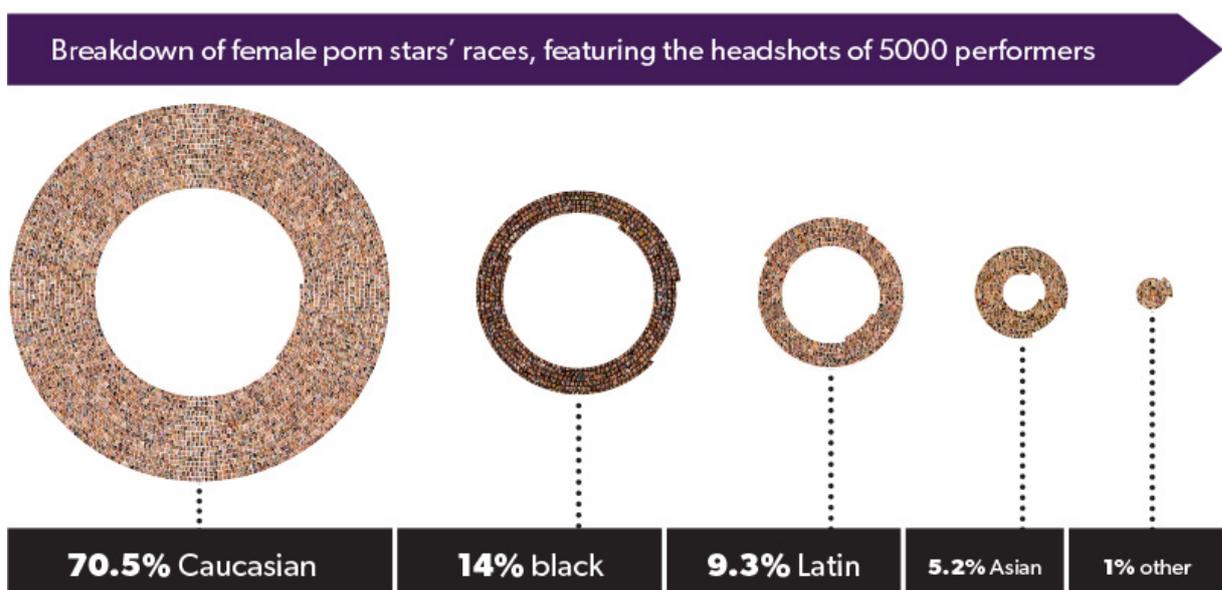
### 2.3 But who is the porn star?

But where do we go from here? Will Lovely Linda become the Davey Crockett of the Seventies, maybe replace Fred Flintstone on jelly glasses, Spiro Agnew on watches, Mickey Mouse on alarm clocks - or will the real purpose of the film the premise that sex should be fun, dirty but giggly - be the surviving reminder of all this hubbub?

*Greg Jackson*

In 2013, data journalist John Millward compiled information of over 10,000 porn stars extracted from the world's largest database of adult films and performers, the Internet Adult Film Database (IAFD). IAFD's data is based on various sources, including performers' modeling profiles and the information they give during interviews in the porn films themselves. It took Millward six months analyzing it to discover the truth about what the average performer looks like, what they do on film, and how their role has evolved over the last 40 years (Figures 19 and 20).

Figure 19 – Female porn stars' races according to John Millward's compilation



Source: MILLWARD, 2013.

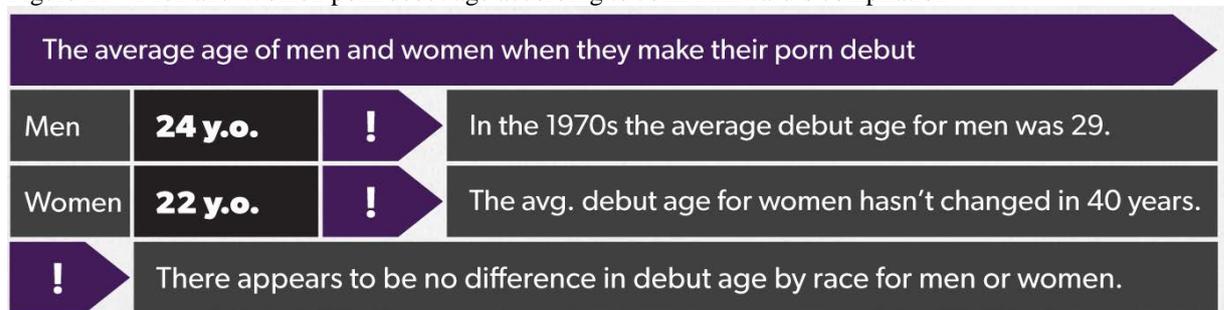
Figure 20 – Female porn stars' hair colors according to John Millward's compilation



Source: MILLWARD, 2013.

The data shows that the average age of a woman getting into porn is 22 years old — as it has been for the last 40 years — and that is the case for all women, regardless of race. Men have been progressively getting into the business at a younger age, though: in the 1970s their average debut age was 29, but now it's 24 (Figure 21). Porn stars of both genders have also been progressively retiring earlier: in the 1970s, men stayed in porn for an average of twelve years, and women for nine. Now men on average quit after four years, and women after three. The average height for female porn stars is 165 cm, against the 161,8 of civilian women.

Figure 21 – Men and Women porn debut age according to John Millward's compilation



Source: MILLWARD, 2013.

Of the top 10 90s female porn stars per Ranker, all but one (Silvia Saint) are reported not to have undergone breast augmentation procedures; of the top 10 porn stars from the 2000s per the same site, just five are reported to have had boob jobs, and in recent years, natural, less curvy body types such as Stoya's and Riley Reid's have gained mainstream attention (plus devoted fans). Demand for content featuring stars with larger bodies is up too. "I think the industry has shifted a lot as far as the body types that are popular — it is definitely more inclusive," adult performer Channel Preston tells Cosmopolitan.com. "Where in the '90s, the body type used to be an idealized, unobtainable fantasy, now it has shifted to the girl-next-

door look ... Many performers today you would never guess were porn stars in their everyday life."<sup>38</sup>

### 2.3.1 A body that is constructed like a name: meet The Lees

*Nikki Lee* and *David Lee* are the most common first and last names of porn stars. The porn industry, and porn names, have changed drastically since the 1970s, when Linda Lovelace and Marilyn Chambers, for example, chose to keep their first names. Between the 80s and 90, the big trend was doing a takeoff on celebrity names like Angelina or Jennifer. Many performers nowadays take on celebrity names, funny names, super-explicit names, elegant classy names, or girl-next-door ones. The joke around is that your porn name is composed by taking your first pet's name and following that up with the name of your street. Jokes aside, a porn name must be commercially appealing, first and foremost, but it must also be easy to spell and should effectively represent the performer since, depending on potential popularity, this could be how they will be recognized by the masses after retirement and beyond.

Indeed, female porn stars definitely seem to choose last names that evoke notions of femininity, sexiness and sweetness (Love, Star, Rose), while men go for stronger, more masculine ones (Steel and Stone). Arnold M. Zwicky, Professor of Linguistics at Stanford, confirms my suspicion in some of his lecture notes: '[performers'] choices are very far from a random sampling of names current in the United States, or of current American family names'.<sup>39</sup>

Many are the reasons why a performer picks a specific name, as the interaction depicted in Figure 22 shows.

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<sup>38</sup> MACMILLEN, Hayley. Ralph. "6 Ways Porn Is Different Now Than in the '90s" Jan. 30, 2017 In: <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/a8616324/porn-industry-adult-entertainment-changes/> Last accessed May 31, 2019.

<sup>39</sup> ANS 2005 - American Name Society - 2005 Annual Meeting - Oakland Marriott City Center, Oakland, California - January 6–9, 2005 - <http://www.stanford.edu/~zwicky/pornstar.pdf> Last accessed May 31, 2019.

Figure 22 – Online interaction between The Author and a performer



Source: The author, 2019.

Collected through online and face-to-face interviews, these are the most common reasons:

- Pop culture influence:

**Ryan McLane:** "My first name is Ryan and my last name... I obviously got from Die Hard." (NELSON, 2016).

**Sadie Santana:** "My stage name came about because I'm a huge Carlos Santana fan! I knew what I wanted my last name to be, and when I spoke with my agent at the time they said there hadn't been a Santana in a while so it was perfect! Now as for my first name, I had no clue. I actually really suck at coming up with names. Even when I was a stripper, the bouncers came up with my name. So I let my agents at the time come up with it. We voted, and "Sadie Santana" was born." (BOX, 2015)

**Leya Falcon:** "Leia, Princess Leya. Falcon, Millennium Falcon. Changes the spelling of Leya cuz I didn't wanna get sued." (NELSON, 2016).

**Tanya Tate:** "It's a Marvel thing. You know, like how Stan Lee used to remember his character's names? They all had the same first and last name initials: Bruce Banner, Peter Parker, Susan Storm, Reed Richards, and Matt Murdock. At one point when I was living in the UK I was given the nickname of "Top Totty" at the gym I attended. I liked the initials TT, and so Tanya Tate was made." (BOX, 2015).

- Personal history:

**Missy Martinez:** "I wanted to choose something catchy. "Missy" was a nickname I'd had growing up and I wanted to embrace my heritage, so "Martinez" paired well with the first name and it all made sense." (BOX, 2015; NELSON, 2016).

**Sheridan Love:** "My porn name is actually my middle name and my great-grandmother's first name."

**Amber Ivy:** "Amber is my real name, but Ivy comes from poison Ivy but not Batman, comes from my favorite band, The Cramps."

**Kagny Lynn Karter:** "It's my real name but I added the Karter, which I wish I wouldn't have because first of all it's too long, second of all my real name is way hotter anyway, third of all every time I have to sign autographs it's like super duper

long, and I didn't know anything about branding, I wasn't super business savvy." (NELSON, 2016).

**jessica drake:** "I chose "jessica" because I wanted an actual girl's name opposed to naming myself after a car or a fruit. "drake" came from riding in the back of a pickup truck in Texas with my fingertip on a map – it landed on Drake, Arizona. "jessica drake" became all lowercase when I couldn't decide how to sign it on posters at my first convention when people wanted my autograph - I hated my capital "J". I went home and practiced signing it, and loved the name all in lower case: "jessica drake." Now I realize the submissive implications, but that works for me, too."

**Chanel Preston:** "I used the name "Chanel" when I started stripping. I wanted a real name that wasn't too common, so Chanel it was. Once I got into porn, the person who helped me break into the industry thought of the last name "Preston". We thought it sounded classy and had a nice ring to it, so I went with it." (BOX, 2015)

**Lisa Ann:** "Once the studio caught wind of my self-introduction, they called and let me know that we would be going with my simple real name: Lisa Ann. I wasn't super-thrilled about it at the time, to be honest. But fast forward to now, and I am glad I used my real name as, over the years, I have become more and more comfortable with my existence in this world as a well-known porn star. Plus it is WAY less awkward for me to introduce myself with my real name than it would be to introduce myself as something like 'Dick Nasty'" (ANN, 2015, p. 95).

#### - Commercial reasons:

**Nina Hartley:** "Long story short, I picked "Nina" mainly because it's a name that Japanese tourists could pronounce (I took Japanese as my second language in high school). Also, I have ancestors from Alsace-Lorraine, and "Nina" is a name from that region. As for "Hartley", I chose that because it's close to my real last name, and I was a fan of Mariette Hartley on the Polaroid commercials she did with James Garner back in the '80s."

**Kelly Madison:** Having a cool porn name wasn't what was important to me when choosing the name "Kelly Madison", rather it was choosing a name that I could relate to but most importantly that I could purchase the .com for. I also wanted something similar to my real name so that I didn't end up with an identity crisis. My husband and I purchased a baby name book to research popular names and back in 1999 the most popular was Madison. I thought that would be a nice last name – it seemed smart, trendy, and I just liked how it read. My real name is Ellie, but unfortunately elliemadison.com was already gone. So I put a K in front of my name, and KellyMadison.com was born." (BOX, 2015).

The porn-name-as-rebirth story is common among the stars who choose to leave their old identities behind and rechristen themselves. The most practical reason for the porn name is believed to be to keep family and friends unaware of the porn star's new line of work, one that would be an unwelcome surprise. However, social media stardom and the possibilities to migrate into mainstream entertainment might be what has been driving people into the XXX world. "These days, a successful porn star has to be a social media maven, primping for the camera and constantly doing what it takes to earn followers. With that kind of online visibility, a choice has to be made: fully disclose, in your own terms, the XXX career to your parents (they're going to find out anyway) or let them discover it." (SNOW, 2017).

According to Mireille Miller-Young, associate professor of feminist studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara,

Making a name in the world of adult entertainment is the key to becoming a porn star. For performers, making a name includes creating a captivating persona and becoming a savvy financial manager and entrepreneur. Selling themselves as brands or commodities means that stars must spend a great deal of time on promotion, including at photo shoots, trade conventions, and entertainment- industry events, and on their websites, on social networks, and in chat rooms, to foster a fan base. The women I spoke with were hungry for the fame, visibility, and mobility that such recognition brings. Beyond the desire for starring roles, video box covers, magazine layouts, long- term contracts, and lucrative pay rates, many women spoke about using their celebrity to cultivate opportunities beyond the formal roles of porn stars. They spoke of working toward greater control over their image and work and the ability to move behind the camera or into the mainstream entertainment industry. Those interested in making a career out of the job talked about wanting to produce their own websites, direct their own films, manage their own talent agencies, and license models of their body parts for the sex- toy market. For these women, having fame means being treated as a successful star, a desirable object of beauty, and a savvy businesswoman garnering admiration, if not respect (MILLER-YOUNG, 2014, p. 213-215).

The implications of choosing to christen oneself with another name are endless. However practical reasons the change may carry, for porn performers there is also the matter of separating their private life from their art. More than a planned change, it generates the creation of a new persona, something implicitly understood and unquestioned by the audiences. The body directly presented as the center of the performance is a real body, but the alias it carries may or may not be the one given to it on the occasion of its birth. “Performers have the ability to move in and out of classifications, spaces, ‘communities’, wearing the various titles that each space or event requires of them. The spectator, unless aware of the other roles the performers have worn, accepts that what they see is all that there is” (HEDDON, 2008, p. 32). The performer’s agency on self-naming might be considered the first official act of self-writing: by carefully crafting an alias, pornographic performers are giving genesis to the public persona they are about to present to society – one that will come with all the moral judgement that the work they perform carries. This personal performance bears similarities to autobiographical writing. At the center of the autobiography is a subject who supposedly knows her/himself, and this individual self is conceived as a rational being with the body subordinated to consciousness and thought. As Sidonie Smith writes,

Reflecting on its essential nature, abstracting its teleological boundaries of experience, the self thereby presumes the possibility of self-knowledge. As subjectivity metamorphoses into objectivity and impartiality, the self assumes its privileged status as the origin of meaning, knowledge, truth. [This] teleological drift of selfhood concedes nothing to indeterminacy, to ambiguity, or to heterogeneity. Such purposiveness leads to the silencing of that which is contingent, chaotic, tangential to a true self (SMITH, S. 1993, p. 8).

### 2.3.2 But why porn?

Porn isn't about the money for everyone [to be honest].

Clearly in any industry there isn't one reason  
why everyone would get involved.

*Chelsea Poe*

For some performers, pornography is a path to college  
and out of poverty. For others, it is a chance to make a  
statement about female pleasure.

*Mireille Miller-Young*

According to Mark Spiegler, an adult talent agent, at the turn of the last century the average female porn star would be making about \$100,000 a year. Today, that figure is closer to \$30,000. "Performers are hustlers now, and they have to get very creative when it comes to maintaining their income and reaching an audience," Chanel Preston, performer and chairperson of the Adult Performer Advocacy Committee, tells *Cosmopolitan.com*. "They accomplish both of these through feature dancing, selling merchandise, webcamming, [and more]" (DOORN; VELTHIUS, 2017). The most successful stars — the ones who last more than four to six months in the business — usually leverage some combination of these or make their way to the business side. So, what drives new women into an industry that is clearly suffering financially from the issues of internet piracy? Here are some extracts collected from various sources, in which performers explain in their own words why they entered the pornographic industry.

Why a porn star? Let me explain, I look at things differently, I realized at a young age if we were clones of one another the world would be a bloody boring place. My decision to be a porn star was based on business, one of financial gain and development. I had a 2-year plan, I wanted to move away from my small town in Bristol to London. I wanted to get myself off and out of the council system. I lived off benefits as a single parent and I wanted more for myself. Did I expect anyone else to pay for my dreams to be turned into reality, no, I wanted to do that for myself. I was very happy to put in the hard graft and do it for myself. Did I like sex more than anything else, if I'm honest, yes!

That's where it started, with a dream and some passion. I knew I had the skills to make money from the world's biggest industry, I knew sex sold everything. I began

by writing a 2-year business plan covering finances and marketing and I made a start. It really was that simple.

What made the difference is 18 years ago it was pre-internet. There was money to be made unlike today. The salary was very attractive, some weeks I easily made \$10,000 depending on what, or when I choose to work. Did my business plan work? You bet it did. Did I sleep myself to the top of my workplace? Damn right I did, I was supposed to. Unlike many other people in regular jobs. (YOUNG, 2019).

"But why would you do porn?"

People often ask me this question. They know I am a freshman at Duke University, and their shock and incredulity are apparent when the rumor they've heard whispered or read on a chat board turns out to be true.

However, the answer is actually quite simple. I couldn't afford \$60,000 in tuition, my family has undergone significant financial burden, and I saw a way to graduate from my dream school free of debt, doing something I absolutely love. Because to be clear: My experience in porn has been nothing but supportive, exciting, thrilling and empowering (A., Lauren; XoJane, 2014).

Why did you decide to work in adult films and how did you first get into it?

I actually got into in by accident. My plan wasn't to get into porn and to be a porn star. The opportunity kind of fell into my lap. I grew up in Scotland and I was going to fetish clubs in London and I was really involved in the fetish scene and Torture Garden and all that sort of stuff, so I was kind of doing risqué shoots anyway. I had modelled for Burning Angel before just doing a photo shoot and they asked me if I wanted to come to Paris and shoot some scenes. I was like, yeah, I want to go to Paris, so I went, and I did it. When I was there it wasn't how you'd think a porn set would be it, it was just a bunch of friends hanging out, having sex and getting paid. I just kind of thought that was really cool. Honestly, I thought it was just so much fun so I shot all my first scenes – like my first girl-girl scene, my first boy-girl scene, my first anal scene – all in that one week because I didn't ever think I would do it again. I was just kind of doing it for sh\*\*s and giggles. Then fast forward a year when I was living in LA and very very broke, and not really doing anything else and the opportunity again just fell into my lap. I had a lot of fun with it so I thought, why not? So, here I am now. (DIAMOND, 2016)

I was firm: I didn't have daddy issues, mine were purely financial. That's what happens when you're poor (SNOW, 2017b).

What motivated you to get into the adult industry?

It was the year I lost my virginity. I was fourteen and I'd started exploring my sexuality—that was when I first decided I want to be in porn. When I was in high school, I was criticized for my sexuality. I identified as bisexual at that point but now I've shunned categories. Early on I was engaging in sex with both men and women and if I was having sex with boys, I was considered a slut and when I was having sex with girls I was criticized as being a lesbian. No matter what I did I was criticized for my sexuality (WHITE, 2017).

For instance, I have found that women enter the pornography industry because they are enthusiastic about its potential for lucrative, flexible and independent work. Women who previously worked in the retail sector or in nursing found that pornography offered them greater control of their labor, and surprisingly, it treated them with more humanity. Some women found that it enabled them to rise out of poverty, take care of their families or go to college. Others emphasize the creative aspects of pornography, and say it allows them to increase their economic mobility while also making a bold statement about female pleasure (MILLER-YOUNG, 2013).

But money does matter: Jenna Jameson famously built a porn company that was making \$30 million a year by 2005. Today, with more performers competing for fewer roles, performers are more likely to be making a middle-class income. This becomes even more critical when we take into consideration the proliferation of “free” porn websites, which promote and deliver pornographic scenes without any consideration towards any legal rights regarding the use of image of pornographic performers. As porn producer and performer Jiz Lee wrote for *The Daily Dot*, “I once came across a video I was in that had been viewed over 50,000 times. If even a fraction of those views had been paid for, the small porn company would have been able to produce another feature, pay performers more, and increase the quality and frequency of their work” (DONNELLY, 2017).

## 2.4 Female agency

Porn was always for men. Now that women are finally allowed to have a sexuality, we are looking for stimulus... Well, now is the time to start making films for women. That doesn't just mean quality and scripts. It means what's the sex all about.

*Candida Royale*

Cinema, in general, has always been seen as male territory and the feminist critique of cinema uses psychoanalysis to justify this affirmation. In 1975, Laura Mulvey was already inspired by Freud's writings to explain how cinema "reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle" (MULVEY, 1989, p. 15). Mulvey seeks in psychoanalytic theory the grounds for a profound critique of the image – especially that produced in the context of Hollywood cinema – as a product of the predominance of the masculine gaze, to which the image of woman exists exclusively as the passive object for the male eye. Psychoanalytic theory is used as a "political weapon" to unmask forms as “the unconscious of patriarchal society helps to structure the form of cinema” (MULVEY, 1989). Using Freudian concepts such as scopophilia, voyeurism, castration complex, narcissism and especially fetishism, the article establishes what would be the mechanism of pleasure and fullness of

narrative fiction cinema and proposes the rupture of this mechanism, the destruction of this form of pleasure and the production of a "new language of desire" (MULVEY, 1989, p.16) The masculine and feminine positions – and the active / passive heterosexist division: the man is the look; the woman, the image – are clearly demarcated in the analysis of the image and the gaze in cinema. These positions, however, are complicated by the notion of castration complex, in which the woman represents the lack and the threat of castration represents the sexual difference. For Mulvey, the male unconscious has two possibilities to escape from this castration anxiety: by placing the woman in a devalued position, as someone who must be saved or punished (voyeurism), or by the complete negation of castration, substituting or transforming the female figure by / in a fetish. This is the mechanism of fetishist scopophilia, quite visible in the cult of the movie star. American professor Ann Kaplan argues that “the psychic patterns created by capitalist social and interpersonal structures (especially the late-nineteenth-century forms that carried over into our century) required at once a machine (the cinema) for their unconscious release and an analytic tool (psychoanalysis) for understanding, and adjusting, disturbances caused by the structures that confine people” (KAPLAN, 1983, p. 24).

In her article “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure’” (MULVEY, 1999) Mulvey introduces two new elements to her analysis: the woman as a spectator and the female character as the center of the narrative. In this article, the central assumptions of “Visual pleasure and Narrative Cinema” are maintained. However, it speaks more directly about the subject of women in the audience and makes it more explicit that the male gaze – rather than the "man's gaze" – represents a position, a place. When she talks about the "male gaze," Mulvey is talking about the masculinization of the viewer's position, masculinity as a point of view, and the woman in the position of spectator assuming the masculine place of gaze and pleasure, reliving what would be for psychoanalysis the lost aspect of their sexuality, that is, the active, phallic and pre-symbolic phase of the sexual life. Here, of course, Mulvey is referring to Freud's theory of "femininity" and the constitution of feminine subjectivity as a crossing to passivity, in which the active phase would remain as mere memory. Mulvey's analysis that in the traditional narrative cinema the gaze (and subjectivity) is masculine, active, and phallic has served as the backbone for much of the feminist theory and critique of cinema. Numerous readings, reinterpretations and critiques of this masculine-looking thesis were produced in the field of the feminist critique of cinema –much of that criticism focused

on what would be the absence of a reflection on a "feminine gaze" that could be contrasted with the masculine.<sup>40</sup>

For Ann Kaplan, psychoanalysis, while an important tool for feminist analysis, can be an oppressive discourse in that it places women in a position that is contradictory to the possibility of becoming subjects and the possibility of autonomy. It is fundamental for her to ask questions about whether the gaze is necessarily masculine and whether it would be possible to construct other structures in which women would look without necessarily being in the masculine position (KAPLAN, 1983, p. 24). She also asks how psychoanalysis can be useful for understanding our socialization within patriarchy and how commercial films are able to "satisfy the desires and needs created by the family organization of the XIX century" (KAPLAN, 1983, p. 24).

Kaja Silverman, professor of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania, questions in what sense, represented only as an object of masculine discourse, a woman is or can be a subject (SILVERMAN, 1988). Teresa de Lauretis, Italian author and Distinguished Professor Emerita of the History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in an instigating piece on desire and narrative inspired by Mulvey's relationship between sadism and narrative (DE LAURETIS, 1984), opens the door to a less pessimistic critique by asking how much vanguard cinema should or should not abandon the narrative, considering that the most interesting works currently in the cinema are neither anti-narrative nor anti-Oedipal. Another topic to be explored is how disruption with the heterosexual matrix of sexuality would (or would not) destabilize the idea of a female image corresponding to a masculine look. Like Judith Butler's question about the song sung by Aretha Franklin, "You make me feel like a natural woman": and if the listener is a woman? (BUTLER, 1991). That is, what would mean – for both the production and the interpretation of images in the cinema – the introduction of a desire that escapes heteronormativity? Feminist film theorist Jackie Stacey (STACEY, 1992) discusses the question of resizing the discussion about the gaze by considering the specifically homosexual pleasures of the female spectator and the need to rethink the rigid distinction between desire and identification. The preoccupations that marked these works remain, especially those related to the necessity of a counter-reading of the classic cinematographic narrative, the critical reflection on the politics of the look in the cinema and the audiovisual production, and the special attention to the other possibilities of looking, like for example a feminine gaze operating the camera in pornographic productions.

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<sup>40</sup> In addition to Mulvey, Claire Johnston and Pam Cook are two other key references in the introduction of psychoanalysis to the feminist analysis of cinema in the 1970s. See Cook and Johnson (1988).

Mulvey's analysis that in the traditional narrative cinema the look (and subjectivity) is masculine, active, and phallic has served as the backbone for much of the feminist theory and critique of cinema. Numerous readings, reinterpretations and critiques of this masculine-looking thesis were produced in the field of the feminist critique of cinema – too much of that criticism focused on what would be the absence of a reflection on a "feminine gaze" that could be contrasted with the masculine. As Linda Williams puts it, the principal problem for women pornographers is how to authenticate female pleasure within a genre symbolically dominated by the phallus, regardless of whether or not the penis is visually represented (WILLIAMS, 1999). Without a visual female equivalent to male ejaculation within the cinematic terms of the genre, the construction of female sexual pleasure is fragmented across sounds and images, while male sexual pleasure is most often depicted in the form of ejaculatory punctuation.

## 2.5 Club 90 – the genesis of feminist porn

Before there was *Sex and the City*, there was Club 90.

*Annie Sprinkle*

We're the first generation of porn actresses to become stars.

*Candida Royalle*

In 1983 a group of four well-known female porn stars (Gloria Leonard, Candida Royalle, Veronica Vera and Annie Sprinkle) got together to throw a baby shower for Veronica Hart, described in the two quotations below.

At the baby shower all of Veronica's friends from outside the industry eventually left and there was nothing but women from the industry all together. We had such a wonderful time together. We were hanging out, not really having a political discussion. We were just playing together. We said "gee, we should do this more often on a regular basis." There was such a feeling of camaraderie. This was the spring of 1983 and we started meeting in the summer of 1983 (ROYALLE apud BELL, 1994, p. 144).

Leonard: While working on a baby shower for Veronica, I said something that Annie was surprised to hear me say, something negative about the pornography industry. She said I was always reluctant to bad-mouth my feelings about people in this industry for fear of not being accepted or getting work.

Hart: And never having heard it from anyone else in the business.

Leonard: Being a vet of therapy of one sort or another over the years, it occurred to me that perhaps there was a need for women who've had sex on film to discuss some of the causes and effects of being in this business — as related to self-esteem, family, friends, men, and just things in general. And Annie was particularly going through a rough time with a lot of ambivalence, so we put this group together. (FUENTES; SCHRAGE, 1987, p. 41-43).

From this meeting sprung “Club 90”<sup>41</sup> (Figure 23), named after Annie Sprinkle’s address, a supporting / conscience raising group for female pornographic performers that discussed ideas such as the lack of realism, the poor quality of plots, character motivation, scripts and acting in pornographic productions.

Figure 23 - The original Club 90 members



Caption: Annie Sprinkles, Candida Royalle, Veronica Hart, Veronica Vera and Gloria Leonard (from left to right).

Source: CINEKINK, 2015.

In January 1984, Carnival Knowledge – a New York based feminist performance group – approached the members of Club 90 asking if they would consider being part of a performance series entitled *The Second Coming* at the Franklin Furnace. The aim of the series was "to explore a new definition of pornography, one that is not demeaning to women, men

<sup>41</sup> Kelly Nichols and Sue Nero would later join the club.

and children" and bring feminists and sex workers together to ask: could there be feminist porn? A porn that does not denigrate women or children? These questions were posed in a manifesto painted in red on the Furnace wall (Figure 24). The feminist artists in Carnival Knowledge had first met Candida Royalle, Veronica Vera, and Annie Sprinkle at a porn trade show. They all got together for a year, transformed the Club 90 meetings into a performance, wrote a proposal, and got approval from Martha Wilson – *The Furnace*'s patron. Hundreds of artist books and videos with sexual themes went on display on the main floor. Gossamer fabric breasts hung in the stairway leading to the basement, and Carnival Knowledge featured "domestic" pieces dealing with everything from eating to masturbation. Eight different performance events, included mudwrestling done by artists, exhibitions of art works and sales/displays of adult books and sexual aids culminated on *Deep Inside Porn Stars*, which promised "live performances by seven top film stars from the sex industry."

Figure 24 – Manifesto painted in red on the Furnace wall



Caption: "The Fiery Furnace: Performance in the '80s, War in the '90s".  
Source: CARR, 2005.

The performance was a stylized reenactment of their support group meetings in a set depicting Annie Sprinkle's living room, even involving tea and cookies, and "sought to remind the audience that sex workers are mothers, daughters, wives and women - just like their feminist counterparts" (BORGREEN; GADE, 2013, p. 335). *Deep Inside Porn Stars*

was advertised as a show in which porn stars would recreate on stage “what goes on at the ongoing support group meetings between seven celebrated sex stars.” Photographer Dona Ann McAdams, who shot the publicity still, "Feminists and Porn Stars," in a Broadway loft, suggested that the participants pose topless with signs identifying them as either "Feminist" or "Porn Star" – but many traded signs in a show of solidarity (Figure 25). The publicity was still widely reproduced in publications ranging from *Hustler* magazine to the *Village Voice*.

Figure 25 – Dona Ann McAdams’ publicity still



Caption: "Feminists and Porn Stars", by Dona Ann McAdams, 1984, silver gelatin photograph, 8 x 12 inches. Source: McAdams, 1984.

The show began with the members in evening gowns, moved to personal narratives from each, and concluded with them having replaced their "sexy" clothes for sweatpants, sweatshirts and flannel night gowns thus revealing the "true" woman underneath. Changing clothes in the course of their re-enactment, the seven stars transformed “from glamour girls to regular girls’ (SPRINKLE, 1993)<sup>42</sup>. While the performers chitchat on the background about mundane issues, each one of the women narrates her own story while slides documenting different life points were projected on the background. Collectively, they discuss their

<sup>42</sup> POST PORN MODERNIST. Written and performed by Annie Sprinkle. Directed by Emilio Cubeiro. Location: Highways Performance Space, Santa Monica, California, USA. California: Franklin Furnace: performance and politics collection, 1993. (98min), color. Retrieved from: <http://hidv1.nyu.edu/video/pg4f4t4g.html>. Accessed on: 30 Aug. 2019.

childhood, first sexual experiences, church, shyness, pets, children – all topics which challenge the commonly held assumption that somehow, porn performers and other sex workers have lives which are different from other women's.

The first one to narrates her story was Candida Royale, and she opened by telling everybody her civilian name: Candice. While showing slides of herself in a Girl Scout uniform, tapdancing at a presentation, high school pictures and slides of herself singing in clubs in San Francisco, Royale brings out the ambiguity of being in porn:

People ask me why I went into porn... money was my superficial reason. But there are lots of other more complex reasons: attention, a need to express my sexuality under the guise of another being: Candida; and fear of success. I've had lots of time since my last film three years ago to try and understand my choices. With the help of an incredible shrink, I've grown to appreciate what porn did for me. As well as how much it hurt me. (ROYALLE apud BELL, 1994, p. 146)

Sprinkle's monologue happens while slides of Ellen and Annie are juxtaposed and unites her two identities. She says:

I was born Ellen Steinberg. But I didn't like being Ellen Steinberg very much, so I simply invented Annie Sprinkle.  
 Ellen was excruciatingly shy. Annie was an exhibitionist.  
 Ellen was fat and ugly, and no one seemed to want her. Annie was voluptuous and sexy, and everyone seemed to want her.  
 Ellen desperately needed attention. Annie Sprinkle got it.  
 Ellen had to wear ugly flannel nightgowns like this one and horrible orthopedic shoes. Annie Sprinkle got to wear sexy lingerie and six inch high spiked heels.  
 Ellen was scared of boys and absolutely terrified of sex, but Annie was fearless. (You can close your eyes at any point during the evening.)  
 Ellen was dull and boring. Annie was exciting.  
 Ellen was a nobody from the suburbs of Los Angeles. But Annie Sprinkle got a little bit famous. She even got asked for autographs and she lived in Manhattan.  
 Ellen Steinberg wants to get married and have children, but Annie Sprinkle wants fame and fortune and a career.  
 After all these years I've come to realize, that as hard as it is for me to believe, Ellen Steinberg really must be Annie Sprinkle. And the truth is, Annie Sprinkle is still very much Ellen Steinberg. (SPRINKLE apud BELL, 1994, p. 148)

*Deep Inside Porn Stars* deconstructs the division between the pornographic and the non-pornographic by giving the audience a glimpse into the non-pornographic side of well-known porn stars. Far from being pornographic in its essence, “the performance became part Chorus Line and part consciousness-raising session about the performers’ personal lives and working experience, inspired by a support group the women had organized the previous year”, says professor at the Yale School of Drama and award-winning playwright and theater critic Elinor Fuchs. (FUCHS, 1996, p. 132). It is undeniable the nature of self-writing that is embedded in the discourses of the seven porn performers in *Deep Inside Porn Stars*: by narrating their (hi)stories in first person, be it their civilian or their performer story, they tinted

those performances with a heavy coat of autofiction and auto-writing, giving the audience the opportunity to witness first-hand the narration of an oral autobiography, destined to the same audience that consumes the narrating/narrated body, as written by Associate Professor of Cinema Studies at the University of Oregon Peter Alilunas:

During Royale's moment in the spotlight, she pulled a sweatshirt dress over her gown and offered her real name to the audience. She presented an *autobiographical* slideshow with pictures from her childhood, from various stage shows, and in the San Francisco jazz clubs where she had performed.<sup>70</sup> She ended the monologue with what amounted to a sneak preview: "I see myself as a revolutionary of sorts, maybe one day making women's films to replace the tired old men's films that still exploit women and promote archaic sexuality. After all, I'm still young and I have a lot of dreams." It was the most public pronouncement yet of her ideas and goals (ALILUNAS, 2013, p. 277, our emphasis).

It was through the performer's eyes and words that their identity – born or constructed – was narrated to the listeners. They held the power of point of view, approach, selection, choice of words. The performers presented were the performers chosen by the performers themselves: both to be created, lived, performed and, ultimately, delivered to an audience that took their words as first-person testimonials of their own stories.

## 2.6 "Finally... there is Femme"... and "it's only the beginning."

The group opened possibilities for the active participation of women in pornography, this time not relegated exclusively to the front of the camera: aware of the new "capital" residing in the star value of their own names" (WILLIAMS, 1989, p. 249) – as it is made clear in Royale's statement that "All of a sudden my name was becoming sort of reborn and I was not reaping any of the rewards. [...] I decided if they are going to exploit my name and make money, I'm going to exploit my name and make money off of it too but I'm going to do it with something I believe in, that I feel has integrity" (ROYALLE, 1993) – Candida Royale moved on to found Femme Productions in 1984 in New York, with the goal of making erotica based on female desire, as well as pornographic films aimed at helping couple therapy. "Her productions are aimed more to women and couples than to the standard pornographic audience of men, and have been praised by counselors and therapists for depicting healthy and realistic sexual activity" (CAMERON, 1990). In an interview given to *The Age*, Royale stated that she tried to avoid "misogynous predictability", and depiction of sex in "...as grotesque and graphic [a way] as possible" (ROYALLE, 2004). She also criticized the male-

centeredness of the typical pornographic film, in which scenes end when the male actor ejaculates. Femme's films – directed by Club 90's members – are not “goal oriented” towards a final "cum shot"; instead, the films depict sexual activity within the broader context of women's emotional and social lives. “I created Femme in order to put a woman's voice to adult movies and give men something they could share with the women in their lives. You'll find them to be less graphic, and you'll also find story lines, good original music and real characters of all ages” (ROYALLE, 2019). Although she never directly mentioned Ziplow's formula<sup>43</sup>, in many interviews Royale insisted in reinforcing the idea that Femme Productions refused to follow any “formula” for erotic film making because it dealt with “women's sexuality by figuring it as the map on which male pleasure was traced” (ALILUNAS, 2013, p. 291). Although she at first refused to name her productions as ‘feminist’, the intentions of the studio clearly align with feminist discourse: “I wanted to prove it was possible to make an artfully crafted adult movie that could appeal to intelligent adults and not insult them and degrade women,” said Royale<sup>44</sup>. “Rather than pornography causing us to act out in certain ways, I saw contemporary pornography as a reflection of the

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<sup>43</sup> Stephen Ziplow, in his *Film Maker's Guide to Pornography* (1977), provides a checklist of the various sexual acts that should be included in a porno, along with the best way to film them. This extremely functional guide to the would-be pornographer is useful because it also goes to the heart of the genre's conventionality. The list includes:

1. "Masturbation": with or without paraphernalia, but always including well-lit close-ups of genitalia. Although Ziplow does not specify the sex of the masturbator, it is clear from his description that he assumes the act will be performed by a female ("It's always a lot of fun to watch a pretty lady getting off on her own body," p. 31). Compared to the stag film, in fact, hardcore feature-length pornography has very few scenes of male masturbation.
2. "Straight sex": defined as male-female, penis-to-vagina penetration in a variety of positions, which Ziplow enumerates as man on top, woman on top, side to side, and "doggie" (p. 31).
3. "Lesbianism": here Ziplow is terse; all he says is that it is "a major turn-on to a larger portion of your heterosexual audience" (p. 31).
4. "Oral sex": defined as both cunnilingus and fellatio. Zip low notes that "cunnilingus presents technical difficulties" of visibility, since the man's head obscures the "action," whereas "blow jobs," which present no such difficulty and have the further advantage of facilitating the money shot, are "always a hit with the porno crowd." His advice in both cases is to block out the action well in advance (p. 31).
5. "Menage a trois": a threesome with male or female as the third party (p. 32). (It seems to go without saying that while two female members of such a configuration may involve themselves with each other, it is taboo for two men to do so in heterosexual hard core.)
6. "Orgies": "a lot of people making it together." Ziplow warns that these can be expensive (p. 32).
7. "Anal sex." Ziplow presumes the person receiving anal sex to be female (p. 32).

These are the sexual acts that Ziplow deems essential to a hard-core feature circa 1977. But even a cursory look at a random sample of films from 1972 on suggests that to this list could be added at least one more "optional component," which I shall also define, in the jargon of the industry, as

8. "Sadie-max": a scene depicting sadomasochistic relations such as whipping, spanking, or bondage, performed with or without paraphernalia.

This list of sexual numbers, although quite varied-and many ·pornographic features do their best systematically to work in as many of these numbers as possible-is still far from inclusive. In heterosexual porno, for example, no male-to-male relations of any kind occur, nor is there any bestiality or "kiddie porn. (WILLIAMS, 1999, p. 126-127)

<sup>44</sup> CANDICE. Written and Directed by: Sheona McDonald. Starring: Candida Royale. Canada and USA: Dimstore Productions, 2019. 1 video (80min), color.

society that created it. Were women in fact exploited? Yes. Women were essential to the creation and sales of commercial porn, and yet their sexuality was completely ignored and misrepresented” (ROYALLE, 2006, p. 3).

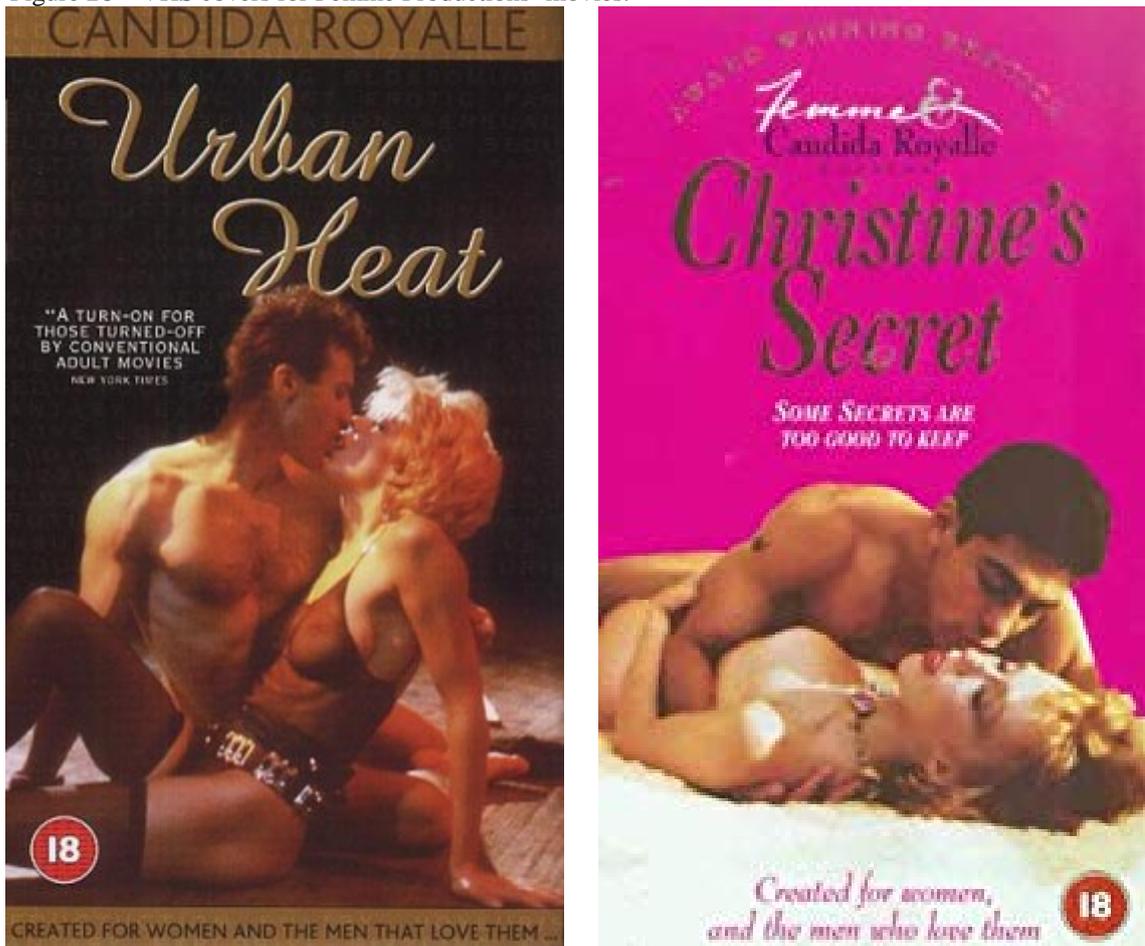
The men in the industry laughed at her at first,” Royalle’s friend Vera told *BUST*. “They thought she was insane to insist that ejaculations should be inside the body and with condoms (unless the performers were a committed couple). Until Candida came along, the thought was that the male viewer had to see the ejaculation in order to believe it. Contributing to women’s options for pleasure was her prime motivation. Often she said that she wanted to make movies that she could be proud to show her friends. She didn’t feel that way about many of the movies in which she performed. (HART apud WAKEMAN, 2018).

In the opening of the first movies the studio produced – there would be a total of 18 between 1984 and 2007, when Royalle first became sick – Royalle’s sultry voice introduced the production company:

Finally, there is *Femme*. Erotic film star Candida Royalle dares to bring to the screen the fantasies that women have been dreaming about all these years. *Femme*, conceived and produced by women, explores human desires from the exhilarating perspective of the woman who knows... Discover the series: *Femme*, *Urban Heat*, *Three Daughters*, *Christine's Secret*... *Femme* – it's only the beginning. (WILLIAMS, 1999 p. 249)

The first two movies were *Femme* (1984) and *Urban Heat* (1984). The following movie, *Christine's Secret* (1986), won five awards from the East Coast Critics Association and put *Femme Productions* in the spotlight, allowing the production of its most expensive movie to date, with a \$75,000 budget, *Three Daughters* (1987), the first one directed by Royalle. It soon became the largest seller for *Femme Productions*, and it received an award for the soundtrack produced by Gary Window, who worked with Pink Floyd and who was married to the lead actress of the movie, Siobhan Hunter. Figure 26 depicts the VHS covers for *Urban Heat* (1984) and *Christine's Secret* (1986), as abovementioned.

Figure 26 – VHS covers for Femme Productions’ movies.



(a)

(b)

Caption: (a) VHS cover for *Urban Heat* (Femme Productions, 1984). Attention to the blurb of The New York Times quoted on the cover, “A turn-on for those turned-off by conventional adult movies.”; (b) VHS Cover for *Christine’s Secret*. (Femme Productions, 1986). Attention to the catch phrase on the cover, “*Created for women, and the men who love them*”.

Source: AMAZON UK, 2019.

Royalle gave her fellow Club 90 friends the opportunity to get behind the camera themselves with her three-volume set *Star Director’s Series*, brief cinematic vignettes of personalized fantasies. Then in 2007, she launched *Femme Chocolat*, a series that showcased women of color both in front of and behind the camera, an idea that’s still ahead of its time in many ways. She held an understanding that there was market space beyond the ‘couple’s porn’ walls, one that would empower women in many different ways. Perhaps Royalle’s biggest contribution to pornography, however, is the fact that she took over all stages of filmic production, from conception to distribution – something which was exclusively in the hands of men. The financial success of Femme Productions – later partnered with Adam & Eve Studios in 1995 – brought closer attention to pornography aimed at women and couples,

discovering a market that until then had been mostly ignored. What Royalle recognized as a market in 1984 is corroborated two years later by Lee Irving, when he poses that

More than 60% of adult rental transactions in video stores involve women, whether they are by themselves or with their husband, boyfriend, or girlfriend. Couples that have never watched XXX-rated entertainment are now popping them into their VCRs. This shift in demographics of watching adult films—from primarily men to, now, couples—has dictated a need for films with more sensitive stories that appeal to both sexes (IRVING, 1986, p. 46).

Unlike other critics of the “formula,” Royalle eventually did what no other woman to that point was able to accomplish: seize complete control, from production to distribution, of the adult filmmaking process. The result was a dramatic change within the cultural landscape centered on the narrative “meaning” of pornography and a challenge to hegemonic beliefs regarding the industrial practices behind its manufacture (ALILUNAS, 2013, p. 217).

Royalle’s approach with *Femme* and willingness to seize control of the means of production has also influenced a new generation of feminist porn directors, such as Madison Young, Shine Louise Houston, Jincey Lumpkin, Jacky St. James, Dana Vespoli, Mason and Courtney Trouble, and they frequently cite her as a guiding force and pioneer for their own work, which is overtly political and explicitly feminist. Some of these directors make pornography specifically for a female or genderqueer audience, while others aim for a broad appeal across genders and sexual orientations, as Royalle claimed was *Femme*’s objective. The soul of feminist pornography is as strong today as it was in 1983.

The Club 90 women maintain an unyielding devotion to each other with an indefatigable spirit born out of a baby shower. Annie Sprinkle declares they continue to do everything on their “own terms”, being there “own bosses”. They represent “the feminist shift,” she says, showing adult entertainment’s younger generation that they can grow into “independent businesswomen” if they choose that direction and, as Veronica Hart implies, become as powerful as they want to be (MORELAND, 2015).

## 2.7 Feminist porn

#Feministporn is about equality. Enjoying it is for everyone.

*Sssh.com*

Feminist pornographers are committed to gender equality and social justice. Feminist porn is ethically produced porn, which means that performers are paid a fair wage and they are treated with care and respect; their consent, safety, and

well-being are critical, and what they bring to the production is valued. Feminist porn explores ideas about desire, beauty, pleasure, and power through alternative representations, aesthetics, and filmmaking styles. Feminist porn seeks to empower the performers who make it and the people who watch it.

*Tristan Taormino*

In October of 1984, the MacKinnon-Dworkin ordinance proposed to treat pornography as a violation of women's civil rights and to allow women harmed by pornography to seek damages through lawsuits in civil courts. Lisa Duggan had just published "Censorship in the Name of Feminism", associating the Antipornography Civil Rights Ordinance to sheer censorship.

Dworkin and MacKinnon argue that pornography is at the root of virtually every form of exploitation and discrimination known to woman. Given these views, it is not surprising that they would turn eventually to censorship—not censorship of violent and misogynistic images generally, but only of the sexually explicit images that cultural reactionaries have tried to outlaw for more than a century (DUGGAN, 2006, p. 32).

With this, soon the appeals court agreed that the ordinance amounted to censorship, and the Supreme court upheld this ruling without comment. It was the year *Femme* was founded, with Candida Royalle calling her alternative vision for porn “positive sexual role modeling.” She decided that her sets would be clean, respectful, and put women in control of their own images. Her films would include performers of color, dramatically underrepresented in the industry, and older actresses. Most importantly, she was inspired to change how women were represented in pornographic films: “These movies are sold based on the women,” Royalle told German feminist erotic filmmaker Petra Joy in 2008, “but our sexuality was completely ignored in them.”

By 2006 so many producers and directors had followed Royalle’s lead that Toronto’s *Good for Her* adult store established the annual Feminist Porn Awards (FPAs)<sup>45</sup>, which set

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<sup>45</sup> The FPA ran until 2015, when it changed names to Toronto International Porn Festival. The reason for such change was that "Good For Her decided to broaden the conversation about porn and bring in people who felt that the previous name and contexts were not inclusive of them as attendees, directors and/or performers." THE TORONTO INTERNATIONAL PORN FESTIVAL, Toronto. The Toronto International Porn Festival is sponsored by Good for Her in Toronto, Canada. Retrieved from: <https://torontointernationalpornfestival.com/>. Accessed on 2 Oct. 2019.

criteria for what constituted feminist pornography. To qualify for an award, says the store's manager Alison Lee, a film had to use erotic narratives to challenge stereotypes. In porn, this includes featuring performers of color, trans, fat, older, or disabled performers, who are typically stereotyped or relegated to the fetish market in mainstream porn. To qualify as feminist pornography, the director had to put the performer's pleasure and agency at the center of the story, ask for performers' consent for any sexual act, permit performers to revoke consent, and provide clean and safe working conditions. Good directors acquire a reputation for taking care of performers' bodies; they also make money by presenting authentic sexual scenarios that viewers can reproduce at home without hurting each other. Although these practices may not be observed across the industry as a whole, it is significant that The Free Speech Coalition (FSC)<sup>46</sup> members are expected to adhere to a code of ethics that includes written service contracts, teaching performers to perform a scene safely, advising them of any physical risks involved, and enforcing professional behavior on the set. Feminist producers also made a women's market visible to the industry and courting these consumers has created an incentive for mainstream porn to be seen as explicitly respectful of female performers. Australian producer Louise Lush / Ms. Naughty says that

[f]eminist porn really took off in the new millennium, when the internet created a private, safe space for women to explore sexuality without stigma. The first paid porn site for women was called Purve, which launched in 1998. The New York Times called it "something of a cultural milestone." Other sites like For The Girls emerged in the years after, catering to straight women, daring to offer photos of naked men with erections – something previously denied in magazines. Meanwhile early queer sites No Fauxxx, Good Dyke Porn and Crash Pad Series appeared as the decade moved forward, creating a space for authentic depictions of lesbian and queer sex. (Ms. NAUGHTY, 2018)

Another milestone was the publication, in 2013, of *The Feminist Porn Book* – edited by Tristan Taormino, Mirelle Miller-Young, Celine Parrenas Shimizu and Constance Penley. This compilation of essays by performers, directors and academics sought to provide an intellectual discussion of pornography from a feminist perspective while acknowledging the work of the women actually making that porn. The book inspired the *Feminist Porn Conference*, held in Toronto in 2013, just after the porn awards. The event brought together people keen to further discuss how feminism could inform the production and consumption of pornography. Topics discussed included the history of feminist porn, authenticity and realism,

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<sup>46</sup> The Free Speech Coalition is a non-profit trade association of the pornography and adult entertainment industry in the United States. Founded in 1991, it opposes the passage and enforcement of obscenity laws and many censorship laws. THE FREE SPEECH COALITION. The Free Speech Coalition (FSC). The Free Speech Coalition (FSC) is the trade association of the adult entertainment industry based in the United States. 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.freespeechcoalition.com>. Accessed on 3 July 2019.

consent, queer identities, sex work, disability and kink, along with the usual more academic, critical theories and analysis. In March 2014 the *Porn Studies* academic journal was launched, providing another academic platform for the discussion of feminist porn, welcoming contributions from performers and directors as well as respected academic voices.

In the years since 2014, feminist porn as a genre has expanded to include many more new voices and perspectives, reflecting an increasing awareness of gender identity, sexuality and feminist ideals of intersectionality. Sites like *Pink Label TV* have provided a platform for the promotion of smaller companies and new voices within feminist porn. Crowdfunding sites like *Patreon* have also created an alternative online space for porn filmmakers to showcase and sell their work. Even the mainstream sections of the industry have acknowledged the growth of this porn perspective, with major award nights XBiz and AVN creating “feminist porn” and “alternative porn” categories.

Feminist porn ideology also embraces a wider, intersectional definition of feminism, giving space to the perspectives of queer, trans, non-binary people and people of color, embracing body positivity and fighting against racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia and sex work stigma through the positive depiction of different sexualities and experiences. Feminist porn as a “genre” is also fairly tricky to define as it includes so many types of sex acts, orientations, performers and methods. “Gonzo” style – which has no plot and often the director is part of the action – is quite common, as is “documentary-style” shooting where the performers have whatever sex they like without direction. At the same time, one can find a fair share of feature-style films with elaborate storylines and great acting. Queer and lesbian porn has come to be heavily associated with it, but there is plenty of heterosexual-themed films as well.

Feminist porn does not discriminate when it comes to what sex it depicts. Films can show softcore, soft-focus, romanticized sex or full-on hardcore, fisting, female ejaculation or intense kink. It can happily depict rough sex, BDSM, choking, spitting, facial cumshots or anything else Gail Dines regularly attributes to “degrading porn”. The sex acts themselves are not a defining feature; an emphasis on agency and enthusiastic consent – especially when it comes to “extreme” porn – takes precedence. A lot of feminist porn includes interviews with the performers, either before or after the scene. The benefits are threefold: first, it personalizes the performer, allowing the viewer to get to know them, who they are and what type of sex they enjoy. In effect, this humanizes the performers, removing the dreaded danger of “objectification” from the scene. Secondly, it enhances the whole scenario because the viewer knows what works for the performers – and can consequently empathize or tune their arousal

to the circumstances of the scene. Lastly, interviews provide all-important context for the scene, letting the viewer know the motivations and reasons behind the sex. This last point is vital when it comes to depictions of BDSM or rough sex. Anti-porn feminists claim that porn enacts violence towards women and they often use BDSM as an example. Although this shows a crude misunderstanding of the politics of role-playing sex scenes, it does reveal one of the problems of visual representations of BDSM: it can be difficult to depict the negotiation and planning that goes into the scene or to accurately capture the delicate relationship that underlies the sex. Feminist porn makes an effort to make the negotiation explicit.

Female-identified directors have tended to dominate feminist porn, but it is not an exclusive club – male-identified directors have described their porn as feminist as well. And of course, trans and non-binary people feature as prominent creators of feminist porn content. The plurality of styles is best exemplified in the passage below by Australian producer Louise Lush / Ms. Naughty:

In terms of aesthetics, the range is great. Erika Lust's films are high-end, film-style productions that make use of DSLR cameras, beautifully dressed sets and carefully designed lighting. Anna Span and Courtney Trouble, meanwhile, often make use of simple gonzo techniques, shooting with a single video camera and available light in existing bedrooms or outdoors. Tristan Taormino's films are backed by a major studio and thus are high-budget but she also makes use of the gonzo style, which includes interaction with the stars and acknowledgement of the camera and audience. Petra Joy makes use of vignette-style scenarios set in heavily-draped rooms, sometimes awash with coloured lighting and occasional soft focus. In short, feminist porn can't be defined by any single aesthetic style (Ms. NAUGHTY, 2011).

What happens next with feminist porn is anyone's guess. It is growing in popularity and influence, with more major porn studios beginning to take notice of the trend, but porn is at something of a crossroads at present, with declining revenues thanks to piracy and flailing world economies. Most feminist porn productions are independent, created on shoestring budgets and without major distribution outlets. Clearly, profit margins are a factor in the continuing growth of this kind of porn, and Tristan Taormino compares supporting it to supporting alternative food production in the American market:

I call feminist porn "organic, fair trade porn" and liken it to the organic and fair trade movement in the United States. People are also willing to put their money where their politics are to support local, artisanal, and independent small businesses. If they care where their coffee came from, how it was made, and how it got to the marketplace, they buy local, organic, and fair trade. Well, the same thing needs to happen for porn buyers. Consumers who want to support feminist porn should look for filmmakers who identify their work as feminist and support it by buying their films. The biggest thing you can do is research the directors and companies who create porn and to buy—not illegally download—it (TAORMINO, 2013a).

## 2.8 Let's talk about the women in contemporary porn

In many ways, it feels annoying that we have to rehash some of the stuff from the sex wars of the '80s and '90s, but I don't feel like we're stuck there. I feel a real sense of momentum, and I feel finally like there is a loud response to the resurgence of anti-porn feminists like Gale Dines. Every day, someone writes to me and says, "OK, I just found out there's this thing called feminist porn." That's super-exciting because I feel like it shifts the dialogue; the next time that a friend of that person says, "God I hate porn," they can turn to them and say, "Have you seen all the porn that's out there? Because I don't know if you have, and there are alternatives." That, to me, means there's been progress and that we can shift the way that people think about porn -- the way that people make it, the way that people consume it, and the way that people relate to it (TAORMINO, 2013b).

Since the 80's, when porn star turned director Candida Royalle broke ground, setting a precedent for female-produced content, numerous women have chipped away at the stereotypes that pornographic product was produced by and directed exclusively towards a male audience. Fewer than 8 percent of the top-grossing Hollywood movies in 2014 were directed by women, while the number of women directing movies in the porn industry borders de 50% in 2018 (HERMAN, 2015). Eight of the fifteen XBIZ Director of the Year - Feature nominees in 2019 are well-known and widely-respected women within the industry. Additionally, the same can be said for nearly half of AVN's 2019 nominees for best director. Hollywood, by contrast, has only nominated five women for the Best Director Oscar in its entire history (1976 – Lina Wertmüller for *Seven Beauties*, 1993 – Jane Campion for *The Piano*, 2003 – Sofia Coppola for *Lost in Translation*, 2009 – Kathryn Bigelow for *The Hurt Locker* and 2017 – Greta Gerwig for *Lady Bird*, with just Bigelow emerging victorious).

But more women have been in leadership roles for several decades. Christie Hefner, for instance, was promoted to Chairman of the Board and CEO of her father's Playboy Enterprises in 1988; in 2012, twenty-nine-year-old feminist sex-educator Lux Alprtrum purchased Fleshbot from Gawker Media and became its CEO. Alprtrum told *Salon* that her career was made possible by internet market segmentation: much like Amazon or Hulu, Big Porn can serve different sexualities, desires, and ages, which allows women who have a keen sense for a portion of that market to prosper. Alprtrum remarked, "It's not so much of a top-down dictation thing anymore" (POTTER, 2016).

Another aspect that has changed drastically is that, since the video era of porn at the end of the 20th century gave way to the digital era in this one, porn has seen yet another

renaissance. With laptops, high-speed Wi-Fi, cell phones, and newer technology, we can pretty much get porn anywhere, anytime. For better and worse, technology has arguably democratized access to pornography, bringing along the problem of internet piracy and the economic impact this has in the industry.

“When I came in,” says the Mills College comparative lit grad [Dana Vespoli, who got into the industry in 2003, at the age of 30, and is one of the most prolific directors nowadays], “there was really only one female director who I knew was shooting her own camera and creatively involved. She was an auteur named Mason. Some stars would lend their name to a title, but when I’d show up on set they weren’t even around. But by 2011, female directors were ubiquitous.” (HERMAN, 2015).

That is not without its own set of obstacles. “We are faced with the challenge of producing content that appeals to all genders and their preferences. Heterosexual male directors are only expected to appeal to their fellow heterosexual males,” says performer/director Kayden Kross (SNOW, 2019). But women seem to be doing it just fine. Out of the fifteen movies nominated for Best Director - Feature at the 2019 AVN Awards, seven were directed by women: Kayden Kross, Bree Mills, Angie Rowntree, Jacky St. James, Stormy Daniels, Kay Brandt and Joanna Angel. For the Non-feature Best Director, Dana Vespoli received her 11<sup>th</sup> nomination. Together, these women amount to over 100 nominations in the best director category in several porn award ceremonies. For the purpose of this research, I will focus on the three directors who have produced the highest number of films:

### 2.8.1 Kayden Cross

At the age of 40, Kayden Kross has directed 27 movies and performed in 165. She started out in the adult entertainment industry at age 18 as a stripper at the club Rick's Showgirls in Rancho Cordova, California. Kross was subsequently contacted by an adult industry agent who helped her get work as a nude model in various men's magazines, and she eventually made the leap into performing in explicit hardcore movies and signed an exclusive contract with the top porn company Vivid in November 2006. She became a free agent a year later and went on to sign an exclusive contract with Adam & Eve. Kross was the Pet of the Month for the September 2008 issue of Penthouse and launched her official website that same year. In January 2010 Kayden became a contract girl for Digital Playground. Kross was cited by CNBC as one of the twelve most popular girls in hardcore cinema in January 2011 and hosted

the Xbiz Awards Show in 2012. Moreover, she not only writes columns for the magazines Complex and Xbiz, but also pens a regular blog for Xbiz.com.

A psychology major who has had five poems published in the American River Review, a literary magazine published by American River College, as well as some short stories published in several young authors anthologies, in 2015 Kross joined with fellow performer Stoya to create TrenchcoatX, an adult site that featured the kind of porn she herself wanted to see and perform in. Along with original content directed by Kross the site features curated videos from other filmmakers, many of them female. The site attracted attention because it doesn't use standard terms for porn and typical categories, instead encouraging users to find porn based on their own preferences.

We set out with the goal of creating a site that veered away from what was stereotypically the destructive side of porn... We pay our performers fairly. We treat them with respect. We list them according to their names as opposed to their skin color. We've attracted a consumer base that appreciates such and agrees that it is fair to pay the prices we ask for access to content that they could likely steal, should the desire strike. We are creating more original content now than ever with the idea in mind that the sexuality exhibited is an exploration and not a factor of shock value. We are also bringing in more content from outside studios than ever, each piece selected for no reason other than it is good at what it's doing—whatever that may be—and makes no apologies for it (KROSS, 2017).

Kross understands the changes that the industry underwent with the advance on the internet and the repercussions of the economic impact it had for performers while that, at the same time, allowed for more female agency: “In 2017 there are no more "Vivid Girls." You're only a brand name if your fans make you a brand name. As long as you put in the work, you can become a reputable brand. The work means constant social media engagement. Producers, much like the producers of other forms of entertainment, scrutinize a performer's “numbers” before casting a scene” (TURNER, 2017).

### 2.8.2 Joanna Angel

Joanna Angel has directed 114 features in 17 years in the adult industry. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature with a minor in Film Studies, and is the founder (and CE-Hoe, as she calls herself) of Burning Angel website, which started in 2002. Now part of a network of sites called Adult Time, which encompasses 56148 full length films from several studios,

the website has won multiple AVN and XBiz awards and has been credited with growing the alt porn<sup>47</sup> scene and has helped launch the careers many top adult stars. Inside you'll find the complete library of the quintessential tattoo porn site featuring the hottest punk, goth and emo girls in the industry. Watch all the award-winning videos like 'Jews Love Black Cock' and 'Dirty Grandpa'. Also check out Lady Gonzo, which features Joanna directing gonzo porn videos the way she'd like to see them and even getting involved in the action herself! (BURNING ANGEL, 2019).

"Possibly the world's first Jewish punk porn star with a BA from Rutgers, Oradell native Joanna Angel calls the shots on both sides of the camera and minds the bottom line," says Eric Levin in 2007 (LEVIN, 2007), Angel was inducted to the AVN Hall of Fame in 2016 because she "has etched out one of the most singular identities the business has ever seen since launching her flagship website" (BLOCKS, 2015). With a quotation from Kurt Vonnegut, ("So it goes") to a paraphrase of Margaret Atwood ("Touch me and you will burn") tattooed across her 4-foot-11 frame, Angel refuses to acknowledge any difference between doing what she does and composing poetry: "Some people make music, others paint, I make porn," she said (LAHAM, 2005). The porn she makes, however, is deemed "alt-porn", a label she refuses:

It's kind of a silly name. It's just supposed to mean porn that is different. [Laughs.] It's like, what is alternative music really? It's just music that's different from pop music, you know? But I think what makes alt porn is the community and the culture behind it in addition to the content. It's going to work hand in hand. When we started the website, it was a reflection of ourselves. It still is to this day. There's band interviews on the website, the style of girl that we use is not your average typical porn star and the personality on the website is a little bit different. All the members interact with each other, all of the girls have blogs and profiles, and people become friends with each other. It's more of a community and a reflection of a subculture rather than just being a website with content to jerk-off to and never think about again (ANGEL, 2011).

Angel's site also differs from regular porn tube sites because it has a focus on community and culture. There are your standard offerings in picture and video, of course. But Burning Angel also has live events, both online and in the physical world, and there is also an active forum for members to discuss music or tattoos or pop culture in general. Engaging with other members (and even the performers) gives paying users a reason to return to the site again and again. "The wall of the porn star is breaking down and I think we're moving in a direction where there's a lot more interaction between fans and stars", Angel says (MORRIS, 2011).

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<sup>47</sup> "Alt porn sites tend to address their target communities more narrowly, drawing on the iconography of subcultures such as goth or hippie and they are often characterized by the 'do-it-yourself' amateur aesthetic associated with the subcultural production of art, fashion and music" (ATWOOD, 2007, p. 444).

Perhaps because she started in the industry through a website, Angel is very aware of the possibilities the internet brings to performers, both positively and negatively. She often addresses the issue of piracy – indeed a downfall brought by the world wide web – but even though she considers herself a pessimist, Angel finds a positive side in it:

I definitely think in the beginning with just having porn, you know somebody out there who would want to pay for it. Now you have to make sure your stuff has amazing quality. You want to make sure there's a bunch of stuff surrounding it so people, when they buy a membership, really feel like they're part of something. You want to make sure you're giving these real collectible items and not something that you just put in your DVD player and throw out when you're done.

The only positive thing about piracy is that it's really forced us to make our product pretty amazing, I think. But unfortunately making your product amazing costs more money, so we're spending more money and making less money, which really sucks. I hate it and we have lawyers that go after our stuff and we work on the internet every day and try to take down as much of our stuff as we can but unfortunately, this is just how it's going to be. Piracy is not going to end. There is not going to be a president that comes in a makes this shit illegal, so I think I'm kinda over the stage where I'm crying about it. So I'm just trying to see how our business can survive with all this going on (ANGEL, 2011).

### 2.8.3 Jacky St. James

Known as "the woman who conquered porn", Jacky St. James has directed over 95 films since 2012, including a late-night premium cable series, *Submission*, for Showtime. A former aspiring mainstream actress with more than 13 years of experience in online advertising before porn, St. James got her big break in adult when she entered a scriptwriting contest for the *New Sensations* Romance Series. Her films are story-based, high budget productions an emphasis on strong female protagonists. Her sex scenes are a mix of new techniques and more traditional porn styles. Although she describes herself as a sex-positive feminist there is no doubt that her productions aim at mainstream porn media:

For me, most of what I do is scripted and feature-driven, so it's always about finding the best person for the job, based on what they can bring to the table from an emotional level -- somebody who can really resonate with a character and somebody who can understand the emotional journey of a character. And a lot of people might laugh and say, "Oh, it's just porn, hahaha," but we're writing things that delve into really deep issues that people have. They aren't just campy porn lines. These are stories that just happen to have sex (ST. JAMES, 2015).

For St. James, who has been nominated for 25 AVN and XBiz awards since the beginning of her career and has won 11 times, there is no doubt that the contemporary pornographic industry fosters a positive environment for women. "And when, in life, especially as a woman, can you go into a job and be a production manager, a director, a writer

of a piece within a few months? It's unheard of. Most women in Hollywood work years trying to climb the ladder to do that -- and I was doing it right out of the gate. So, for me, there was something really appealing about the fact that I can be successful and have a lot of creative control and be a woman" (ST. JAMES, 2015).

When in 2015 Rashida Jones produced a documentary about young pornographic performers, "Hot Girls Wanted", which eventually turned into a Netflix documentary, she made a statement that the pornographic industry could not be a good thing because it was too "performative, and women aren't feeling joy from it. It is fulfilling a male fantasy" (MEYERSON, 2015). Performers like Mistress Matisse stated that "Hot Girls Wanted" was not made by anyone who's actually in the sex industry, and it was very obviously planned to fulfill an agenda, and that agenda is to make the sex industry look bad. This film was not a call to strengthen the rights of porn models; it was a scary story to tell them about what would—what must, inevitably—happen to them if they dared try to take this path to economic freedom," said Matisse. "There was nothing in the film that I saw that even hinted it was possible the industry could change" (O'HARA, 2015).

St. James' answer was an open letter to Jones:

Cause I'm Tired of Civilians Acting Like Feminism in Porn Doesn't Exist...  
Dear Rashida Jones and Natasha Noman,

I'd like to share a few names with you:

Dana Vespoli  
Angie Rowntree  
jessica drake  
Joanna Angel  
Bree Mills  
Nica Noelle  
Candida Royalle  
Nina Hartley  
Stormy Daniels  
Dee Severe  
Aiden Starr  
Courtney Trouble  
Lorelei Lee  
Madeline Marlow  
Holly Randall (who is rumored to be in the next Hot Girls Wanted series)  
Erika Lust (who is rumored to be in the next Hot Girls Wanted series)  
Kelly Holland  
Shine Louise Houston  
Tanya Tate  
Annie Sprinkle  
Lexi Sindel  
Angela White  
Belladonna  
Anna Lee  
Kay Brandt

Kelly Shibari  
 Julia Ann  
 Chanel Preston  
 Mason  
 Raven Touchstone  
 Kayden Kross  
 Dixie Comet  
 Kayla Jane-Danger

These are just a FEW (not all) of the women who have helped shape the adult industry. Who have been innovators, creators, directors, writers, advocates, producers, and visionaries. Most of these women came before me – giving me the opportunity to do what I do today. These are women who have actually worked within the industry, not judged it from afar. They are/were the ones on the front-lines that fought to have their voices heard and built names for themselves.

Rashida, your HelloGiggles article says that you want to “reclaim porn as a feminist space.” Do you realize that countless women have been doing this for decades? Do you realize how patronizing it is to women working in the adult industry to hear you say this as if it was somehow a new concept? It completely undermines everything that women have done for our industry and it discredits and diminishes the work of countless women.

And while I’m on the subject of “discrediting”...

Natasha, several of the clips in your Mic video (the same video where you say that “lesbian porn is made by and for men”) were actually directed by women. If you paid for these films, then you would have known the names of the directors by simply looking at the credits. So that begs to question, did you simply lift them from tube sites? I ask because the clip you used from my film was not a lesbian title at all. It was a hot-wifing movie. Completely different genre - although I can understand your mistake if you did steal it off a tube site. After all, tube sites rebrand content all the time for clicks. I am guessing you didn’t watch the entirety of that film either, because there was a whole lot more going on than just a “male” fantasy.

It’s so disappointing that we live in an age where absolutely nothing needs to be fact checked anymore. Where celebrities or popular websites can spoon feed “facts” to the masses and nobody will even bother questioning or probing into the truth – and certainly not when it pertains to the adult industry.

I absolutely love the adult industry, and I am aware there are a lot of areas of improvement needed. I don’t think anyone in the adult industry would disagree with either of you on that fact. But if you actually paid for your porn or dug a little deeper you would know that there are countless women in the industry directing, writing, producing, and more. Many of these women are feminists. Many of these women are doing what you both are implying hasn’t been done.

Since both of you are so quick to educate the masses on how to improve upon the adult industry (when neither of you actually work in it), I’d like to take this moment to educate you. You cannot undermine the work of women and then act like you are somehow champions for their cause. The harm that you do by patronizing an entire gender with your vast “knowledge” of sexuality is truly detrimental to the progress so many women in our industry are making every single day.

Sincerely,  
 Jacky St. James

P.S. To the women (working in adult) whose names I did not include in this post, I sincerely apologize. Your work matters (ST. JAMES, 2017)

St. James is an avid advocate of pornography as reality "When people say to me, “Porn Sex isn’t Real,” my reply is always, “How is two people having sex NOT real?” But, if you define “real” by two people with amazing chemistry, having incredible sex, look no further than Carter Cruise and Michael Vegas in Happy Anniversary", the need to understand that porn is a commercial product “You can learn a lot about adult performers by watching

their BTS interviews (which are bonus features for those who are PAYING FOR THEIR PORN) and spares no words when commenting on pseudo-porn contemporary culture:

Women weren't sexualized by *50 Shades of Grey*. They've been watching porn and reading erotica for centuries. It's shocking to me that there's suddenly a consciousness that women are sexual. We've always been that way. *50 Shades* has allowed us to make it more of a talking point. And that's the only positive thing I can take away from that fucking book, because I thought it was horrible (ST. JAMES, 2019a).

Adult performer and director Nica Noelle has described St. James' production as "at turns romantic, sweet, taboo, funny and smart, with consistently high production values and gorgeous cinematography. Her fans range from college students to single moms and middle-aged couples. In an industry that struggles to find its rightful place in pop culture, Jacky St. James remains its best bet for bridging the gap between porn and mainstream cinema" (ST JAMES, 2019b).

## 2.9 Conclusion: we have come a long way, Candida

From a place of non-existence – to the extent that they were not even named – to being the most prominent names in the conception, production and distribution of material in the pornographic industry, women have fought many battles to establish their space. Despite MacKinnon and Dworkin's erroneous assumptions that "Pornography is a systematic practice of exploitation and subordination based on sex that differentially harms and disadvantages women" (DWORKIN; MACKINNON, 1988), women have shifted the gaze and their position from object to subject.

For decades, critics of pornography have insisted that it objectifies women. Historically, feminism and pornography have traveled together down a very rocky, unorthodox road. This partnership was only natural, perhaps even inevitable. After all, both feminism and pornography scorn at the conventional notion that sex is necessarily connected to marriage or procreation, and both view women as sexual beings who should pursue their sexuality for pleasure and self-fulfillment. Indeed, most of feminism's demands have been phrased in terms of women's sexuality: equal marriage, lesbianism, birth control, abortion, gender justice.

The similarities do not end here. Both feminism and pornography thrive under an atmosphere of tolerance, where questions are encouraged, and differing attitudes are respected. Not surprisingly, both feminism and pornography are suppressed whenever sexual expression is regulated. Sexual freedom (especially pornography) is an integral part of the battle for women's freedom. The censoring of sexual words and images does not simply lead to the suppression of women's sexual rights; it is an attempt to control women themselves. For women's rights have traditionally been phrased in terms of their sexuality: marriage, abortion, and birth control. To surrender one iota of women's control over their own sexual expression is to deny that it is their sexuality in the first place.

If the pornographic industry is nowadays a space that allows for the experimentation, without boundaries or judgement, of all sorts of (female) sexuality, it is entirely as a result of (feminist) women who claimed that it was their right to exert their sexuality in front of the cameras, without losing face or identity. Their boldness in threading male-dominated territories without fear has made it possible for women to aspire to financial equality and respect inside this industry that is not as blue as it was presumably tinted. There were also no rose-colored glasses: what the women in this industry have done was to get to work and not yield to discourses or social constraints. The argument that women only go into porn as a result of financial necessity sounds so out of place now that it is laughable to conceive it was true half a century ago, before Veronica Hart got pregnant. That baby-shower celebrated more than just a kid: it brought along it an entire generation of empowered women, who are not ashamed to wear their (deep) throats out when they claim for their dutiful rights.

### 3 VOICE OVER – Take 1

One of the intersections between literature and pornography happens in the autobiographies and memoirs of pornographic performers. For those who narrate identities that were created exclusively for the public presentation of a sexual character, the crafting of the written work would be simplified if we believed the public eye is essentially interested in two aspects of those lives: what drew them into pornography, and how life inside the industry really pans out. For a pornographic performer, these would be the two essential aspects in the construction of their autobiographies and memoirs if these were the only two things the public is interested in knowing when they buy a “porn biography”, but the truth goes much further than that. Perhaps motivated by the financial decline of the industry in the post-internet era<sup>48</sup>, since the early 2000s the profile of the performer who initiates in the pornographic industry is no longer the young girl who does so exclusively for economic reasons. While that it is still considered “easy money” by the majority of the civilian population, it is common knowledge that the pornographic industry no longer poses as a means to get rich; rather, it now functions as either a gateway to mainstream media or as a means in itself into a more liberal approach to sexual experimentation.

As a result, the autobiographies and memoirs of pornographic performers have increasingly been portraying a more questioning and conscientious approach to the industry itself, debating topics such as racism, the formation of the pornographic identity, the pornification of mainstream culture and the relationship between pornography and drugs, for example, outside the realm of judgment. Often, these new autobiographies and memoirs present deep analysis of the pornographic industry and its implications in contemporary culture through the eyes of those who are most intrinsically involved in the industry: the performers themselves. Concurrently, the profile of the performers has also been moving away from that of the stereotypical porno actress, often highlighting not only the diversity among performers but also the strategies used by some to create personas or characters that encompass the diversity that exists in real life, including marginalized sexualities,

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<sup>48</sup> The popularization of internet websites, which provide free pornographic content, has dramatically harmed the industry in financial terms. As a result, scene rates have dropped vertiginously, making porn not as rentable a business for the performers as it used to be. As consequence, entering the pornographic industry since the 2000s is no longer a matter of economic necessity only, since it does not assure an income as bulgy as it did in the past for stars such as Nina Hartley, Asia Carrera, Jenna Jameson and Tera Patrick, to name a few. Joining the pornographic industry nowadays involves a more personal interest on the content and format of the industry per se. For this discussion, see LEE, Jiz’ “‘Ethical Porn’ Starts When We Pay for It” (2015).

ethnicities and social roles, and transforming the pornographic product into a space for the debate of the most varied arrays of topics.

The influence of pornography in mainstream culture has been discussed in relation to music videos, movies, songs and fashion to extreme lengths. The effect of this eternal debate, however, has recently cast a new light on the position of pornographic performers, who are now being called onto stage to voice their opinion about the industry they are part of and its influences on general U.S. culture. Conversely, the voice of porn performers has been heard more often nowadays than in the past, and not only in relation to pornography, but also about many other aspects of cultural life. Boosted by a new trend in the publishing market which sets sexuality under the spotlight and sex workers on the soap box, some of the more recently published autobiographies and memoirs bring to the general public a deep debate about processes of identity, performance, political positioning, sex work ethics and legislation, and gender – both in and out of this industry.

That is not to say that sex workers have not, in general, always been under the scrutiny of society. Throughout history we have witnessed the testimonial of sex workers being used to support or refute the idea that sex work – and, collaterally, pornography – is a valid form of remunerated activity. Perhaps the best-known autobiography by a pornographic performer is *Ordeal* (1980), by Linda Lovelace. Following the rise and decline of porn's first sweetheart (and her subsequent retirement once she became a born again Christian), *Ordeal* has become the Bible on which the anti-pornography movement swears: Linda Lovelace made several accusations against Chuck Traynor (her husband while *Deep Throat* was being filmed) for the first time in public at a press conference announcing the book. Among the accusations, she stated that he had forced her into pornography at gunpoint and that, in the movie, bruises from his beatings can be seen on her legs. In 1986, after she published *Out of Bondage* (a memoir focusing on her life after 1974), Lovelace testified before the 1986 Attorney General's Commission on Pornography in New York City, where she uttered her most famous post-porn statement: "When you see the movie *Deep Throat*, you are watching me being raped. It is a crime that movie is still showing; there was a gun to my head the entire time". Her voice was made louder when she was joined by supporters such as Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon, Gloria Steinem, and members of Women Against Pornography. Following her testimony for the Meese Commission, Lovelace gave lectures on college campuses, insisting on what she described as callous and exploitative practices in the pornography industry. Until this day, the anti-

pornography movement relies on Lovelace's memoirs as examples of the destructive power of the pornographic industry to the lives of women.

While Lovelace's testimonial cannot be completely discarded, throughout the time there have been accounts which present to the reader a different aspect of the pornographic industry, celebrating it as a space for safe, sane and consensual sexual experimentations, for example. As a rule of thumb, autobiographies and memoirs of pornographic performers have gradually come to introduce to their readers a more positive aspect of the pornographic industry, one which is not entirely exploitative of any kind of sexuality but, rather, encompasses "marginal" sexual identities while fostering possibilities for conversations regarding many aspects of contemporary life, no longer acting as a warning against the industry, but functioning as one account of one individual and his or her journey in (and out of) an industry which seems to still be the unknown, shady forest that society fears. It is pivotal to highlight that since those individual accounts are narratives by different personas, constructed by different performers, it is to be expected that they will mirror different experiences inside the industry.

### 3.1 The corpus

In the past fifteen years, over twenty-five autobiographies and memoirs of pornographic performers have been published in the United States alone, illustrating a memoir boom inscribed in Smith and Watson's list of sixty genres of life narrative (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p. 253). Selecting the corpus to illustrate this research was no easy task. Therefore, some guidelines became necessary. First, I wanted to work exclusively with autobiographies and memoirs of female pornographic performers. The female place of discourse inside the sex work industry is something which is constantly questioned both by society and by anti-pornography feminists, who doubt the veracity of any woman's volition to enter – and stay in – the pornographic film industry. Secondly, I wanted to focus on performers who did not demonize the profession, since a lot of the anti-pornography feminists already extensively base their discourses on those autobiographies. It is important for me to investigate voices which promote a positive approach to the pornographic film industry by acknowledging it is a) valid work and b) a serious industry, albeit flawed. Third, I did not want to focus exclusively on alt-porn productions; it was

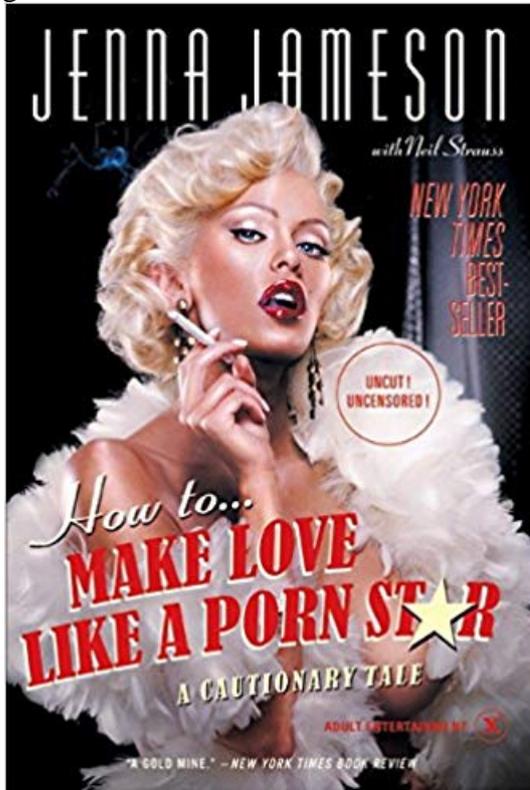
pivotal to cover both mainstream and non-mainstream pornographic productions because not only is their outcome different, but they also foster different narratives from performers because they attract different profiles – of both performers and audience. An alt-porn performer apparently tends to care less about public opinion and carry a more subversive message, whereas mainstream performers think of themselves more as entertainers. The borders between these definitions, however, are blurred by what one defines as mainstream just as much as by what one defines as entertainment. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that there is a difference between mainstream and alt productions, a difference that echoes in the narratives of performers coming from these two nuclei.

I have narrowed down the focus of this work on the autobiographies/memoirs of four performers – Jenna Jameson, Stormy Daniels, Ashley Blue and Asa Akira – divided into two categories: mainstream and alternative. The categories used are not related to the type of pornographic productions they take part in, but to the tone of the final published product. Paratextually, an analysis of the available covers of the works of Jameson, Daniels, Blue and Akira (Figure 27) already points out towards a significant difference in the marketability of the books: Jameson's and Daniels' covers depict their photographs<sup>49</sup> – curiously, almost in the same position –, while Blue's and Akira's bring artistic pictorial representations of themselves, transforming them into (clearly fictional) characters.

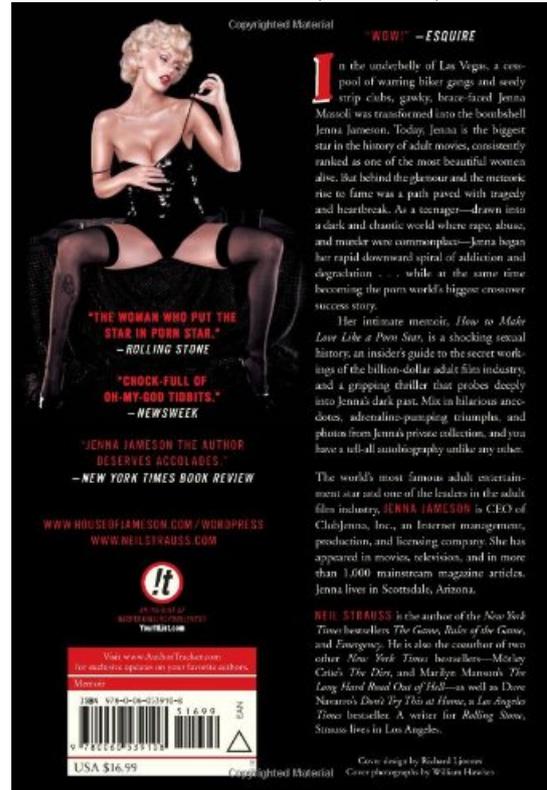
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<sup>49</sup> It did not escape me that Jameson's photographs have been clearly altered to resemble a cartoonish, doll-like image. However, when placed next to the works of the other performers, it is undeniable that it is closer to Daniels' cover than to the other two.

Figure 27 – Covers of the works of Jameson, Daniels, Blue and Akira (continue)

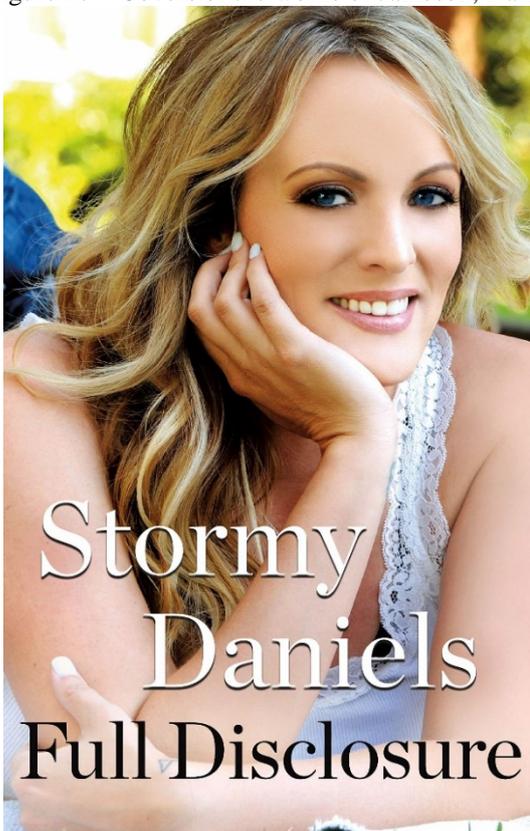


(a)

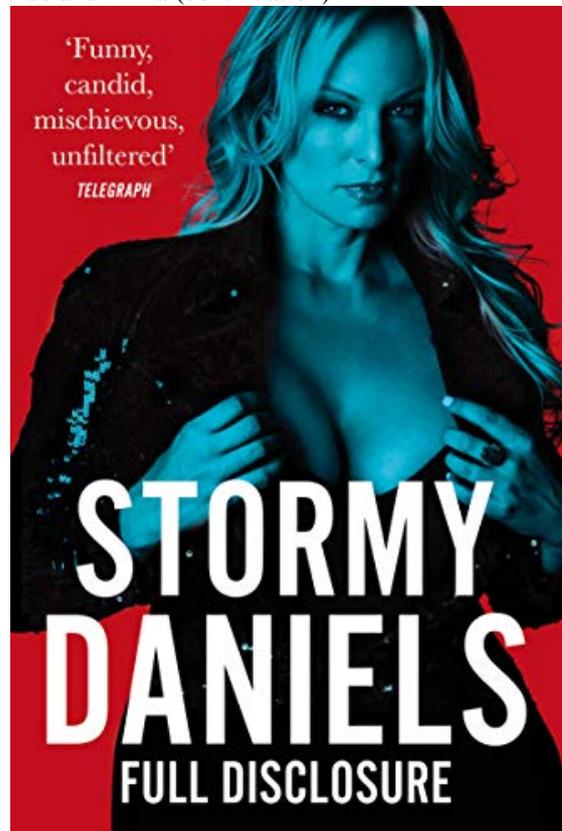


(b)

Figure 27 – Covers of the works of Jameson, Daniels, Blue and Akira (continuation)



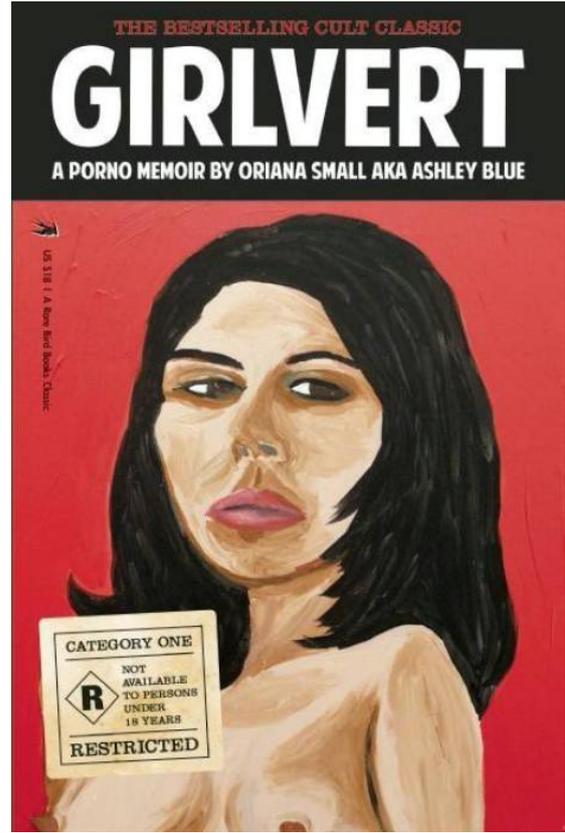
(c)



(d)

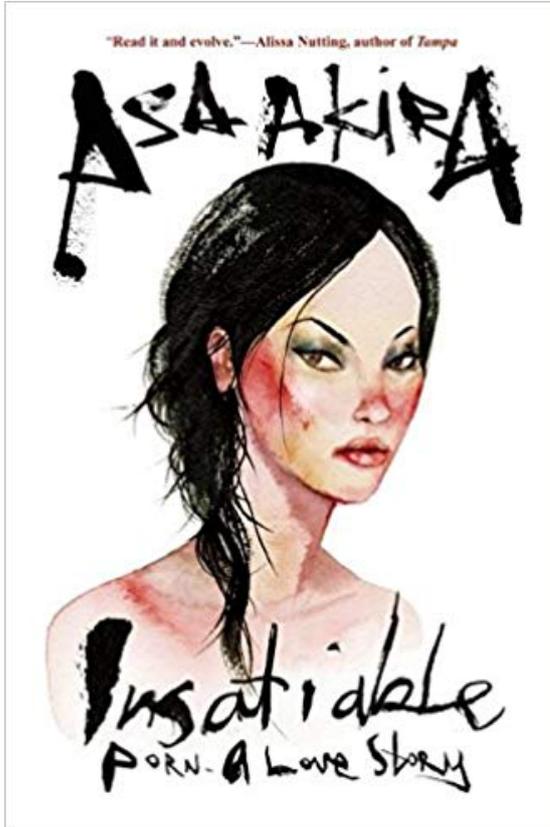


(e)

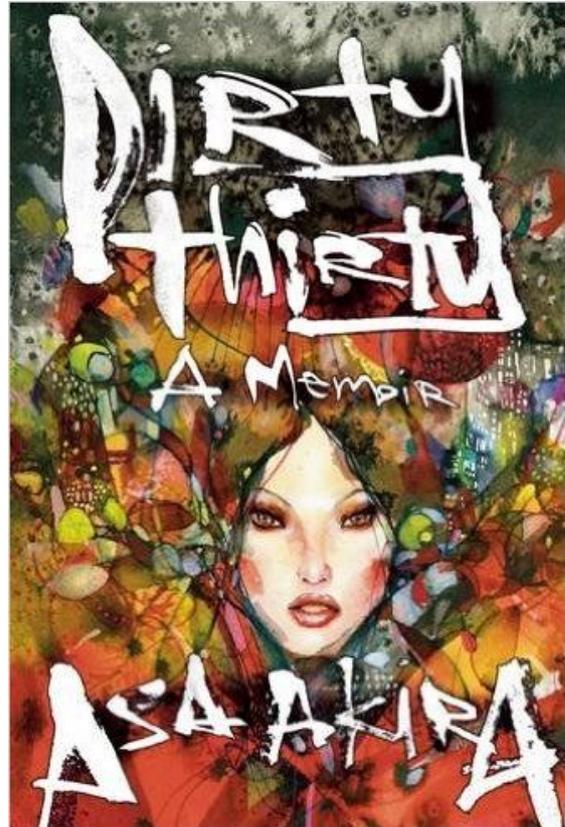


(f)

Figure 27 – Covers of the works of Jameson, Daniels, Blue and Akira (conclusion)



(g)



(h)

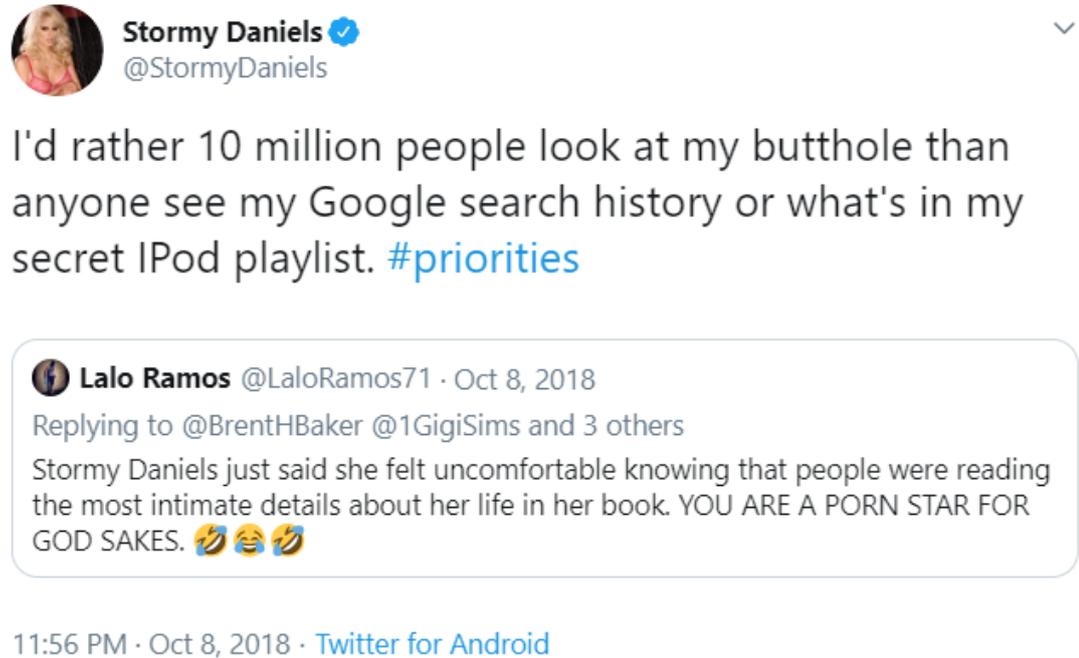
Caption: (a) and (b) – Jenna Jameson’s book cover, front and back; (c) and (d) – Stormy Daniels’ book covers for print and e-book edition, respectively; (e) and (f) – Ashley Blue’s book covers; (g) and (h) – Asa Akira’s book covers.

Source: The author, 2019.

While it may be argued that Jameson and Daniels are also characters, the use of photorealistic images of these performers *versus* the artistic representations in the portraits of Blue and Akira configures interesting counterpoints in the discussion of the representation of all four performers in their autobiographies and memoirs even before the text itself begins. Judging by the cover, Jameson’s and Daniels’ books present a clear, well defined, realistic representation of the subject they narrate; Blue’s and Akira’s, on the other hand, are heralded by artistic interpretations of themselves, free of commitments to the “truth”. They are distorted versions of a reality looked at through artistic lenses, having specific features enhanced or exaggerated through drawing. The fictionalization of these pornographic performers, therefore, begins at the covers of their autobiographies: Blue and Akira’s more blatantly, Jameson and Daniels’s more subtly.

Even though they come from different backgrounds and take part in different types of pornographic productions, these four performers gather around one point which is crucial to my research: what they present to the public in their autobiographies and memoirs is their own version of an industry that is still uncharted territory for the academic world and most of society. By narrating themselves inserted in an industry which allegedly does nothing but objectify women, these performers challenge a more conservative audience that already gazes at their bodies into taking a closer look at their words, even though they make it clear, in many instances, that to have their words read feels like a much more intimate exhibition than having their bodies gazed at (Figure 28).

Figure 28 – Stormy Daniels’ tweet about privacy



Source: DANIELS, 2018.

### 3.1.1 Jameson and Daniels

Jenna Jameson and Stormy Daniels are, perhaps, more familiar to the general audience. Jameson is considered the most famous pornographic performer in history, being a name commonly referred to even after having been retired for eight years. Daniels has just headlined the news after the disclosure of a 2006 sexual encounter with current American president Donald Trump, long before he became president. Besides their popularity in mainstream media, the fact that both Jameson and Daniels published autobiographies which were cowritten with male journalists has also led me into grouping them in the first category of autobiographic writing by pornographic performers I am going to analyze. The consequences of such mediation can immediately be noted, most prominently in a construction of discourse that makes the performer’s voice more present than the civilian’s, perhaps as a marketing strategy which results in a product that is, at the same time, more mediatic and more marketable. For example, the use of common stereotypes of pornographic performers’ lives – although questioned and even later refuted – might be the result of the co-authorship. The inclusion, for instance, of the sexual abuse

suffered by both Jameson and Daniels in their childhoods mirrors what is believed to be the reason why performers enter the pornographic industry, echoing what the general public expects to find in these autobiographies and, therefore, more readily transforming them into best-sellers.

It is not my intention to deeply explore the developments that this co-writing brings, but it is necessary, of course, to recognize the reality assembled through the mediation of autobiographical discourse by writing professionals. The fact that the two coauthors are journalists of renowned publications brings some level of entertainment/sensationalist media bias to Jameson's and Daniels' autobiographical discourse, as if their contribution was only in content and not in form. This alleged inability to formulate a discourse which presents at the same time content, coherence and marketability reinforces yet another stereotype of the female pornographic performer as a passive receptacle for experiences, incapable of processing them or producing a self-validated discourse; instead, she needs the "help" of a journalist (the irony of the male gender does not escape me) to make her narrative organized, meaningful and commercially appealing to the public. As much as clandestine contributions (LEJEUNE, 2014, p. 135) may be present in the works of Akira and Blue, Jameson's and Daniels' works are explicitly co-authored right from the cover. Is the need to make the co-authorship of *How to make love* and *Full disclosure* explicit from the start a commercial process, or is it validation of the performers' discourse? Does the fact that the coauthors are journalists and not fictional writers reinforce the proposition of veracity in these autobiographical discourses, or is it only a strategy to attract the captive audience of these two professionals at *Rolling Stones Magazine* and *The New York Times*, respectively? Lejeune quotes an 1829 article on *The Globe* newspaper, in which the implications of "apocryphal memoirs" are discussed, formulating a "third genre" between fiction and memoir (LEJEUNE, 2014, p. 136):

We acknowledge that the greatest part of the originality of confessions disappears when we know that they are not the work of the penitent. But that these books cannot instruct and entertain at the same time, this is what we think is unacceptable. They can even have a distinguished literary merit.

These considerations may serve as beacons to answer some of the questions posed here, albeit with totally inversed values. While that for *The Globe* the co-authorship removes the originality of autobiographies and puts on check the veracity and power of entertainment of these works, in the case of Jameson and Daniels the co-authorship imbues both works of these same elements, endowing their narratives with more "truth" and more market potential.

It becomes, then, necessary to develop a research into these consequences – over the text – of co-authoring by male journalists on the discourse of female pornographic performers. Unlike the *nègre* described by Lejeune, the co-authorship of these autobiographies transforms the performers – and not the co-authors – into the prostitutes<sup>50</sup>. Rather than serving as a negative point that makes the text unauthentic, the coauthoring of these journalists acts as a validating mechanism that makes the text true. Palatable. Marketable. Although for Lejeune the *nègre* is the ghostwriter, in the two cases discussed here the co-authorship makes the performers the co-speaker. Having their speech validated by professional writers makes them the *nègre*.

### 3.1.2 Jenna Jameson – “The Queen of Porn”

The best sex takes place in the mind first.

*Jenna Jameson*

The first work I would like to address is Jenna Jameson’s *How to Make Love Like a Porn Star* (2004). The complete title, *How to Make Love Like a Porn Star – A Cautionary Tale* is misleading, however. The word “cautionary” winks at the anti-pornography audience, but the focus of the narrative is on the successful and pathbreaking career Jameson has followed – or, at the most elementary level, her transformation from a shy teenager to a self-possessed woman. The autobiography is a 579-page illustrated volume, divided in six books numbered with Roman numerals, each preceded by an epigraph from a Shakespearean sonnet. The narrative is told through a series of first-person accounts, interviews with her family and friends, diary entries, personal photos, movie scripts, a studio-performer contract, bulleted lists, comic book strips and an epilogue. It covers Jameson’s life from childhood to 2004, when it was published. Co-written with Neil Strauss, *New York Times* journalist, and published in August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2004, the book was on the *New York Times* best seller list for six weeks. It also won the 2004 "Mainstream's Adult Media Favorite" XRCO award in a tie with Seymore Butts's *Family Business* TV series. It

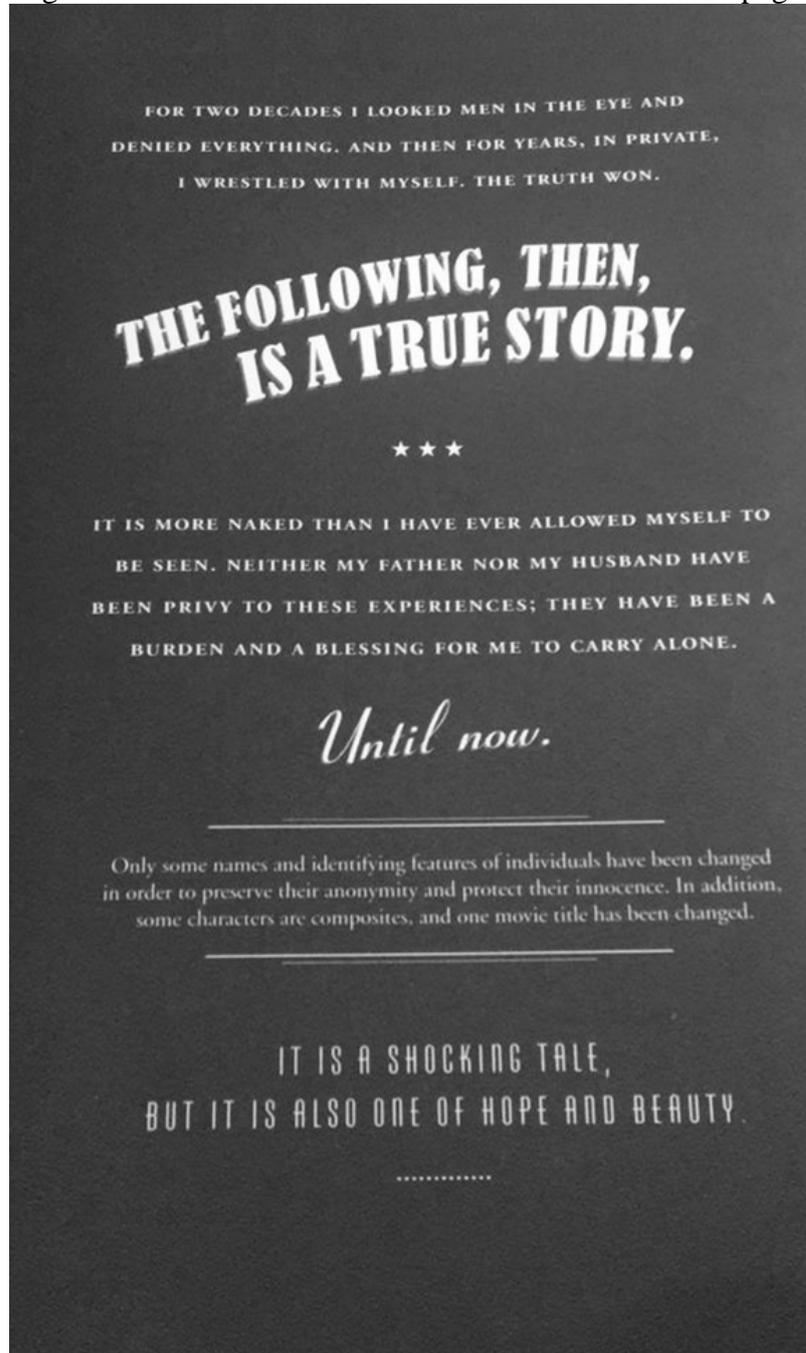
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<sup>50</sup> Lejeune argues that “Thus the mediation of the ‘ghostwriter’ will either be hidden, or, if it is admitted, it will be blurred or changed. The ghostwriter gets bad press; the victim of a system that exploits him, he is at the same time the fall guy, like the *prostitute*. It is true that the ghostwriter’s employer, like the *pimp*, is also seen in a bad light”. (LEJEUNE, 2014, p. 147, our emphasis).

has been translated into German (2005), Swedish (2005) and Spanish (2006) and it is dedicated to Jameson's mother, who had been a chorus dancer in Las Vegas.

*How to Make Love Like a Porn Star* (hereon referred to as *HTML*) opens with a page which resembles an old circus advertisement (Figure 29):

Figure 29 - How to Make Love Like a Porn Star's first page



Source: The author, 2019.

By announcing that the text that follows the introduction is a “true” story, Jameson acknowledges that the border between fiction and reality in the autobiographical discourse is a porous one – to the point where she needs to make explicit to the reader the veracity of her

tale. She even justifies the utterance with a preamble in which she admits to having lied, but promises she now is telling the truth. Aiming at titillating an audience who always reaches for unprecedented disclosure and exclusive access to secret events, Jameson promises to tell what has not been told before at the same time that she aims for a pact with the reader in which her truth is not questioned not because it bears no witnesses who can counterpoint it, but because she says so. Her next step is to counterweigh that statement by admitting that some editing has been done to the “real” facts: names were changed, identities were merged, movies were retitled. Instead of instilling suspicion in the reader, this strategy only reinforces her stance that she is telling the “truth”, since she is declaring that some facts have been altered. The irony in this passage, found in “and protect their innocence” (in an industry that is considered the furthest away from innocence and naivety possible), does not go unnoticed.

Another aspect that I would like to point out is Jameson’s insistence on declaring that the unveiling of her memoir is, to her, more private than her naked performances on camera. The theme of over-exposure through writing is recurrent in all the autobiographies and memoirs studied in this work. As discussed before, the unveiling of personal information, intentions and thoughts can be perceived as more invasive and intimate than the total exposure of the nude body. Jameson will come back to this point later in the book, when she says that

[g]enerally speaking, people are not very original. No matter who you are or what you do, you will inevitably be asked the same questions by every stranger you meet. Typically, your interrogators will show a degree of tact. After all, they don’t want to offend you. But if you happen to belong to that small segment of the working force that has sex on screen for a living, tact goes out the window. *Since you are revealing so much of yourself on camera, most people figure that no question—no matter how personal—is off-limits* (JAMESON, 2004, p. 513, our emphasis).

Born in Las Vegas on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1974, Jenna Marie Massoli lost her mother to cancer at the age of two. Her father, devastated by the loss of his wife, left Jenna and her older brother to raise themselves while they moved around a lot, as a result of the family’s bankruptcy due to her mother’s illness. At the age of 16, after being raped by her boyfriend’s uncle, Jameson left home and moved in with her boyfriend. At first, she tried to start a career as a show girl, having taken years of dancing lessons, but she was too short. She started stripping in 1991 – although still underage – at Las Vegas’ infamous Crazy Horse Too, a strip club that was involved in many lawsuits and had connections with the mafia. Regardless of the club’s shady reputation, Jameson’s account of her early days as a stripper revolves around friendship, money and the transformation she underwent on stage, as she narrates:

Though I was painfully shy and antisocial in real life, when I got onstage, I transformed. I had learned how to perform when I put myself through pageants in junior high. The personality and attitude I repressed with everyone exploded out of me onstage. Something inside of me just turned on. I made eye contact with the interviewers, moved with a sensual grace I never knew I possessed, and sashayed around the stage like a natural. I had been taking dance classes since I was four, everything from ballet to clogging, and I knew just what to do: I even iced my nipples to make them stand out. The hardest part was to look like I was enjoying myself without smiling and unveiling my braces. (JAMESON, 2004, p. 30-31)

Soon, I had so many regulars that all I had to do each night was cater to them. One guy would give me a thousand dollars to let him brush my hair. Another would rub my feet. So I'd just sit there, get pampered, and, boom, earn another thousand dollars. I didn't have to dance, speak, flirt, or give these guys any part of me. One local politician liked to be dominated and, although I had such a submissive personality naturally, one night I took his beer into the bathroom, peed into it, and then made him drink it. He loved it. The next night, he tipped me with a pink slip: for a brand-new Corvette. (JAMESON, 2004, p. 51)

Making around US\$ 4.000,00 a night, Jameson progressed to modeling when an agency came to the club to shoot the dancers for a deck of playing cards. She compares the result of her shoot to the pictures she used to see at her father's *Playboy* magazines, when she dreamed "of being one of those girls" (JAMESON, 2004, p. 51) Shortly after that, she was sought out by photographer Julie Parton, who forwarded her shots to Suze Randall<sup>51</sup>. Her first moniker came about the first time she stepped on a club to strip, as she describes her conversation with the club manager:

"I'm Vinnie," he said. "What name do you use?"

I told him the name I had always used in my imagination for my fantasy self: "Jennasis."

"Like 'In the beginning'?" he asked.

"Exactly." (JAMESON, 2004, p. 36)

Ironically, *Jennasis* was not her beginning. In her transition to modeling, she chose a more fitting name to what she, then, considered to be her real career, following the rules that apparently are common in the choosing of porn aliases: provide security to the performer by guaranteeing some level of anonymity, following an alliteration pattern and, at the same time, being unique enough to distinguish the performer from her peers.

My birth name, Jenna Massoli, sounded too Godfather; it conjured up the visual of a fat woman cooking spaghetti while her husband comes home from a hard day spent fucking hotter, thinner women. Besides, *if I used my real name, then guys would figure out where I lived and stalk me.*

I could have used my stripper name, Jennasis, but *it sounded too much like a sex-industry name.* I didn't want to have a porno name like Cherry Rain, Candy Floss,

<sup>51</sup> Randall was the first female staff photographer for both *Playboy* and *Hustler*. She is one of the early female porn film directors and is currently president of one of the world's biggest adult content websites, *Suze Network*. In 1972, she played an *au pair* in Éric Rohmer's film *Love in the Afternoon*, but she gave up acting and modelling and devoted her time to erotic photography, becoming the first female to shoot Page 3 for *The Sun* newspaper, a British tabloid tradition of publishing an image of topless female models on the newspaper's third page. She went on to shoot for Penthouse, making the portraits of many of the pets. Her daughter, Holly Randall, followed her mother's footsteps and has her own erotic website, being considered one of the most important contemporary erotic photographers.

or Jenna Lynn (for some reason, everyone picks the last name Lynn). *I knew I wanted my first and last initials to be the same, and I wanted it to sound like it wasn't some made-up stage name.*

I liked Jenna because I didn't know anyone else with that name. So I grabbed the phone book from underneath the kitchen sink [...] and flipped to the J surnames. There was Jack (too close to home), Jacobson (too matronly), Jacoby (too lawyerlike), Jaffe (too Valley Girl), James (too common), and Jameson (too alcoholic). That was my first reaction. But as I thought about Jameson, I decided that I liked it. It was the name of a whiskey, and whiskey was rock and roll. Jenna Jameson, alcoholic, rock and roller. Right on. *The name just stuck.* I suppose if I were pickier I would have kept going through the J's and ended up as Jenna Johnson or Jenna Justus or Jenna Juvenile Diabetes Foundation. (JAMESON, 2004, p. 86-87, our emphasis)

It was the birth of Jenna Jameson, the name under which she would become internationally famous and, it seems, brought in an entire new personality: “At my next real photo shoot, at Julia Parton’s house in Las Vegas, I *was* Jenna Jameson. When I signed the release, it felt so good to write ‘Jenna Massoli, a.k.a. Jenna Jameson.’ It was as if a public persona was suddenly coming into being”. (JAMESON, 2004, p. 93) / “After Emma finished [applying make up to] my face, I hardly recognized myself: I looked, for the first time in my life, like a woman. And that woman appeared sexy, confident, and sophisticated. She was Jenna Jameson. And I liked her a lot more than Jenna Massoli.” (JAMESON, 2004, p. 101). The clear separation between Jenna Massoli and Jenna Jameson is explicit in these two passages, as if heralding the dichotomy between person and persona, between private and public identities, between civilian and pornographic performer. The metanarrative aspect infused in these utterances corroborates with the idea that the pornographic persona differs from the civilian one, and it is constructed with specific intentions and objectives.

Jameson herself directly addresses the first “expected” answer from a porn star’s autobiography on page 125:

Until the day they bury me, a discarded pile of flesh, bones, and silicone, I will always be answering the same question. It comes at me every time I leave the house—which is less often than you might think because, believe me, it’s not easy to tear myself away from the *E!* channel. Be it a man or a woman, a teenager or a grandparent, an attractive person or Bill O’Reilly, they all want to know: “*So how did you start doing porn anyway?*”

When someone asks an actor, a photographer, or a snowboard instructor how he or she got into the business, what they generally want to know is how to break in themselves. But in the case of my profession, *what they generally want to know is what enables someone to make the decision to have sex with strangers on camera for a living.* This is why the second question I get asked most commonly is whether I was beaten, abused, or suffered some sort of childhood trauma like a bump on the head or food poisoning. (JAMESON, 2004, p. 125, our emphasis)

She answers the question on the subsequent page thought a bulleted list:

The actual answer, which I never really realized until I started writing this book, is this:

Baby steps.

STEP ONE

Teenager wants to be a model.

REASON

Like all teenagers, she thinks she's special.

STEP TWO

Teenager starts dating a tattoo artist and biker.

REASON

He's older, badder, and allegedly wiser.

STEP THREE

Teenager becomes a stripper.

REASON

Work, money, and approval of boyfriend.

STEP FOUR

Teenager starts modeling nude.

REASON

It's just like real modeling, except with stripping added in.

STEP FIVE

Teenager starts acting in soft-core all-female adult movies.

REASON

Revenge. (JAMESON, 2004, p. 126)

Jameson claims that it was revenge from her boyfriend's infidelity that led her into doing porn. "As time passed and the wound didn't heal, I decided to get back at him and cheat, in my own way. In the biker and tattoo-artist community, the worst stigma a man can have is if his old lady is sleeping with someone else—and everyone knows it but him. And the best way for me to do that was on camera." (JAMESON, 2004, p. 128). It is important to point out here a paratextual element, found on the ear of the first edition of the hardcover book: "In the underbelly of Las Vegas, a cesspool of warring biker gangs and seedy strip clubs transformed the gawky, brace-faced Jenna Massoli into the bombshell Jenna Jameson." (JAMESON, 2004, ear) In both passages, Jameson's entry into the pornographic industry is accounted for as something provoked by external elements and, although none of them configure economic reasons, neither seems to sprout out of her ready interest in pornography – opposed to what we witness in the other three autobiographies to be discussed in this work.

As part of her "revenge plan", she contacted Andrew Blake, who was then the most prestigious soft-core director in the business and introduced herself. Blake flew her to California the following week, where Jameson shot her first soft-core girl/girl scene with performer Nikki Tyler (who would later become one of Jameson's closest friends and on-off lover). Her next feature, *Up and Cummers II*, got her US\$ 3.000,00 for one scene, but she refused the offer to double the cache for a boy/girl scene. At the age of 19, her first boy/girl scene with Randy West came shortly after the realization that "as I spoke, it dawned on me for the first time that this really was a professional career for me now, albeit an odd one."

(JAMESON, 2004, p. 145) What follows seems to be a more candid explanation for her presence in the pornographic industry than the ones previously presented:

It wasn't just the money. The ever-increasing amounts just helped rationalize it. I was nineteen and had been in every hard-core adult magazine there was, except for maybe *Over 60* and *Still Swinging*. There was nowhere else to go. Adult films seemed like the natural next step. Many of the other magazine girls at that time didn't move on to film. There were notable exceptions, though: Savannah, of course, whom I had seen in my dad's copies of *Penthouse* and *Hustler* before she ever appeared in films; Racquel Darrian was a top nude model; and Janine Lindemulder was one of the most published girls in *Penthouse* before she started working for Andrew Blake. Besides, if I made it in film, then maybe the magazines would finally start calling me Jenna Jameson in my pictorials instead of Shelly and Daisy and Missy. (JAMESON, 2004, p. 145-146)

Jameson goes on to describe her first b/g scene as “explosive, something in which I had absolutely no shred of self-consciousness.” (JAMESON, 2004, p. 146) At the end of the scene – which later would be recognized as one of the first internal ejaculation scenes in the adult film industry – Jameson was called “Randy West with a pussy and tits” by West himself. “I had found my calling” (JAMESON, 2004, p. 147), she states.

And what a calling it was. After a short hiatus that was made necessary as a result of a divorce and severe drug abuse (something Jameson had been dealing with since her first marriage, and that would continue to be a problem for her until recently), she returned to the adult industry at the age of 23, this time more in control of her professional persona, being photographed by Suze Randall again after having moved to Los Angeles, where she lived off Nikki Tyler's couch. Jameson then understood the industry as a business, and this is manifest in her autobiography from chapter 3 of Book 4 onwards, where she constructs a how-to manual to the adult film industry: the *dos and don'ts* for both female and male performers, a copy of a exclusivity contract with a studio and the rates practiced at the time, all punctuated with narrations of how she marketed herself in the industry, walked into Wicked's studio and demanded a contract<sup>52</sup>, designed her own limits, took over the microphone at *E! Entertainment Channel's* coverage of the Porn Awards in Cannes – later being hired as a reporter to cover the opening of all Planet Hollywood restaurants in Asia –

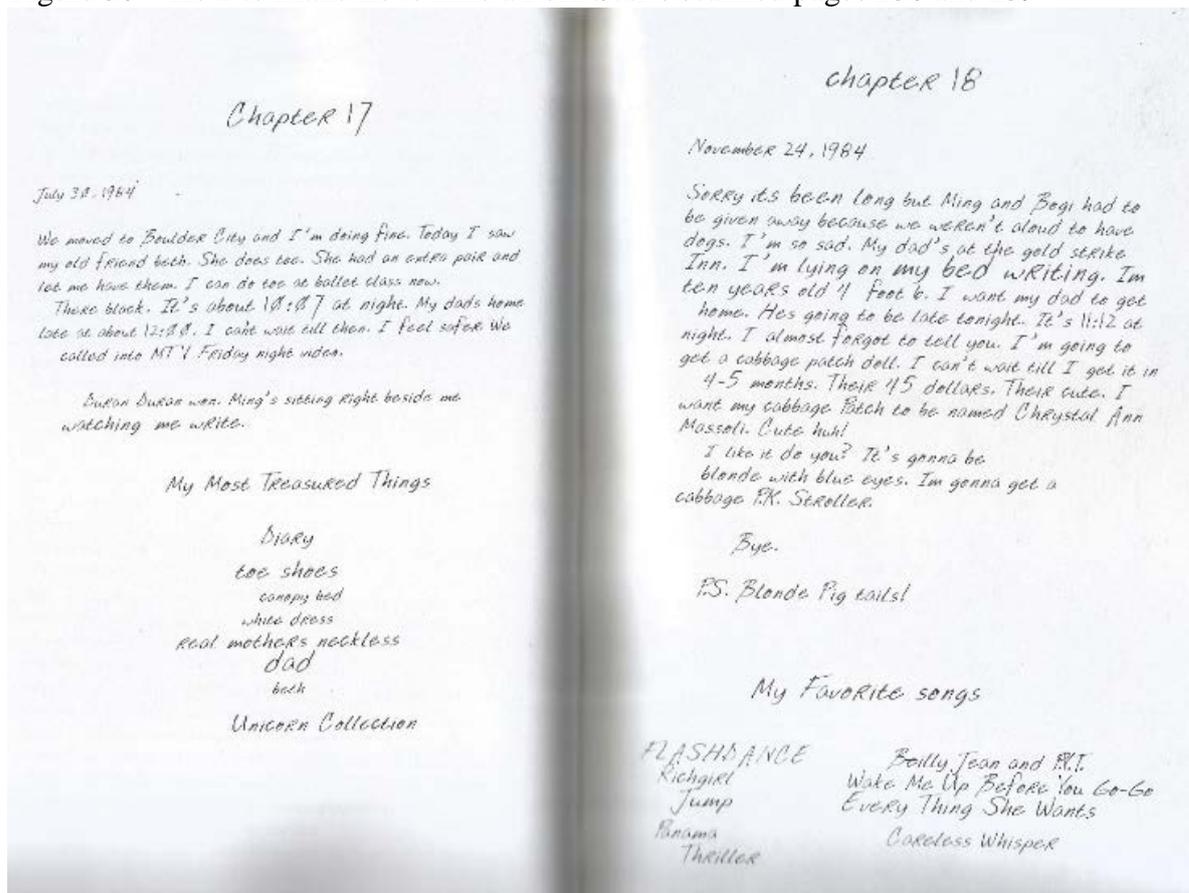
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<sup>52</sup> A contract performer is bound to appear only on productions from a certain studio, being paid a yearly fee. Until then, Steve Orenstein (Wicked Films) had signed only one other contract performer. In her contract, Jameson got US\$ 6.000,00 per film, with eight films to be done in one year. Under Wicked's promotion, Jameson became the only winner of Adult Video Network Awards for Best New Starlet, Best Actress, and Best Sex Scene in the same year.

and mailed Howard Stern<sup>53</sup> photographs of herself, getting a recurring spot in his radio show.

Jameson challenges the reader's fidelity to her narrative again while reinforcing her pact that she is telling the "truth" on page 149, when she writes, in the introduction of a transcribed pornographic film script: "Note to the reader: The following sex scene has been transcribed in its entirety, so that no scintillating detail is left to the imagination". The promise to tell it all, to unveil the secrets is reignited to the reader in those words. Another technique she uses to reinforce the idea that she is being loyal to the truth are what seem to be scanned pages of her diary, scattered along her memoir (pages 52, 53, 203, 223, 231, 238, 239, 247 for example), starting from 1983, when Jameson was 8 years old (page 225). These count as entire chapters in her memoir, and act as visual documentation and registry of childhood events described by Jameson, for example when her mother died (Figure 30).

Figure 30 – How to Make Love Like a Porn Star's scanned pages 238 and 239



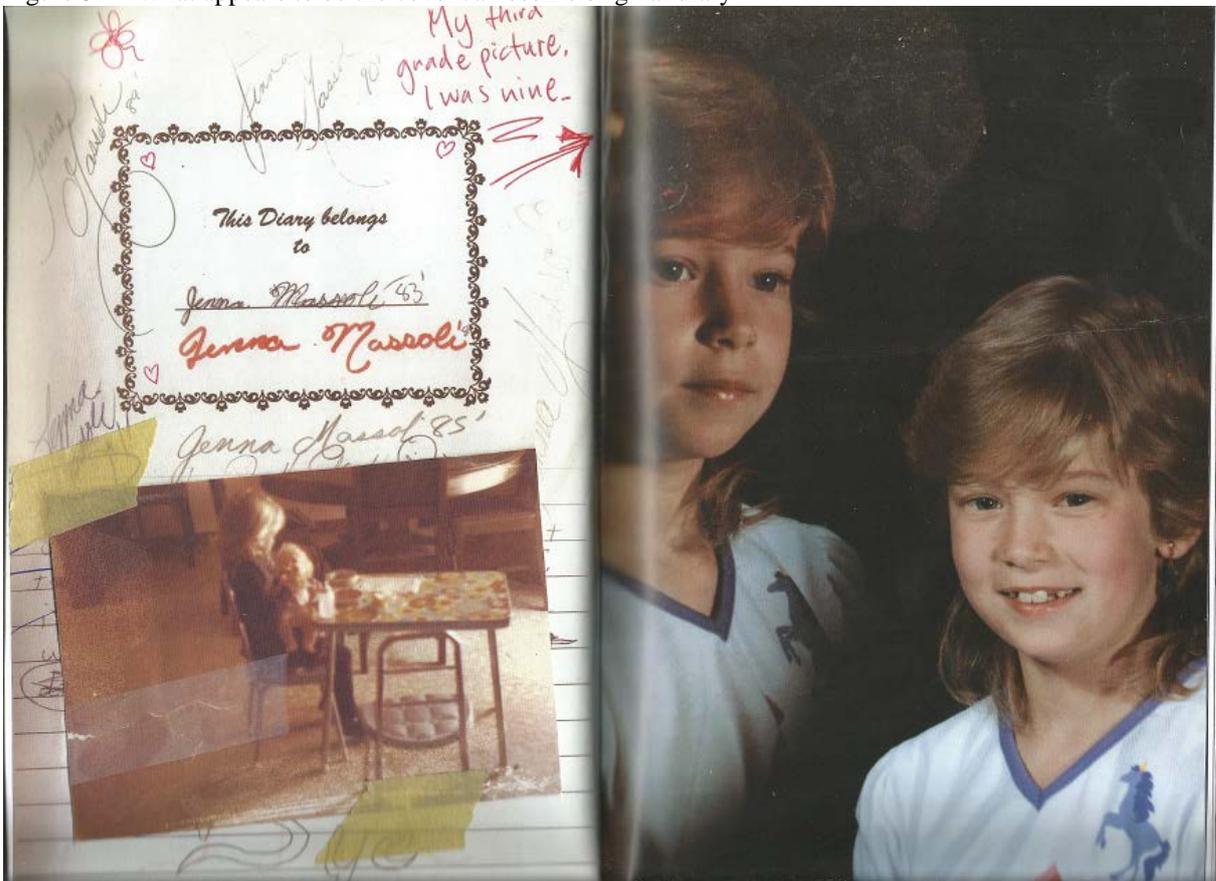
Caption: How to Make Love Like a Porn Star's scanned pages 238 and 239, as presented in the book, showing Jameson's diary.

Source: The author, 2019.

<sup>53</sup> American radio and television personality, producer, author, actor, and photographer. He is best known for his radio show *The Howard Stern Show*, which gained popularity when it was nationally syndicated from 1986 to 2005.

She even goes to the length of presenting the original diary's cover in the first set of colored pictures in the book, which comes unnumbered between pages 52 and 53. This set of photographs are what seems to be handmade collages of Jameson's personal photographs and handwriting, sometimes aiming at explaining the image to the reader ("My third grade picture. I was nine."), others appearing to be adolescent's musings of signing autographs in 1989, 1990, and so on, on what appears to be the cover of the original diary (Figure 31). These personal mementos confer veracity to the autobiography, because – if authentic – they are records of the past and, therefore, should act as proof of veracity, attesting to the events narrated<sup>54</sup>.

Figure 31 – What appears to be the cover Jameson's original diary



Caption: Scanned image of Jameson's autobiography.  
Source: The author, 2019.

<sup>54</sup> The entire tome presents four sets of colored, gloss paper with photographs. The last three are composed of professional-looking photographs of Jenna Jameson. The first one is the only one that simultaneously presents images and writings, resembling a personal picture album that follows from Jameson's birth to the cover of her first pornographic feature from Vivid. In a way, it is as if this first collection spans over the life of Jenna Massoli until she becomes Jenna Jameson, therefore allowing for a more personal and candid approach to the images. The minute Jenna Jameson – the performer – takes over, handwriting and heart-shaped letters disappear, giving room to aesthetically crafted professional photographs.

Jameson had learned how to market herself. She left Wicked in 1999, founding her own company, ClubJenna, in 2000 with her second husband, Jay Grdina. The website, which was one of the first to provide not only films, but all sorts of media to paying members, started to make its own productions in 2001, primarily starring Jameson and Grdina only. The first ClubJenna film, *Briana Loves Jenna* (2001), co-produced with Vivid, cost US\$280,000 to make, and grossed over \$1 million in its first year. It was the bestselling and best-renting pornographic title of its year, winning the Adult Video Network Awards. Jameson's films averaged sales of 100,000 copies, compared with run-of-the-mill pornographic films, which did well to sell 5,000. In 2004, ClubJenna signed other models, and the next Jameson directed her first feature. In 2005, ClubJenna had estimated revenues of \$30 million, with profits of about half that. The Jenna Jameson brand also spread over mobile apps, licensed sex toys and sex simulation video games among other products. In 2006, New York City-based Wicked Cow Entertainment started to expand her brand to barware, perfume, handbags, lingerie, and footwear, sold through high end retailers such as Saks Fifth Avenue and Colette boutiques. By 2006, when ClubJenna was administering more than 150 official sites for other adult entertainment industry stars, Playboy Enterprises announced that it had bought ClubJenna Inc., along with an agreement to have both Jameson and Grdina stay on as contracted executives. Christie Hefner, then chairwoman and chief executive officer of Playboy, said:

As a best-selling author, a personality whose name is among the most-searched on the Internet and the founder of a profitable business, Jenna is a uniquely successful talent. CJI is a very attractive business, which we believe will be both financially accretive and strategically complementary as we continue to execute our multi-platform strategy. This acquisition will allow us to diversify our content offerings in the domestic TV business, while, on the online side, also expanding their existing properties through our network of sites.<sup>55</sup>

In her first meeting with Wicked's president Steve Orenstein, Jenna Jameson had said:

I've done a billion magazines. With no one's help, I made myself the most photographed girl in the business. The movie scenes I've done have been pivotal. A lot of people know who I am. I know what I'm worth, and I'm ready for the next step. The most important thing to me right now is to become the biggest star the industry has ever seen (JAMESON, 2004, p. 344).

Without a doubt, the biggest star position belongs to Jenna Jameson, but her title as the Queen of Porn has more to do with her ability to market herself as a brand than with her

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<sup>55</sup> PLAYBOY Acquires Club Jenna Inc. *finanzen.net*, [S.l.], 2 June 2006. Retrieved from: <https://www.finanzen.net/nachricht/aktien/playboy-acquires-club-jenna-inc-591515>. Accessed on: 2 Aug. 2019.

performance. Over the 15 years she was active in the industry, she performed in less than 100 movies, without ever touching the two biggest taboos in the industry: anal and interracial sex scenes. Her list of partners does not extend over 30, as she often performed with the same professionals. In January 2008, Jameson confirmed she was retiring from pornographic performances (ANDREW, 2008). Since then, Jameson married and divorced mixed martial artist and former UFC champion Tito Ortiz, with whom she had twin boys in 2009. Her first appearance at an adult-entertainment event since her retirement was at the 2013 Exxxotica New Jersey convention in October, and she shortly returned to the adult industry as a webcam model the following month, hosting the 2014 XBIZ Awards on January 24<sup>th</sup>. In late November 2015, Jameson made multiple tweets showing support for Donald Trump as the next president of the United States. In 2017, she criticized *Playboy* magazine for featuring its first transgender Playmate. She gave birth to a baby girl in 2017, after converting to Orthodox Judaism and marrying Israeli boyfriend Lior Bitton. As of 2019, a Google search on Jameson's name immediately links her to the Keto diet, as she has recently lost 40 kilos. Her Instagram account mostly features her daughter and full-body pictures of post-Keto diet Jameson. Her Twitter account linefeed consists mostly of retweets of current event news with commentaries which would easily place her accordingly within the context of the conservative, Republican, *diversephobic* contemporary America. In what can be considered yet another facet of her persona, Jameson's tweets currently focus only on political issues – mostly the Jewish situation in America and her anger towards pro-choice legislation. In a way, the controversial tone of her social media keeps her in the minds of people, and even though she has not performed in over ten years, Jenna Jameson remains one of the most powerful name brands in the pornographic industry.

### 3.1.3 Stormy Daniels – a political storm in a Double-D Cup

The sex is completely different.  
 Sex at home is about what feels good;  
 sex on camera is about what looks good.  
 Especially for the woman.

*Stormy Daniels*

Stormy Daniels (Stephanie Clifford) was brought to the spotlight in January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018 when *The Wall Street Journal* reported that Donald Trump's lawyer had paid her hush money a month before the presidential election to stop her from discussing an affair she allegedly had with Trump in 2006. In October 2<sup>nd</sup> of the same year she published *Full Disclosure*, a 270-page memoir that covers her life from her childhood to the current days. Without a doubt, the media attention she received for the sexual encounter with the current president motivated the writing and publishing of the memoir, since more than 50% of the book is focused on the Trump case. Daniels herself makes it clear she understands this is what motivated readers to buy the book in the beginning of chapter 3, in which she mentions Donald Trump for the first time: "Okay, so did you just skip to this chapter? Quick recap for those just joining us: my life is a lot more interesting than an encounter with Donald Trump. But I get it. Still, of all the people I had sex with, why couldn't the world obsess over one of the hot ones?" (DANIELS, 2018, p. 109)

Born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in March 17, 1979, Daniels was raised by her mother after her father left the family. She describes a horrendous childhood, with a mother who left her to fend for herself at the early age of four, and a house where

[r]ats moved in, and their poop was all over the house. They loved the third bedroom, which became a literal junk room. They could have it. The real problem was roaches. They were everywhere in the house and no place was safe. I had a waterbed and I don't think my mother washed those sheets once after Dad left. The roaches hid in it, waiting for me. I have scars on my legs from where they would bite me. (DANIELS, 2018, p. 17-18)

Despite the long list of boyfriends her mother brought home, Daniels observes that "None of them came on to me, which I know is what people assume happened to adult actresses to "damage them" as children." (DANIELS, 2018, p. 21) Still, Daniels was actually sexually abused by a neighbor for two years, starting at the age of nine.

He got up quickly and walked down the hall.

"It's a secret," he said. When I entered, he closed the door behind me.

I was wearing the hot pink cotton bicycle shorts that were so big in the eighties and a huge shirt my mom got at Kmart. It was white and had three girls on it holding surfboards with raised puffy paint designs. I looked down at my clear jelly sandals, the ones I loved so much even though they made everyone's feet smell so bad. He took off my clothes, and the feeling I most remember is shock at what was happening.

I was nine. I was a child, and then I wasn't.

(DANIELS, 2018, p. 27-28)

The terrible childhood and sexual abuse accounts are part of the type of narrative that is easily found in the stereotype of the pornographic performers as legitimizing – or

explaining – their entry in the industry. However, Daniels refuses to be victim, and chooses to refute the abuse as the reason why she does porn.

I hesitated to even share this here because I know how quickly my truth will be used against me by people who want to prove that women involved in the adult entertainment business are all “damaged.” In a recent survey of two thousand people, 81 percent of the women alleged they had experienced sexual harassment or assault. Did they all become porn stars? By that logic, if you polled a hundred female surgeons—or politicians—would none of the women say that they got through growing up female scot-free? [My friend] and I endured assaults from the same man. Why isn’t she doing porn? (DANIELS, 2018, p. 33-34)

At the introduction of the memoir, Daniels discusses her civilian name: “I was supposed to be called Stephan Andrew after a late relative, but [my mother] and I were stuck with Stephanie Ann. If we should ever meet, call me Stormy.” (DANIELS, 2018, p. 9). However, the birth of “Stormy Daniels” was first shared with her stepmother, Susan, when Daniels was 15. She says:

It was around this time that Susan became the first I told about hating the name Stephanie. *There are lots of stories about why I call myself Stormy, but the truth is that while Stephanie is a lovely name, it never suited me.* First off, my mother gave it to me, and I didn’t want anything from her. And I read a lot of books about Native Americans because of my dad’s Cherokee heritage. In those stories, names reflected both character and destiny. I couldn’t rule the world with a name like Stephanie. But Stormy ... that made more sense. (DANIELS, 2018, p. 46, our emphasis)

The “truth pact” with the reader is established here. After acknowledging that there are “lots of stories” about her name, Daniels establishes a closer relationship with the reader by sharing “the truth” on the significance of the name she chose at the age of 15. But it was only at the age of 17, the first time she was on stage to dance at a strip club where she had gone visit a friend, that the alias actually embodies a new persona. She says:

[the strippers] spirited me into the dressing room, a long rectangle with a table and chairs. It was very smoky and dirty, with two steps that went up the back to the DJ booth, which you walked through to get up to a stage that was the size of a queen-size bed. The girls began to play dress-up with me. *I was Cinderella, with the bluebirds and mice making my dress and fairy godmothers making me feel special.* They muttered and cooed over their project. “Try this on,” a blonde said, handing me a bustier. Another girl said they were going to just do a little something with my eyebrows, and they all nodded. One girl got to plucking, and it hurt so much, but I’m thankful for it now. You should have seen those brows. I’d never groomed them, because my mother didn’t teach me any of that stuff. They did my makeup and did what they could with my brown hair, which I’d always just worn long and flat.

“What’s your name?” Amy asked me.

“Stormy,” I said, looking at *my transformation in the mirror. I smiled. Stormy.* (DANIELS, 2018, p. 52-53, our emphasis)

Refusing to be part of her biological family has led Daniels into quickly forging family-like connections with the strippers and, later in life, establishing relationships which she dubs “family ties” with friends and colleagues, and she often refers to work colleagues as family: “I grew up in a strip club, and like all the dancers, I called Cinnamon “Mom.” (DANIELS, 2018, p. 59). Her description of the dancers at the clubs resemble that of family members, and she makes it clear that the relationship with them goes beyond mere work colleagues: “These women raised me, doing the job my mother had bowed out of.” (DANIELS, 2018, p. 59).

Daniels took on a permanent job at the club despite being a minor, and her migration to film seemed like a natural follow up in her career, mimicking what Jenna Jameson states happened to her when becoming a pornographic performer was the expected move in the advance of her career. Daniel writes:

I'd clocked two years of feature dancing and was killing myself driving all over. I was making a hundred dollars a show before tips and doing fifteen shows a week. The problem was that I had topped out on rate. *I'd done just about every magazine except Penthouse and Playboy. And the only way to bump your rate up after you top out is to do films.* Devon Michaels<sup>56</sup>, who opened so many doors for me, was in the same boat. She called me one day and told me, “I'm going to go to L.A. I've decided to do porn.” (DANIELS, 2018, p. 80, our emphasis)

Immediately after arriving in Los Angeles with Michaels – who had insisted she come along and had even actually paid for her ticket – Daniels met Brad Armstrong,<sup>57</sup> who was directing Michaels in the scheduled scene. Daniels knew her porn and was an avid consumer of it, even having a DVD collection. She was familiar with the work of Wicked Productions and recognized Armstrong immediately. He put her in contact with Steve Oreinsten, owner of Wicked, even before she had done a scene. She was signed as a contract girl for Wicked in September 2002 and did her first photoshoot with photographer Suze Randall – like it had happened with Jenna Jameson. Being in a relationship with Armstrong, Daniels soon started writing scripts for him and her contract with Wicked was extended to performer and writer. It did not take long before it was expanded again, and she incorporated director into it. She did some cross over, appearing in mainstream Hollywood productions such as Judd Apatow's *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (2005) and *Knocked Up* (2007).

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<sup>56</sup> Born March 8, 1976 in Chicago, Illinois, Devon Michaels has been in the industry since 2002. (IMDB.COM, 2019).

<sup>57</sup> Brad Armstrong (born Rod Hopkins, September 23, 1965) is a Canadian pornographic director and performer. He is currently under contract with Wicked Pictures, and is known as one of the most important men in the sex industry, earning the nicknames “The King of Porn” and “The Spielberg of Skin Directors”. He has won a myriad of awards both as performer and as director, including 18 “Best Director” awards, 9 “Best Screenplay” and has been inducted into XRCO and AVNs Hall of Fame.

Daniels was inducted into the AVN Hall of Fame on January 18, 2014 and was inducted into the XRCO Hall of Fame on April 16, 2014. Her directorial work that year earned fourteen AVN Award nominations including a nomination for Best Safe Sex Scene.

Daniels's perspectives about the industry in her memoir are clean cut and humorous at the same time. Feeding the audience's thirst for anecdotal tales of pornographic sets, she describes the scenes she takes part in as though she were registering a regular daily chore in domestic life. The juxtaposition of porn scenes with chatting about ordinary topics and the stop and go rhythm of the narration also contribute to the humorous tone of the descriptions.

These four girls were going at it like they were inventing girl-on-girl rough sex. The grunts, the cries, the "yeah, yeah, yeahs." One girl was using a double-ended dildo to fuck another one doggy-style while also thrusting the opposite end into herself. Devon was helpfully spreading the ass cheeks of the receiver while getting fucked with another dildo. It takes a village.

Stephanie was going, "Unh unh unh unh" at the top of her lungs when Brad said, "Cut."

They all broke character, relaxing their bodies with double-headed dildos still inside them.

"Do you think the weather is gonna be good this week?" Stephanie asked, as the camera guy switched tapes. Back then you had to do that for every twenty minutes of film.

"I think so," said Nicole, just as nonchalant. "I don't think there's rain coming, so it might just stay humid."

The tech said, "Ready," and they were right back at it.

"Oh, God, yes, yes, yes, yes!" screamed Nicole, in time with each thrust of a dildo.

After a while, Brad said, "Cut. I want to move the lighting." While the men on the crew saw to that, the girls checked their nails.

"Is anyone gonna be at that party Friday?" said Nicole.

"Oh, it's so far out," said Stephanie. "I don't know if—"

"Action," said Brad.

"Yeah, like that!" yelled Stephanie, falling right back into heavy-breathing rhythm.

"Just like that, you fucker! Oh, God, oh, God!"

*On set, you're not just breaking the fourth wall. You're pissing on it, then knocking it over with a bulldozer.* (DANIELS, 2018, p. 82-83, our emphasis)

The premise of this girl-girl scene was *typical porn*: We are hiking when my friend sprains her ankle out on the trail. I give her a shoulder to lean on, and when that doesn't fully do the job, I comfort her with my vagina. (DANIELS, 2018, p. 85, our emphasis)

I found doing a boy-girl scene to be easier for me than girl-girl. Just logistically, when it comes to kissing another woman, you've got two sets of lashes hitting, the lipstick all over the place. Guys usually have no ego with me, whereas girls ... Let's be honest, this is a business where your income and popularity are directly related to how pretty you are. (DANIELS, 2018, p. 88-89)

In 2010, Daniels made a public statement revealing her intention to run as senator for the state of Louisiana opposing David Vitter, after the unveiling of his connections to a prostitution ring. A registered Democrat, she self-declared as a Republican candidate because "now I cannot help but recognize that over time my libertarian values regarding both money and sex and the legal use of one for the other is now best espoused by the Republican Party"

(CONDON, 2010). She made several listening tours around Louisiana to focus on the economy, as well as women in business and child protection, and stated that if elected, she would likely retire from the adult industry<sup>58</sup>. However, on April 15, 2010 she announced that she would not be running for Senate, saying she could not afford a run for the Senate seat and stating that the media never took her candidacy seriously.

One of my lines on the tour was “Politics can’t be any dirtier of a job than the one I am already in.” But I was wrong. I realized two weeks in that, just like the entertainment business but with way more repercussions, it’s about who you know and it’s about money. Vitter’s war chest was estimated at two million dollars. Right there was the real civics lesson: The person most qualified to represent the average resident of his or her state could never afford to run. Which means they will never win. Which means the people will never have true representation. It’s why we are stuck with a Congress full of millionaires. I started to get disheartened and was actually depressed for a while about that. Here I was, just doing this until an adult showed up, but what if there were no more honest grown-ups in politics? (DANIELS, 2018, p. 163)

But Daniels was far from being done with politics. In January 2018, The Stormy Daniels – Donald Trump scandal broke when *The Wall Street Journal* revealed that shortly before the 2016 United States presidential election, Daniels had been paid \$130,000 to sign a nondisclosure agreement about a sexual encounter she had had with Trump in 2006. The details of said “affair” are described in the second half of her memoir, which deals mostly with the implications of having met Trump until current days, including her subsequent divorce, loss of her child’s custody and illegal imprisonment on July 12, 2018, when she was arrested in Ohio by undercover vice cops in a sting operation in a strip club.

In the 22 pages of Chapter 3 (DANIELS, 2018, p. 109-131) Daniels narrates step by step her encounter with Donald Trump on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2006. As posed before, she clarifies that she understands that this is the (only) chapter that led some people to the book when she directly addresses the reader on page 109: “Okay, so did you just skip to this chapter?”; she reinforces this idea a couple of paragraphs below, when she addresses the reader a second time: “As you know, [Jessica Drake and I] had history. *For those of you just joining us*, she slept with my boyfriend Brad behind my back, and I wanted to murder her. Little things” (DANIELS, 2018, p. 109, our emphasis). This direct reference to the importance of this chapter above all others to the eyes of the audience plays a significant part in the memoir: Daniels is aware that the interest in her narrative evolves almost exclusively around the

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<sup>58</sup> “I figured that if I could use my name to highlight topics like Planned Parenthood and sex education—which I am very passionate about—and expose this guy as a hypocrite who was not good for the average Louisiana resident, then I would. The Stormy Daniels Senate Exploratory Committee was up and running, and we even had a campaign slogan: “Stormy Daniels: Screwing People Honestly.” My endgame, and I said as much on national interviews with the likes of CNN, was to inspire someone more qualified to step up to the plate.” (DANIELS, 2018, p. 161-162)

political scandal she had starred, and seems to accept – and even stimulate – such specific interest with those two tongue-in-cheek comments. It is not a surprise, therefore, that the majority of the narrative in this memoir circulates around this encounter and its developments. Daniels makes no effort to hide this specific strategy in the construction of this work – much to the contrary.

The entire chapter, however, takes on a different path than expected. While it obviously presents humorous anecdotal moments of her encounter with Trump – including a description of his penis and her discovery of the shampoo brand he uses – and appropriately feeds the hunger for “intimate details” of the general reader, the chapter when closely analyzed reveals more about character construction than about sexual innuendo. The parallelisms found in the construction and representation of the persona involved both in the pornographic and the entertainment/political industries are worth dwelling upon. There are many passages which refer to concepts of performance, but curiously only two refer to Daniels herself, as the following chart shows:

Table 2 – References to performance

About Daniels	About Trump
“I wasn’t <i>putting on an act</i> —that’s just my personality and what I do to people who I work with.” (p. 123)	“Back then, Trump was just a charismatic businessman and Apprentice reality star. <i>Playing the part</i> , he came over to shake our hands. “I’m Donald Trump,” he said, <i>acting</i> like he was hosting the event. “Thank you for coming today.”” (p. 110)
“He was a little verbal, but nothing dirty. “That’s great,” he said. “That’s great. Oh, you’re so beautiful.” <i>I certainly didn’t do any kind of performance</i> . I just kind of lay there.” (p. 128-129)	“‘I’m serious!’ I said. For a second, I almost lost my nerve. <i>He was still “The Donald,”</i> and he was much older than me.” (p. 118)
	“His whole demeanor had changed. <i>His peacock plumage was now folded down and he became a more normal human being.</i> ” (p. 118)
	“He seemed to be <i>off-script.</i> ” (p. 119)
	“He was using all the outsized, grand words we know him for now. <i>But it wasn’t for show.</i> He was having a genuine moment. An epiphany.” (p. 119)
	“‘Everybody talks about [my hair],’ he said with an air of in-on-the-joke smugness. ‘It’s my thing. <i>It’s my trademark.</i> ’” (p. 123)
	“He was perched on the edge, <i>like he had tried out different poses. A poor attempt at looking powerful.</i> He had taken off the suit, and was down to his white briefs, a white V-neck, and socks.” (p. 127)

Caption: all emphasis are ours.

Source: The author, 2019.

The similarities between the two characters in that scene is even self-referred in the following dialog:

He looked at me with the same face he made when he found out I was a director.  
 “That’s interesting,” he said. “I don’t drink, either.”  
 “Not at all?” I said, taking my turn to be surprised.  
 “I don’t like the taste of alcohol,” he said. “And I find people make poor financial decisions when they’ve been drinking.”  
 “I know! That’s one of the reasons I don’t drink. I’ve been stripping since I was seventeen, and I can’t tell you how many clubs I’ve been in where girls get drunk and lose their money. I was like, ‘Not for me.’ I totally get it.”  
 He smiled. “*Our businesses,*” he said, “*are kind of a lot alike, but different.*”  
 “Yeah!” We laughed.  
 (DANIELS, 2018, p. 116, my emphasis)

Daniels clearly understands “The Donald” as a performer – and this idea is corroborated by him when he compares himself to her. Both are players in businesses which require total control of persona and character, and which require that person and persona be kept separate, only the latter being accessed by the public eye. When referring to his hair as his “trademark”, Trumps builds a clear allusion to his understanding of the marketability of his persona in the entertainment business, just like pornographic performers have trademarks which are translated in their bodies. The theatrics of both industries, to them, seem similar. Daniels even closes the chapter making a direct reference to the stage-set construction of the chapter, when she states that “*Before we leave this scene, I would like to note that it wasn’t until very recently that I learned that Karen McDougal says she was having an affair with Trump and had sex with him in Lake Tahoe that weekend*”. (DANIELS, 2018, p. 130, my emphasis)

For all it is worth, *Full Disclosure* (2018) can be analyzed under three lenses. The first, which extends from the Prologue until Chapter 3, briefly narrates the childhood of Stephanie Clifford, her transformation into Stormy Daniels and her introduction to the pornographic film industry. The second, which breaks ground and closes on Chapter 3, focuses on her encounter with President Donald Trump – and configures as the main reason why this book was published in 2018. The third lens develops from Chapter 4 onward and is the consequence of that encounter in her personal life and a very sharp view on American politics, with an annotated analysis of the intricate relationship between politics, power and money.

Though 260 pages separate two utterances in which Daniels directly addresses the reader from the position of the narrator of a memoir – “Here’s my story. It has the added benefit of being true”. (DANIELS, 2018, p. 8) and “Though my book has to end somewhere,

my story goes on". (DANIELS, 2018, p. 268) – the importance of this work is made explicit in the significance of having a pornographic performer's point of view on one of the most talked-about sexually toned political scandals since the Monica Lewinsky situation during the second Clinton administration. Daniels herself seems to be surprised with the importance and the impact of her own voice when she claims that

[t]wo hours later, Cohen messaged Davidson about Trump's strategy again. "Keith, the wise men all believe the story is dying and don't think it's smart for her to do any interviews. Let her do her thing but no interviews at all with anyone."

[...]

The wise men were wrong about the story dying. Maybe they should have asked a wise woman. *It never occurred to any of these men that I would someday have a voice.* (DANIELS, 2018, p. 268, our emphasis)

Although it is unclear whose voice being heard is surprising – if the civilian's or the performer's – Daniels' statement addresses a double oppression faced by female pornographic performers, who have two of their voices commonly made mute. The importance of the autobiographical discourse for these women is undeniable because it allows them to expose both – and more – voices to a public who chooses to listen to them by reading their words.

### 3.2 An afterthought

Perhaps pressed by time in order to make use of the spotlights the scandal with Trump brought upon her, Daniels' memoir is not as thorough or as well-crafted as Jenna Jameson's, even though it clearly carries the same "media directed" tone found in *How to make love like a porn star*. And although also co-authored, it rushes through the formation of the persona of Stormy Daniels, choosing to rely almost exclusively on the events surrounding the Trump scandal to secure sales. These events would not have been as popular had she not been a pornographic performer; as consequence, the performer's voice is much more active than the civilian's voice in her memoir, although her place of utterance allows for a more personalized discourse as she discusses the implications of those events in her civilian life in the last part of the book. Nevertheless, the parallel between the two memoirs – both by female pornographic performers, both co-authored by male journalists and both allowing for a behind-the-scenes peek into the pornographic industry while extensively making use of the pornographic performers stereotypes – was easily noted by the readers, who even publicly called Daniels

out on the similarities between her and Jameson, as the following Twitter interaction shows (Figure 32):

Figure 32 – Stormy Daniels' Twitter interaction



Source: DANIELS, 2019.

## 4 VOICE OVER – TAKE 2

Ashley Blue and Asa Akira represent the second category of memoirs by female pornographic performers that I will analyze. Ashley Blue’s memoir has granted her the nickname of “The Hemingway of porn” (BLUE, 2011, back cover). Asa Akira could not stop at one and published two memoirs in the past five years. Both performers escape the stereotypical image of the porn star – white, blonde, tall, with big breasts –, and both have published memoirs which deeply dive into the politics of the pornographic industry without being (officially) mediated by any other discourse. The covers of their works – Blue’s is a painted self-portrait while Akira’s brings street artist David Choe’s portraits of her – already point in the opposite direction of other pornographic performers’ autobiographies or memoirs, which often feature a photograph of the autobiographed – perhaps to make use of their already familiar faces to catch the eye of the audience and boost sales. For these two performers, however, the artistic eye is a filter through which they will present themselves to the imagined reader/ audience, not by a photorealistic portrait, but by artistic interpretations of their faces: an interpretation that ultimately transforms real people into drawn characters. It is not surprising, then, that the narrative of these works plays more extensively with concepts of proximity and distancing between person and persona, of the civilian image and the pornographic one.

### 4.1 Ashley Blue: the girl next door?

I was as fresh as could be. My hair was shoulder-length and flipped-out at the ends, and I had such an innocent smile. Except for the little cocaine addiction, I was the Girl Next Door.

*Ashley Blue*

From a more alternative, less “mainstream” pornographic industry comes the testimonial of Ashley Blue (Oriana Small). Starting in 2002, she worked for ten years in the

industry, and won multiple Adult Video News awards, including the 2004 Female Performer of the Year and the 2005 Best Supporting Actress. In 2013, she was inducted into AVN's Hall of Fame. Blue started in the industry in a niche that fosters what is called hardcore pornography<sup>59</sup>. She had a three-year contract with JM Productions between March 2004 and February 2007, where she created her most important body of work: the *Girlvert* series, a 19-movies line, all but the first starring Ashley Blue as a sadistic, bratty teenager who tricked other women into threesomes, “unwanted” punishment and anal sex. According to journalist Lyndsay G,

[Blue] has done things on camera that many people don't even know *can* be done, put hundreds of thousands of dollars of drugs into her system, been peed on and cum upon thousands of times... and come back for more, swinging, shit-talking, and proud every time. To some, she's hot. To some, she's a hero. To others, she's a symbol of all that's wrong with the world of pornography and the state of modern women (G., 2011).

Winner of "Best Continuing Video Series" 2004, 2005 & 2006 AVN Awards and Winner of Adam Film World's "Best On-Going Series" for 2003, *Girlvert* is a controversial series from a controversial studio, with films often featuring erotic humiliation and rough sex. Although it is pivotal to reinforce that all scenes filmed are consented by the performers, it is undeniable that some of the hooks used to publicize the series are cringe-worthy: "She will treat you like the whore you are!"; "The ultimate Girlvert Ashley Blue teaches these worthless cumbuckets how to be whores!"; "The female pervert is back for more hardcore action that slaps you across the face like a cup full of warm urine."; "Sexual terrorist Ashley "Girlvert" Blue preys on young girls and steamrolls them into submission"; "Ashley Blue is a self proclaimed nightmare for whores. She abuses them verbally and physically, ridiculing them as she forces them to fuck degenerates for your amusement."<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Although technically the difference between softcore and hardcore pornography is how explicit the sex shown on the screen is – softcore pornography does not allow the close up of sexual organs, penetrations or the cum-shot – inside the industry what is called hardcore pornography involves not only “detailed depictions of sexual organs or sexual acts such as vaginal, anal or oral intercourse, cunnilingus, fellatio, fingering, anilingus, ejaculation, and fetish play” (HARDCORE pornography, 2019) but more “violent” acts. Linda Williams poses the distinction between softcore and hardcore productions on gender roles: “In hard-core film and video the hero with whom the viewer is asked to identify is only rarely the male, for male activity and pleasure, as we have seen, are generally taken for granted in hard core. Instead it is the female, in her mixed function of activity and passivity, who most interests the genre, an interest that Dennis Giles (1977, 56) attributes to the unconscious "projective identification with the pornographic female." In the wake of Laura Mulvey's influence, projective identification has not been adequately appreciated by film theory. Yet almost all the hard-core features we have examined share this quality, rare in the narrative feature, of the female actively seeking her pleasure. It could very well be that in sadomasochism too, she actively seeks it, though indirectly and paradoxically, through playing the role of helplessness and abandon”. (WILLIAMS, 1999, p. 208)

<sup>60</sup> GIRLVERT 18. *In*: Adult Film Database. [adultfilmdatabase.com](http://www.adultfilmdatabase.com), [S.l.], 2009. Retrieved from: <http://www.adultfilmdatabase.com/videoseries/2/girlvert/> Accessed on: 10 Oct. 2018.

Born in California in 1981, Oriana Small joined the pornographic industry at the age of 20, after answering to an ad on the paper that said “FIGURE MODELS NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY WORLD MODELING...” (BLUE, 2011, p. 13) As she explains, she responded to the ad despite not having much faith in her looks.

I was nervous. This was a stupid idea. They’re going to say no. Definitely. Maybe they will say something worse. I’ll be a laughing stock. Long after I leave their offices, they’ll still be joking about how I came in to apply. What if they told me I was too short? Or too fat! Not once in my life has anyone told me I could be a model. It was an entirely far-fetched dream for a girl as average as me, medium in every way. I was neither tall nor gorgeous, big-eyed nor buxom...I would call myself cute, at best. (BLUE, 2011, p. 14)

Only upon arriving at the office did she realize the call was for performers in adult films. At first, she turned down the possibility, in a passage that heralds a contradiction that will be carried on throughout the entire memoir, which is the concurrent – and fairly common – fascination and aversion she feels towards pornography:

This was wrong! Oh, I am such a bad person! I should have never come here, I repeated in my head over and over, hoping that would make the huge new scarlet letter “P” on my chest disappear. P for PORNOGRAPHY. However, it was not a simple guilt. I was ashamed partly because porn was supposed to be an evil, vile thing, but moreover, I was ashamed because deep down inside, it turned me on. (BLUE, 2011, p. 17-18)

In her admission that her interest and repulse by pornography made her relationship with it complex lies one important aspect of this memoir: the unapologetic tone used by Blue in her narrative. She does not try to justify why she did things; instead, she is brutally honest regarding her initial feelings of shame and guilt about working in the pornographic industry until the day she realized, while buying cocaine from a neighbor, that “[his] job was way more exploitive and immoral than porn, anyway.” (BLUE, 2011, p. 33). The matter-of-fact tone used by Blue throughout the entire memoir resonates her detachment from any judgments cast toward her pornographic persona, even if her concerns with the implications that being in porn have in her civilian identity sometimes overtake her voice, as I will later discuss.

Blue's approach to sex is made explicit in the beginning of her memoir:

Ever since high school, I was really into one-night-only sexual encounters. It could be as little as a make-out session or a blowjob. I loved meeting new men and going off somewhere to have sex. I never thought of it as “giving it up.” I got something out of it, too. Instead of orgasms, I received knowledge. I was learning about men’s bodies, and I was learning about my own body. *Sex gave me a feeling*

*of power. Sex is power. Sex made me feel pretty, wanted, needed, and smart. I did all I could to make those feelings stronger.* (BLUE, 2011, p. 15, our emphasis)<sup>61</sup>

Feeling pretty, being validated by others and finding acceptance were also norths to Blue's decisions regarding her position inside the pornographic industry: "I also wanted to be as hardcore as I could be for personal reasons. For one, it would please Tyler and our friends so much, and pleasing everyone was very, very important to me." (BLUE, 2011, p. 28) Here there is a clear separation between civilian and pornographic persona, and it scaffolds the analysis of the construction of "Ashley Blue" based on Oriana Small's fascination for contradictions and unconventionality:

I have never been a good kid. I've always liked being bad. (BLUE, 2011, p. 32)

Porn was attractive because I knew it was bad. (BLUE, 2011, p. 32)

We felt like we'd broken the rules, and it was magnificent. (BLUE, 2011, p. 39)

I was turned on by the taboo of it all. (BLUE, 2011, p. 59)

The awareness that the pornographic persona is constructed like a character is clear in Blue's narrative. The constant references to the "character" illustrate how Oriana Small is aware that she has built Ashley Blue as a persona that she embodies exclusively to the pornographic world. At times, she even incorporates the moniker "Girlvert" as another one of her identities, like in the title of this memoir and as her Twitter handle.

It can be a tiresome act. I don't like to *be in character*, so to speak, twenty-four hours a day. I didn't want my entire social life to revolve around sex. (BLUE, 2011, p. 128, our emphasis)

I starred in several [JM Productions] videos, in a series called Girlvert. I had a recurring role as the Girlvert *character*, an angry, abusive, young girl who forces other girls into rough sex. It's the best work I have done in my porno career. (BLUE, 2011, p. 238, our emphasis)

I had to prepare to play the Girlvert. The *character* was a mean teenaged girl that forced other girls to have anal sex. (BLUE, 2011, p. 258, our emphasis)

Knowing Blue's rationale behind the construction of her pornographic persona one cannot help but wonder to which extent her narrative is not also carefully constructed before it is delivered, even though it seems erratic. The building of "Ashley Blue" as a pornographic persona seems as falsely-carelessly crafted as Blue's statement that "I wanted

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<sup>61</sup> No matter how controversial her stance might be, I cannot help but underscore how this act of self-representation goes against the image of the pornographic performers as prey to the industry. Instead, Blue sees her approach to sex as empowering.

to be the most beautiful thing that ever fucked” (BLUE, 2011, p. 37).<sup>62</sup> Fucked, no explanations asked. The words at first sound impulsively and used to create a shock effect, the same way Blue’s persona seems to be built on a whim:

[...] My paper read: BLOW JOB\_\_\_\_, ANAL\_\_\_\_, DP\_\_\_\_, SWALLOW\_\_\_\_, GANG BANG\_\_\_\_, INTERRACIAL\_\_\_\_, and so on.

“What is this part? What do I put here next to FACIAL?” I was trying my hardest not to laugh. I knew what it meant. I just wanted someone to explain it to me out loud. It was too funny.

Ty let out a sigh and explained. “That is a list of what you’re willing to do on camera. The smart thing for a new girl to do is to start out doing solo stills for print work. After you’ve done all the magazines we can get for you, you move up to girl/girl stills and eventually boy/girl. Much later on in your career, you could consider doing anal, if that is something you decide. [...]

As for his take on what I should allow myself to be seen doing on camera, well, no thank you. He couldn’t possibly think that I, Oriana Small, would be doing porn as a career. Maybe I’ll do it once, but not for anything long-term, was my thinking. What the hell was he saying about career longevity? Do people actually plan out that they are going to be fucking in a video for the rest of their lives?

*No way would I be doing this for very long.* We hadn’t even done one scene, so it was kind of impossible to think about the long-term. How would I know if I could handle it? Or, much less, like it? How much will I regret it and for how long will it follow me? What if my family found out? Or my friends? My enemies? My teachers? Kids that I’ve babysat? Old neighbors? People I see on the street? How will it change the way they feel about me?

All I knew at that moment was that I did not want a stretched-out pornography career any more than I wanted a stretched-out twat. I disregarded everything that Ty said I should do. I checked YES for every category. YES ANAL, YES BOY/GIRL, YES DP, YES BLOWJOB, YES SWALLOW, YES FACIAL, YES CREAMPIE.

That should do it, I thought. That should give me a quick and lucrative stint in the profession. What I did listen to Ty about was the amounts of money I would be paid for each sexual act. Since my supportive and loving boyfriend and I were already engaging in these acts in our spare time, I didn’t bat an eye at doing them on film. If it was already bad enough if anyone found out I was doing porn period, then what difference would it make which deeds I’d be committing while doing it? Who cares? Boy/girl was \$800. Anal paid \$1,000. DP, \$1,200. I thought, If I’m going to ruin my chances at running for political office or teaching school, I might as well make as much money as I can doing it. (BLUE, 2011, p. 27-28)

Blue’s perception of the pornographic industry comes across as sharp and objective. She instantly understands the mechanics of it all and can recognize, for example, that the body standards in porn are dubious. Porn is commonly perceived as glamorous, with mainstream performers being expected to maintain a perfect figure and being regarded as extremely beautiful women, thus placing them in a category different from that of the

<sup>62</sup> I would like to establish a parallel here between Blue’s words and Jameson’s words “The most important thing to me [...] is to become the biggest star the industry has ever seen.” (JAMESON, 2004, p. 344) The difference in expectations translates into how different these performers worked their careers, from the construction of their personas to the type of final product they delivered. While Jameson’s focus was always clearly on stardom, Blue’s proposal from the start seems to be more related to exploring limits of sexuality. This immediately defined different parameters in terms of behaviors, utterances and interaction the two performers presented to the industry. Having different goals, it is not surprising that they built different profiles which would guide them towards their expected outcome.

“common” girl. But Blue recognizes that the VHS covers of alternative pornographic films “were yellow boxes with the title and some proletarian photos of girls in need of make up” (BLUE, 2011, p. 30). She understands that the notion of the pornographic industry as a world of perfect bodies and faces did not entirely manifest in the product presented to the public: “The faces and bodies on those boxes looked ugly and crazy. I didn’t have a lot of confidence trying out to be a fashion model, but I knew I was definitely pretty enough for porn” (BLUE, 2011, p. 26).

The separation between pornography and “real life” is a topic approached by Blue in many different stances. “It was for a movie. It wasn’t real life.”, she says (BLUE, 2011, p. 37).

The kind of porn I wanted to be in was the kind that was rough and insane, where even a smaller dick like Jack’s could do some damage. If either of these guys had started kissing me, or gently caressing my body, I would have felt weird. I didn’t want to be physically comforted by these strangers. *My intention was to make a porno, not to make love* (BLUE, 2011, p. 63, our emphasis).

*Having anal sex at home is not the same as performing it in front of other people.* You want to be clinically clean when the camera is rolling. Any unsightly poo or blood is absolutely mortifying! (BLUE, 2011, p. 70, our emphasis).

I think porno performers have talent when they bring something unique to the sex scene rather than memorizing some moves that got positive reactions in the past and doing nothing more than employing them over and over again. To be captivating isn’t a formula. You either have it or you don’t. No one can teach you how to be a standout porno star. *It is way different than being good in bed. They are two completely different forms of sex* (BLUE, 2011, p. 237, our emphasis).

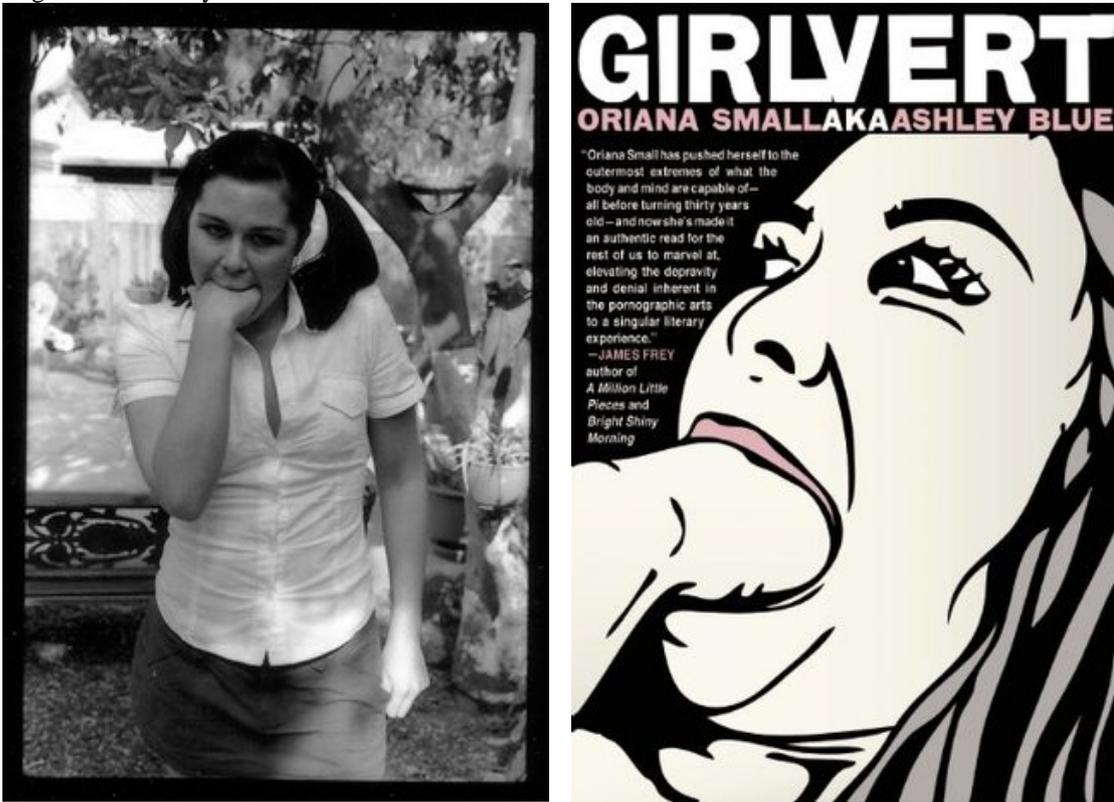
Ed’s body wasn’t one I would normally fuck, with that big, white belly. My focus wasn’t on him so much as it was the idea of him. I was high and completely into the idea of letting this older guy fuck my ass and pay me for it. *It was for a movie. It wasn’t real life.* My relationship was with that camera, and I wanted to turn it on and shock it. I wanted to shove it in the faces of everyone who would be watching someday: I was wild, a crazy girl, and I didn’t care. I was an exhibitionist (BLUE, 2011, p. 36, our emphasis).

I looked up at the lens as I was down on my knees sucking Spike’s cock. He said few words. It was like there wasn’t a man there at all. *Just a camera with a dick.* It’s always easier looking up at a camera than it is into someone’s eyes (BLUE, 2011, p. 58, our emphasis).

Ashley Blue’s career was punctuated with breaking all limits known inside the adult film industry from the very beginning, with her making it clear it was never thought to be a career, but a way to make money. This may be one of the reasons why Blue’s account of her years in the industry differs entirely from Jenna Jameson’s, for instance. While Jameson’s description revolves more about the social aspect of the industry and provides very little personal perspective, Blue is keen to induct the reader into the underground of adult film productions through her own eyes, coming across as very honest in her narrative and

refusing to deliver an arc of spiritual redemption or even a condemnation of the dark side of porn. She is fully aware of her shortcomings, including a constant need for attention and approval, and while she acknowledges an unyielding desire to be in a healthy relationship, she has few – if any – regrets, including not being shy to talk about her cocaine addiction and about how it affected both her decision to start in porn and to stay in it. The 36 chapters of her memoir, *Girlvert*, carry titles such as “Double Anal”, “Pissmop”, “Gonorrhea”, “Anal Fisting”, “Ass Herpes” and “Ass Cream Pie”, corroborating with the persona created by Oriana Small: Ashley Blue made herself “as hardcore as [she] could be” (BLUE, 2011, p. 28), and her trademark movement, the full insertion of her right fist inside her mouth while sexually performing<sup>63</sup>, became one of the covers of her memoir (Figure 33).

Figure 33 - Ashley Blue’s trademark movement



(a) (b)  
Caption: (a) – Ashley Blue’s signature movement, photo by Dennis McGrath; (b) – *Girlvert*’s book cover.

Source: Goodreads, 2019.

In many stances, Smalls speaks of the pornographic industry as a space that allows for her sexual exploration and personal growth.

<sup>63</sup> “I started shoving my hand completely into my own mouth and down my throat. It had always felt good to do this when I was barfing up my food alone over the toilet, so I just incorporated the gratifying feeling of self-purging into our sex.” (BLUE, 2011, p. 23-24)

I had to keep going the distance sexually for myself, too. I had to soar. I wanted to live fully, extraordinarily, not just eking by with some weekend gang bangs from time to time. I realized I had never pursued much in my life with pure gusto, courage, and passion, and often felt caged, dull, and bored. Now, considering the far reaches sex could be pushed to, I felt free (BLUE, 2011, p. 28).

I wanted the opportunity to deconstruct myself and society with no emotional strings attached. Porno gave me that (BLUE, 2011, p. 43).

Getting naked was always the uneasy part of having sex with strangers when I did it outside of porn—the point when I thought the guy could be having second thoughts or might be scrutinizing my body. Regret might sink in. *Porn wipes away any such fears and criticisms*. It's a sure thing that we both wanted it—especially if we wanted to make money. Stripping down nude was just preliminary to the course work. The pressure was off as soon as the clothes were (BLUE, 2011, p. 58, our emphasis).

The fact that I was now an anal-fisting porno girl changed my status *as a performer*. I was as hardcore as it gets. To me, it meant confidence. I could take on anything now, and it would be no problem. Directors saw me as unbreakable. I wouldn't go so far as to say that it made me a star. It did give me a false sense of durability, though, that nothing could ever hurt me. I thought, Hey, if I can fist my own ass, then I am the toughest girl on the planet (BLUE, 2011, p. 116, our emphasis).

However, at the same time, she clearly demonstrates constant concern with the impact of her pornographic persona on her civilian identity. The easily-made connection between adult pornographic films and prostitution is refuted – and feared – by Blue since the beginning of her memoir. Her insistence on separating the person from the persona, Oriana Small from Ashley Blue, echoes on the several passages in which she discusses her concern with how Small is going to be perceived as a “prostitute”, while she shows no concerns about Blue’s reputation because she understands Blue exists only in relation to pornography, and would not be judged outside of it. This clear distinction between the civilian and the performer solidifies the different spaces occupied by the two roles in her discourse, as illustrated in the passages below.

[My boyfriend] might think I went on purpose! – and be disgusted, thinking I was a whore. I felt like I had auditioned to be a prostitute, just like the working girls outside our window. And how, above all else, could I explain the confusing and complex notion that the whole experience was turning me on? (BLUE, 2011, p. 19)

I thought that I would feel more like a prostitute when it was all over. We were paid for sex, technically. But that wasn't how it felt at all. What we did was completely legal, no matter how taboo. We didn't get paid for fucking Ed. We were paid to make a movie, a product. Videotape was the focal point. *It wasn't all about getting this old guy off. Our job was to make a sex tape. There is a difference*. (BLUE, 2011, p. 39, our emphasis).

A lot of porno girls drag gigantic suitcases full of bikinis, heels, and other gear with them to scenes. I couldn't bring myself to do that. A lesser parcel *made me feel like less of a whore*. I didn't like to parade around in public. When I was

among the general population, *I didn't want anyone to know what I did for a living, as if my porno life was still secret.* (BLUE, 2011, p. 57, our emphasis)

I always used the automatic teller machines to make the deposits. I hated seeing the bank tellers reading who the check was written from, looking at me weird with their suspicious eyes. I felt like a total whore in the bank, depositing all of my dirty money. I didn't need some snarky bank clerk being inquisitive about my big check from Spike Johnson Productions. (BLUE, 2011, p. 60)

I wasn't really sure what I liked more, sex at home or sex in the movies. Tyler always knew where to hit me when I was feeling vulnerable. Only hookers like it more in the pornos, I thought. If I like getting paid for sex more, it means I am just a prostitute. *Being called a hooker is way worse than being a porn star.* (BLUE, 2011, p. 101, our emphasis)

Tyler knew he could get to me. He knew I was confused about what I was doing with my body. I was at odds with myself over the sex for money. Was it wrong? Was it more wrong than other things we do for money? Was I a whore? Was I no good? (BLUE, 2011, p. 129)

The reason why Blue seems so worried about being wrongly perceived is she fears the opinion that other people may have of her. Be it in relation to family members, a loved one, or even complete strangers like bank clerks, Small constantly questions her own position in relation to Blue. Although her fear of being outcast or rejected for having entered the pornographic industry never stopped her from making daring decisions in relation to her career (“However, as gut-wrenching as the idea of my family’s reaction to pornography was, it wasn’t as powerful as the allure”) (BLUE, 2011, p. 32), it is manifested in many passages of her memoir in which she states her concern with not only the general public’s, but close people’s opinion about her. From the first interview, in which she feared being discarded for not being pretty enough to be a model, to coming to terms with her complex feelings towards pornography (“The feeling of disgust only lasted a second. I was secretly proud of myself.”) (BLUE, 2011, p. 60), Blue arrives at the end of her memoir free from the constraints of other people’s opinion of her: “As far as I was concerned, the only person who’d earned the right to be morally conflicted about my work was me” (BLUE, 2011, p. 248).

Even though she no longer performs (“I don't consider myself as retired from porn. It's still very much a part of my life. I just have a different role than I used to”)<sup>64</sup>, Blue is still connected to the adult pornographic industry. She has been hosting her own Vivid

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<sup>64</sup> BLUE, Ashley. THROWBACK THURSDAY: A Five Question Quickie with Porno Superstar Ashley Blue. [Interview given to] Holly Kingston. *Fleshbot*, 28 Aug. 2014. Hardcore. Retrieved from: <http://straight.fleshbot.com/6003664/throwback-thursday-ashley-blue-was-avn-s-female-performer-of-the-year>. Accessed on: 20 July 2019.

Radio show, *Blue Movies*, since November 2013, where she discusses all matters related to porn – especially her concern towards allocating a space for performers to speak. Her honest interest in the industry translates in this passage, taken from an interview:

My enthusiasm for the subject of porn movies is genuine and undying, which is why I felt like I was even worthy of having a spot on the Vivid Radio lineup. I collect and find porn (DVDs) to be fascinating, shocking, impressive, hilarious and incredibly interesting. I love being able to share what I see with more people. The performers themselves are a hundred times more intriguing and I'm eager to learn more about them as I get to interview them. Our industry is full of stories that need to be told. My purpose is to tell these stories to our listeners, leading by example, so that everyone listening will feel inspired to share too<sup>65</sup>.

Besides the radio show, Blue dedicates herself to painting. On one of the editions of *Girlvert*, it is hers the self-portrait on the cover. The association between pornography and art is made by Blue herself, when she establishes parallels between painting and doing porn: “There is no acting on the canvas. It’s a different type of freedom, of reality. I used to have the honor of pretending to be someone else. Ashley Blue’s scenes were demanding, but not as challenging as facing a blank canvas.” (BLUE, 2011, p. 303). Blue leaves us with a very objective answer to one of the biggest questions in contemporary culture: “Is pornography art? It’s something that is appealing or repelling just by looking at it, so I will say yes.” (BLUE, 2011, p. 304)

#### 4.2 Asa Akira – embracing racial stereotypes

The world has seen every fold of my most private body parts, and yet,  
I feel this book is my most exposing venture yet. I hope you enjoy.

*Asa Akira*

Perhaps the most prolific adult entertainment performer to date, the “Queen of Anal” Asa Akira has published not one, but two memoirs within three years. Born in New York in 1986, she has appeared in over 700 films and is the second Asian person to win the AVN Female Performer of the Year Award. The child of Japanese immigrant parents, photographer

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<sup>65</sup> BLUE, Ashley. XCritc Interviews. Ashley Blue interview. [Interview given to] Apache Warrior. *XCritic*. [Between 2013 and 2019]. Retrieved from: <https://www.xcritic.com/columns/column.php?columnID=4169>. Accessed on: 2 July 2019.

Kenji Takigami and business executive Taeko Takigami, Asa Takigami lived in Soho and moved to Tokyo at the age of nine. She returned to the United States four years later and moved to Brooklyn. Akira is very vocal about her family and describes them as health nuts who avoided junk food while speaking Japanese at home. She claims to have escaped the porn-star stereotype of a doomed origin and sexual abuse, having had a “perfectly normal” childhood, with a doting stay-at-home mother and parents who have stayed together for 30 years. “I had a normal upbringing. My parents are loving, kind, and present. I have no mental disorders” (AKIRA, 2014c).

Because her grandfather had been a Japanese diplomat for 45 years, Akira managed to receive a scholarship to attend the United Nations International School in Manhattan. “I was surrounded by the Manhattan elite. Spoiled trust-fund babies, and children of diplomats who arrived to school in black limousines with special license plates,” she writes. “And I was the scholarship kid” (CAHALAN, 2014). Her poor grades kept her out during her sophomore year, and she completed her studies at the Washington Irving High School, in Gramercy Park. As a teenager, she worked as a cashier at a children's bookstore but at the age of 14 she answered a Craigslist ad, agreeing to a “sketchy” bikini modeling shoot.

She entered the sex industry at the age of 19, when she was approached on the street in New York and asked whether she wanted to be a dominatrix. She then had a job performing at a sadomasochism club called The Nutcracker Suite before becoming a stripper at Manhattan's Hustler Club. After moving to Tampa, Fla., she became a regular on Sirius XM's “Bubba the Love Sponge Show,” performing light masturbation scenes on camera for a website set up by the radio program. This gave her some popularity, and she became known as the “Show Whore.” It was through pornographic performer Gina Lynn,<sup>66</sup> whom she met while in the radio show, that Akira entered the adult film industry. She explains: “I've always wanted to do porn but I didn't think I would actually do it, because New York is not like L.A., where everybody knows somebody who is in porn. I didn't know anyone.”<sup>67</sup>

She started doing mainly girl/girl scenes with Lynn, and her first boy/girl scene was with Travis Knight in 2008. She signed a contract with Voyeur Media that only lasted six months, followed by years in which she was an independent performer. On October 9, 2013,

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<sup>66</sup> Gina Lynn (born February 15, 1974) is a Puerto Rican former pornographic actress, model, and stripper. She was inducted into the AVN Hall of Fame in 2010 and is the Penthouse magazine Penthouse Pet for April 2012. In 2012 Lynn announced that she had retired from the porn industry but continues to appear on webcams.

<sup>67</sup> XBIZ TV INTERVIEW WITH ASA AKIRA. [S. l.: s. n.], 2012. 1 video (8min43seg). Published by XBIZ Channel. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2D-CdI7YTAU>. Accessed on: 29 Jan. 2019.

Akira announced that she signed an exclusive performing contract with Wicked Pictures. The contract was valid until 2018. She was one of the last Wicked Girls<sup>68</sup> – since 2018, the only one still under contract is Jessica Drake. In 2013, Akira debuted as a director. She has directed a total of eight features, seven for the Elegant Angel studio and one for Club 59. She has won numerous awards in her career as an adult movie actress<sup>69</sup>. She hosted the AVNs Award show in 2013, became Pornhub’s Brand Ambassador in 2018, and her videos alone have amassed more than 460 million video views on porn’s biggest online platform.

As one of the 5 percent of porn stars who are Asian (70 percent are white, according to The Internet Adult Film Database), Akira quickly discovered what typecasting means in porn. “I can’t even tell you how many times I’ve covered my naked body in sushi or played the role of a mail-order bride. ‘Masseuse’ is something I can practically list on my resume” (CAHALAN, 2014), she writes. “I’ve come to embrace the stereotype in a way because it does guarantee me a certain amount of work—there aren’t that many Asian girls in the business—and I realize that’s one of the reasons I have lots of fans, but it’s also nice to know I have fans in other markets as well, “Akira admitted. “I think I’ve turned a lot of men on to Asian women now”. About her first time winning Female Performer of the Year at the AVNs awards, she says:

I feel like I really deserved to win Female Performer of the Year this year and that’s not to say a lot of the other girls didn’t deserve it as well. I worked a lot last year—I literally worked my ass off! I know I worked five to six days a week for most of the year. Not all of those were boy/girl scenes but I guess you can say I have that Asian work ethic. I’d be lying if I said I didn’t want that one so, so, so bad. *I hate to bring race into things but I’m also proud of the fact that I’m only the second Asian girl to win it after Asia Carrera. There’s something to be said about that. It’s harder for an ethnic girl to rise to the top like that. It’s nice to know that I’ve overcome some*

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<sup>68</sup> Being a contract girl brings in more perks than only the financial stability: it is still the last thread of glamour the industry holds on to, and contract performers are considered the unicorns of adult productions. As posed by British scholar Laura Helen Marks, “Wicked Girls embody an ethos of strength, maturity and sexual power. Current contract performers include Jessica Drake and Asa Akira; previous contract performers include Jenna Jameson, Sydnee Steele, and Stephanie Swift, women known for their strength of character, entrepreneurship, and dynamic sexual performances. Wicked Girls are also presented as intelligent and creative, often working as writers and educators in addition to being performers” (MARKS, 2018).

<sup>69</sup> Including 2011 - Best All-Girl three-way sex scene. Best anal sex scene. Best three-way sex scene g/b/b. Best couple sex scene. Porn star of the year.  
 2012 - Best anal sex scene. Best double penetration scene. Best group sex scene. Best tease performance. Best three-way sex scene, b/b/g. Best solo sex scene. Best ass editor's choice. Female performer of the year. Superslut.  
 2013 - Best double penetration sex scene. Best group sex scene. Best three-way sex scene (Girl/Girl/Boy). Best POV Sex Scene. Female Performer of the Year. Best Ethnic Performer (Fan's Choice).  
 2014 - Best Porn Star Website. Best Body (Editor's Choice)  
 2015 - Mainstream adult media favorite  
 2016 - Best supporting actress  
 2018 - Best actress in a couples' themed release

*people's stereotypes of Asian women as the quiet subservient type* (AKIRA, 2013, our emphasis).

The perception of the Asian body as subservient has been amply discussed in relation to pornography by award-winning filmmaker and film scholar Celine Parrenas Shimizu, well-known for her work on race, sexuality and representations and currently a Professor of Cinema at San Francisco State University. As she writes in *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene* (2007):

The term "Asian" holds particular significance as part of a racially based organization of sexuality in contemporary pornography. Based on a study of Adult Video News reviews and Internet pornography database searches of "Asian", the most common current themes of Asian and Asian American women emerge and reflect a relationship to contemporaneous history and globalization: girls from the Orient, young girls (uniformed school girls or poor enslaved girls forced to sell their bodies), the fetishized racial difference in interracial sex, spoils of war, prostitutes, anal sex, and the discourse of stereotypes such as the model minority, the good student, and the small servile body as a pre-feminist haven. While these images are occupied with different kinds of presence, one generalization emerges: race takes precedent over any category of identification organizing the appearances of Asian women in pornography. (SHIMIZU, 2007, 165)

Asa Akira "reinscribe[s] the tradition of hypersexuality as essential to race" (Shimizu, 2007, p. 165) even when she resists them through self-authorship, what she constantly does by reclaiming her ethnicity while refusing to be constrained by it. Together with other Asian performers, she "present(s) existing fantasies of Asian women as crucial to their self-perception and social legibility" (SHIMIZU, 2007, p. 165), ignoring the subalternity that her minority body should ensue. "I don't like anything that makes fun of Asian culture or makes it look dumb," Akira tells *Bustle*: "It's such a thin line to walk and everyone draws that line someplace different. It's such a subjective thing" (MCGOWAN, 2019).

At the beginning, I hated being cast as the Asian girl. I hated every time I had to wear a kimono or be covered in sushi or play a masseuse. Not because I felt it was degrading — because I do feel that it's kind of being celebrated. It's fetishized, but I think that's okay. Now, I've learned to embrace it. It's something that's special about me, it's something that guarantees me work as long as I want to stay in the industry. But I would never do anything that's degrading to Asians (AKIRA, 2014b).

However, Akira understands that her take on the "fetishization" of her culture might be a controversial point to some people, as she discusses:

If it feels like if it's celebrating my culture — or even fetishizing it — that's OK with me. I don't mind being a sex object. I did sign up for a job where I want people to masturbate to me; I want to turn people on. It doesn't bother me, as far as porn goes, to be fetishized. I think that's kind of the point.  
(...)

It's definitely been a really hard thing for me to compromise on. I'm a person of color. I do consider myself a feminist. I do consider myself a progressive. But if I don't play into my Asian-ness and play into fetishization of Asians, then I would cease to exist. I'm sure there are people out there who find things I do degrading to

Asian culture, but I guess I can only live by my own principles (MCGOWAN, 2019).

While Akira grew into accepting to play the fetishized role of Asian woman based on stereotypes on screen, she draws a clear line between playing a one-dimensional sex object on screen and how she wants to be treated in her personal relationships: “I’m like anyone else: In my real life, I don’t want to be seen as a sex object to my friends or even my lovers,” Akira says. “I want to be seen as more than my culture and more than my job. But as far as my job goes? I don’t mind being that person” (MCGOWAN, 2019).

This conscience of the duplicity in her identity – performer and civilian – also resonates with a new approach by performers who are aware that they no longer can pretend to the public to be sexual beings all around the clock. “I love sex, but porn is the fantasy”, Akira states (AKIRA, 2014b).

Who has time to be having porn sex every day? It's very time-consuming. It's not even realistic. [...] As far as separating fantasy from reality, I have enough faith in people that they won't mistake what I'm doing as an educational video. It's a porno. It's entertainment. It's like a Hollywood blockbuster: Just because people are shooting people left and right it doesn't mean that's what we should be doing in reality (AKIRA, 2014b).

The performatic aspect of porn does not escape Akira, as she explains: “As odd as it sounds, porn has always been my dream. The thought of turning people on . . . doing something taboo . . . exposing myself for any perverts’ eyes to see . . . *the performance of it all just gets me going.* (AKIRA, 2014d, p. 70, our emphasis)

The conscience that the pornographic performer is part of the bigger network of sex workers is something new both to the industry and to society. It is no longer acceptable to categorize pornographic performers as broken, having suffered sexual traumas in their childhood, or having entered the industry as consequence of severe drug addiction. Rather, it is a volition that can be translated into agency that drives people into the industry nowadays, and they are aware of their position, being open to debating it with society. “I’m part of the new era of porn,” Akira tells *The Post*. “We’re feminists, very sex-positive people. We’re not victims of rape, not drug addicts, we don’t have any daddy issues” (CAHALAN, 2014).

I don't know that there are many straight-up “misconceptions.” I mean, for every preconception there is of porn stars, there are thousands of girls to prove it right. I guess I'd like people to know I'm not on drugs and I do porn because I want to - because I love to. I think that this is probably true of a lot of the successful girls (AKIRA, 2012).

Akira has a positive view of the pornographic industry as a space that allows for the experimentation of boundaries: “We're entering a time where it's not as taboo as it once was to

be in this business. A lot of it has to do with the Internet. It's drawing all kinds of people, rather than being just a last resort for people who can't really do anything else”<sup>70</sup>. She openly talks about her experience in porn in terms of favorites and opportunities: “My favorite part of porn is the variety of people I work with. Before I worked in porn I was pretty promiscuous, fucking a lot of people, and I like that variety and in porn I get to do that in a safe, controlled way, with people who are tested and it is fun, and I get to play out all these different fantasies.”<sup>71</sup> She is also an avid advocate for feminism inside and outside the industry.

Politically, to say the porn industry is anti-feminist is laughable. As performers, we women exercise our rights to the highest degree. We express ourselves freely, publicly, for the whole world to see, just as men have been doing for a very long time. Within the industry, our voices are heard just as loudly as the men's. I've never once felt that a male's opinion meant more than my own. Which is more than I can say for the general political system: How many people didn't take Hillary Clinton seriously as a presidential candidate, simply because of her gender? So, what exactly about me doing porn is anti-feminist? Many would say I degrade myself, capitalize on the ideology of men, and present myself as a sex object. And they would be right. But it's what I choose to do, because I want to. Whether you understand this desire or not, whether or not you share my urge, and whether you are a man or a woman, it's counterproductive to feminism to tell me I can't do what I want (AKIRA, 2014a).

#### 4.2.1 *Insatiable: Porn – a love story*

In 2014, Akira published her first memoir, *Insatiable: Porn - a love story* (2014), becoming "the latest addition in a wave of highly raunchy but also fiercely unapologetic female porn stars"<sup>72</sup> Dedicated to her parents – with the caveat “But please don't read it” – the memoir is woven by naughty haikus, such as “Home from Trader Joe's / Was it there for that whole time? / Dried cum on my chin” (AKIRA, 2014d, p. 23), imaginary letters to her future unborn child and her mother (to whom she is close without discussing her career), and outrageously politically incorrect anecdotes about Akira defecating during an anal scene and why African-American performers don't take their shoes off during sex scenes.

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<sup>70</sup> BIELSKY, Zosia. "I'm an exhibitionist, I'm hypersexual': Porn star Asa Akira on why she loves her job" May 23, 2014. Updated May 12, 2018. in <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/relationships/im-an-exhibitionist-im-hypersexual-porn-star-asa-akira-on-why-she-loves-her-job/article18826704/>

<sup>71</sup> XBIZ TV INTERVIEW WITH ASA AKIRA. video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2D-CdI7YTAU>

<sup>72</sup> BIELSKY, Zosia. "I'm an exhibitionist, I'm hypersexual': Porn star Asa Akira on why she loves her job" May 23, 2014. Updated May 12, 2018. in <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/relationships/im-an-exhibitionist-im-hypersexual-porn-star-asa-akira-on-why-she-loves-her-job/article18826704/>

She gives the reason for writing a memoir on the first page of the book, in an Author's Note: "I started this book hoping to shed a different light on the industry I love so much. Not to say every day is sunshine and flowers, but I don't feel a healthy, honest voice of someone currently looking from the inside out has been heard." (AKIRA, 2014d, p. ix). It becomes clear that Akira has taken upon herself the role of spokesperson for the industry, unveiling an aspect of it which – according to her – is not commonly observed by the general audience: the possibility that the pornographic industry fosters a healthy, ethic and sane environment, eliminating any explanations and justifications that would aim at (in)validating someone voluntarily choosing to be part of it. When Akira ponders about the exact element which might have taken her into the industry, she echoes the (in)famous question asked innumerable times to pornographic performers: "What made you start doing porn?". Akira addresses this issue in the beginning of this memoir, when she writes that

[w]hile writing, the book morphed into something more. I've always questioned why I am the way I am. I had a normal upbringing. My parents are loving, kind, and present. I have no mental disorders. Why am I so sexual? Why do I insist on publicizing my most intimate moments?

I can't say that I've found an answer—but writing this book has oddly brought me to peace with myself. At the end of the day, I do feel my sexual cravings as a woman are normal, and should be accepted as such by society. It's bullshit that a man who fucks a thousand women is considered a badass, while a woman doing the same thing is shunned. I'm not ashamed that I've worked at an S&M dungeon, stripped, escorted, or that I currently have sex for money every day. On the contrary, I'm proud of myself for having the guts to indulge in my desires. (AKIRA, 2014d, p. ix)

Within these two paragraphs, Akira addresses and dismisses two stereotypes of the pornographic performer: the sad childhood and the lack of parental figures. Later, she will narrate two sexual assaults – also part of the imaginary stereotype of the performer – without granting them any importance in relation to her decision to do porn later in life. The first assault opens a chapter in her memoir, but its impact on her is dismissed when she writes that "Less than twenty-four hours ago I had been molested for the first time in my adult life, but all I could think about was the gloryholes". (AKIRA, 2014d, p. 121) The second one is narrated as follows:

I was about eleven years old and was riding alone. The train was crowded, and we were literally packed up against each other, which isn't anything out of the ordinary for rush hour in Tokyo. I stood face-to-face with a man who, at the time, seemed huge, and towered over me. He grabbed my vagina and looked me right in the eyes. I got off at the next stop and waited for the next train to come. *It didn't seem like a big deal.* (AKIRA, 2014d, p. 125, our emphasis)

Her refusal to interpret those events as pivotal to her sexual behavior functions as Stormy Daniels' dismissal of the impact of sexual abuse in her decision to make porn when she asked "[My friend] and I endured assaults from the same man. Why isn't she doing porn?"

(DANIELS, 2018, p. 33-34). Here, Akira once again establishes herself as outside the norm by undoing yet another stereotype of the pornographic performer as someone broken as a result of sexual assault suffered in her childhood. In fact, what Akira does is to build a space in which her sexual identity needs no explanation. And by acknowledging that coming to terms with her own “sexual cravings” was a process that was helped with her writing the book, she embeds it with a more personal tone than if she had merely chosen to present to the audience the final product of her writing without granting them access to how the writing process impacted her. The self-reflection presented in the Author’s note also foreshadows that the narrative to come will be free from elements such as guilt and shame and will also fail to present any condemning elements towards the pornographic industry; after all, as the title of the memoir indicates, Akira has a love relationship with porn. In this sense, Akira’s first memoir differs from Jenna Jameson’s work because it does not focus on the sad stories of the industry, making Akira the target of much criticism, in which she was accused of trading one porn fantasy for another<sup>73</sup>. In an interview, she defends her stance:

*You write at the beginning of the book that you wanted to write a memoir because you felt there wasn’t a “healthy, honest voice” of porn. Did you read a lot of porn star memoirs prior to writing your own book, like Jenna Jameson’s book [the bestseller *How to Make Love Like a Porn Star*]?*

Yeah, I’ve definitely read a few, especially Jenna’s book. I think it’s too good. But I saw this pattern of really sad stories, and I think that only represents a small percentage of the industry, even though it comes off as a large percentage of the industry. And I just wanted another voice to be heard because there are a lot of girls like me who had very positive experiences in porn. The girls who are victims of unfortunate circumstances: that’s definitely very prevalent in porn. But so is my story. (AKIRA, 2014e).

Akira makes it clear that she knows she is the exception to the norm not because she enjoys being in porn, but because she goes against the deep-set convictions of those who still insist on the premise that a woman could never enjoy being in the adult industry. Here is another excerpt from same interview.

*It seems like a lot of the response to your book so far has been insisting that that is the norm, though. They see you, who had this normal, upper middle-class upbringing and finds porn positive and empowering, and they **think you’re more the exception than the rule.***

Yeah, I’m kind of obsessed with reading those kinds of comments (laughs) To me, it’s more offensive than anything when I’m saying one thing and people are totally just shutting it down and basically saying I’m in denial, or “come back in 10 years and see how you feel.” A lot of people have commented that maybe I’m still hiding things, that I’m not telling myself the truth. First of all, it’s really offensive that they’re not even entertaining the idea that a woman like me might exist. And I think that’s more of a reflection on them than on me. What does it say about them that

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<sup>73</sup> HESS, Amanda. Inside Asa Akira: Is a porn star’s memoir revelatory truth-telling, or a shield deflecting complicated revelations?. *Slate*, New York, 7 May 2018. Books. Retrieved from: <https://slate.com/culture/2014/05/asa-akiras-porn-star-memoir-insatiable-revealed.html>. Accessed on: 29 June 2019.

they can't even imagine that a woman might be a sexual human being and an exhibitionist and in porn because she wants to be doing it? They'd rather think of me as a victim or a drug addict or whatnot. (*ibid*, *my emphasis*)

Perhaps as a result of using her civilian first name as her porn alias and her porn last name as a civilian nickname, the separation between civilian personality and pornographic persona in Asa Akira's memoir is not as clear as we can observe in the other works. There is still a separation between the two identities, exemplified when she narrates her first time in a porn set: "Although I was using my real first name, it was strange, writing down my full porno name for the first time. I looked over my shoulder as I wrote it down, as if at any moment someone would point down at what I had written and tell me, 'That's not you.'" (AKIRA, 2014d, p. 238) Clearly understanding the mechanics and benefits of having two names<sup>74</sup>, she discusses the problematics of her many monikers when she poses that:

[b]ack then, *before porn*, I went by the name Akira. It was my stripping name, so when I was first asked to promote my club on the radio show, that was the name I used. By the time I was living in Florida and on the show as a regular, it was too late to request that people start using my real name. [...]. *Having two names became my living nightmare*. Every time I thought I got close to someone, there would be that moment they called me Akira—and I'd be *snapped back to reality*. This person doesn't even know my name, I'd overdramatically think. The worst was when my two worlds collided—half the people in the room would call me by one name, while the other half would call me another. (AKIRA, 2014d, p. 91, *our emphasis*)

Even though there is a distinction between the civilian identity and the pornographic persona, Akira's interchangeable use of the same names both in her private and public world expands this discussion into social realms as well. Although the same happened to Jenna Jameson, the latter managed to keep different last names to different identities; Akira, on the other hand, erases all distinctions between private, public, civilian, pornographic, first and last names, which consequently makes the separation of her multiple identities a much harder job in her discourse. Not worried about the social implications her pornographic persona might have on her civilian identity – as was the case with Ashley Blue – Akira is able to fluctuate from one personality to another without fear. Of course, the fact she is still active in the business might pose as differential, since her place of discourse is still from within, inside the pornographic industry, while Blue can speak from a more distanced place. Nevertheless, Akira's relationship with both her person and her persona seem less complex than the other performers', perhaps because her approach to pornography is more direct: she started doing

<sup>74</sup> "Not that there aren't perks to having a stage name. Your real name stays safe, untouched, un-google-able. It makes it easy to compartmentalize that era of your life, as well; for a year, I lived as another person. It's as if I didn't need to assume responsibility for any of my actions. 'Oh, that? That wasn't me. That was Akira. I would never get that wasted.'" (AKIRA, 2014d, p. 91)

porn for the sole reason that she wanted to do it, detached from monetary reasons or revenge plots.

Akira opens her memoir with the famous phrase that announces the beginning of any cinematographic performance: “Rolling and . . . action.” (AKIRA, 2014d, p. 1) and closes with a narrative of her first day on set. Although the last events narrated happened much further in time to the time, her choice to return to the origin of her pornographic persona at the close of her memoir heralds that her story is not only cyclic, but also not over. Her last words – not taking into consideration the Acknowledgments – are “And the journey began.” (AKIRA, 2014d, p. 240). In a way, it is as if the 240 pages of *Insatiable* were a performatic preamble to future narratives, in which Akira will continue to present to the audience a final product which is, at the same time, honest and direct, but that does not fail at being complex.

#### 4.2.2 *Dirty Thirty – a memoir*

To some extent, Akira’s second memoir comes across as a reaction to the reception of the first one, although it is not possible to pinpoint if this was a market consequence, since it is impossible to calculate how many copies of *Insatiable* were sold. Regardless whether the sales of the first book were lucrative, Akira’s experience publishing a memoir surely influenced her decision to write another, as she mentioned when the second memoir was being released:

I had spent over a year of my life dedicated to writing *Insatiable*. I had poured my heart out, revealing my innermost thoughts and feelings, the real me, and people were being dicks! In the bad way!

It hurt my feelings. It was crippling. For a while, I decided I was done with writing. When people criticized my looks, it didn’t feel personal. You think my vagina is too meaty? Well, I look how I look—what can I do about it? But my thoughts, my feelings, my jokes that I thought would make people laugh—those were different. While many people may think showing off the cavities between my legs using a speculum and flashlight on the World Wide Web is more intimate, I had never felt as vulnerable as when my book was released.

Like all episodes in life, I eventually got over it when time diluted my pain. I started to write again, and two years later, my second book is about to be released (AKIRA, 2016).

Akira’s second memoir, *Dirty Thirty – a memoir* (2016) is a series of personal essays that recount events in Akira’s life leading up to her turning 30, a dreaded age in the porn industry, when most women start to wonder if their time (in the industry) is over.

I turned 30 this year, which doesn’t sound old in the real world,” Akira said, “but as a female porn star I definitely feel the weight of my age. . . . It’s more of a coming-

of-age book than the first one. I feel like I've matured a lot in the last couple years. [...] The first book coming out affected my life a lot more than I imagined it would. I love sharing things, I like telling stories—it was just an extension of that. I didn't set out to write anything ... for lack of a better word, political (STREET, 2015).

*Dirty Thirty* can be considered much more political than Akira's first memoir. The 261 pages of this memoir follow the structure Akira had presented in her first book. The unnumbered chapters – which may range from narrative, letters, diary entries and even a porn script –in which she discusses issues such as ageism in porn, motherhood and life after porn are preceded by haikus. Akira's haikus have become a product of their own, and properly transformed into merchandise. In 2017, Akira started her own line of scented candles (already discontinued), called Candles by Asa Akira. Upon purchase of a scented candle (and the descriptions themselves are worth quoting – “Forget for a moment that you've been abandoned in cold pool of cum on a sheet-less mattress on the floor of a bedroom lit by a lava lamp - Close your eyes and let us take you to a luxurious bed of roses where the sky is always blue, unicorns fly gayly above, and money grows on trees”. (After anal - eucalyptus and rosewater) and “His jokes are mediocre at best, but you laugh harder than you ever have. The sex lasts just long enough that you can orgasm 1.5 times, and he has a complicated relationship with his mother. (Hot dude - cologne and sweat)” – the buyer received a set of Haiku matches, with haikus such as "Why can't I control / That one last disgusting thought / As I orgasm" or "Dignity is lost / Once your penis enters me / Please step on my head." <sup>75</sup> We cannot overlook the fact that haikus are part of Akira's Japanese heritage and, therefore, fit inside the re-appropriation of the Asian woman image she proposed doing since the beginning of her career.

Turning 30 is the motif that links the entire memoir, as it is made clear in Akira's first lines.

It was one month and thirteen days before my birthday. *I wasn't normally one for counting down to holidays—especially when they were personal—but this was a special one, my thirtieth.* So far, anticipating it was turning out to be a lot like waiting for a tab of acid to hit; one by one, as my peers experienced the customary thirty-year-old freak-out, I patiently waited for my turn. With every moody period day, I wondered: Is this is it—am I feeling it? Is this the beginning stage? Is this when I start to panic about my age? I think I'm feeling it! But as every period ended, I realized no, this was not it. I was still stone-cold sober.

For as long as I could remember, I'd known with absolute certainty *that turning thirty came with a whole show of dramatics.* Knowing this was like knowing the earth is round. On television, in the movies, there was always the girl on her birthday, crying because nothing had gone according to plan, crying because her

<sup>75</sup> On May 22, 2016, BuzzFeed posted a quiz called "Which Asa Akira Haiku Are You?", and even though the website posted a standard disclaimer that "This post has not been vetted or endorsed by BuzzFeed's editorial staff" the quiz is still available on [https://www.buzzfeed.com/blurbur/which-asa-akira-haiku-are-you-1z15j?utm\\_source=dynamic&utm\\_campaign=bfsharecopy](https://www.buzzfeed.com/blurbur/which-asa-akira-haiku-are-you-1z15j?utm_source=dynamic&utm_campaign=bfsharecopy) .

boyfriend had not proposed, crying because of, well, just the overall pressure of being a real-life adult. *It had been ingrained in me, the idea of the thirty-year-old's panic attack.* Whenever someone asked me my age, I found myself automatically saying something like “I can’t believe I’m about to be thirty. That’s so crazy.”

The truth was, it didn’t feel crazy at all. I almost—no, absolutely—wished it did. It was what I’d been expecting. Sometimes I would try to force myself to think of all the things I thought I’d have by this age but didn’t: a child, a primary care physician, a credit card. I’d close my eyes and concentrate on thoughts like: My mom was already pregnant with me at this age. Biggie had already been dead for seven years when his thirtieth birthday came around. *I didn’t think I’d be thirty with Hello Kitty stickers still on my phone. I didn’t think I’d be thirty and still be watching Teen Mom; grownups didn’t do that! And certainly, I didn’t think I’d be thirty and still be using the word “grownup.”* (AKIRA, 2016, p. vii-viii, our emphasis)

Turning 30 years old, for Akira, brings up an entire debate on the ageism that is present in the adult pornographic industry. The idea of an older woman – an attractive mother – having a relationship with a younger man has been in the American cultural panorama for ages. Embodied in the figure of Mrs. Robinson for the 1967 movie *The Graduate*, the term MILF (Mother I’d Like to Fuck) was first used in one of the nine issues of *Motorbooty Magazine*, published between 1987 and 1999.<sup>76</sup> However, the term did not catch on until January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1995, when a user named ChiPhiMike introduced the term while discussing a *Playboy* issue. In 1999, the term went mainstream as soon as the movie *American Pie* used MILF to refer to the character of Jennifer Coolidge, a.k.a. Stifler's Mom<sup>77</sup>. Pornographic features including MILFs rose in popularity, and it has figured among the ten most searched terms in tube sites - the 3<sup>rd</sup> most popular in the United Kingdom in 2014. In 2009, the AVNs included the “MILF performer of the year” category, with British performer Tanya Tate amounting to the highest number of nominations: 19 since 2010. At the age of 40 (in 2019), Tate did not become a mother herself until 2014.

The debate on the figure of the MILF in pornography is extensive. In 2007, an article on the New York Magazine already questioned the popularity of the niche: “How exactly did a once-taboo erotic fetish become a widespread, culturally sanctioned ideal, a perverse mix of branding and empowerment? After all, a hot mom used to be a tragedy, whether in the literal sense [...] or in the bittersweet Mrs. Robinson sense [...] Alternately, it was an insult: [...] A hot mom was by definition a bad mom” (EM & LO, 2007). Tristan Taormino addressed the same issue in the same year, but approached it with a more sexually positive tone:

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<sup>76</sup> THE STAG COMPANY. *The History of the "MILF": Where did the term come from... and where is it today?*. 2015. 1 infographic. Retrieved from: <https://visual.ly/community/infographic/entertainment/origins-term-milf>. Accessed on 18 Jan. 2019.

<sup>77</sup> This is actually how the character is referred to in the credits.

Although Wikipedia defines "MILF" as a descriptor for women ages 35 to 50, in porno land, women cast as MILFs can be as young as 25. After all, once you've reached that age, you're usually on your way to being kicked to the curb by an industry obsessed with the Barely Legal set. Because of a demand for MILF porn, though, older performers are getting more work than ever before. (Some are first entering the biz at 35 and older.) The plots may be predictable and the dialogue cheesy, but it's a refreshing change to see women with sexual confidence and maturity on-screen (TAORMINO, 2007).

Without a doubt, the creation of the MILF character in the pornographic industry has opened doors to performers who would be out of business a couple of decades ago, fostering an environment that allows for the expression of a healthy, older sexuality. As performer Nina Hartley poses, "Now that 'MILF' is a fetish of its own, there is more work to be had. [...] Now some women are 'aging in place,'" she says. "There's no doubt," says Hartley, "that the fact that I've never retired and have worked continually helped to raise age acceptance" in porn (LYNSEY, 2017a). However, it is questionable when 25-year-old performers are cast into this category, because it is a dead end street: once you are seen as a MILF, there is no going back to cheerleading.<sup>78</sup> So, while that it can be empowering to older performers, the fetishization of the MILF might work against younger performers – in age, not in time in the industry. Performer Aurora Snow, then 28, wrote a piece on *The Daily Beast* in 2017 in which she questions the fast lane that configures going from one extreme of porn to the other: "Ten years ago, I was one of adult film's hottest stars. Now I'm 28—and dismissed by directors as over the hill. How did I go from "barely legal" to "older woman" so fast?" (SNOW, 2010).

Turning 30 makes Akira question the milestone itself, as seen in previous quotes, and offers a candid self-portrait: "It's my thirtieth birthday today. I can't believe I've made it to fucking thirty without any Hello Kitty tattoos. Or sex offender registrations. Or cavities! But I've contracted chlamydia like six times, so it's not like I haven't lived." (AKIRA, 2016, p. 137). However, she also wonders if this is the category she is going to be relegated to. The fact that her 30th birthday coincided with her not being nominated for the AVNs Performer of the Year for the first time in five years did not help.

I texted Dee after I got out of the shower.  
How much longer do you think I can be in porn?  
She wrote back immediately: Are you asking 'cause we are now 30?  
Holy shit. I realized that, like everything else in my life, my version of the thirty-year-old panic attack was the porno version. Was it over for me? Was I officially a MILF now? Were people no longer interested in seeing my gaping asshole?

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<sup>78</sup> I would like to establish here a parallel between Hartley's words and what Akira herself said about playing the role of the Asian woman. In both cases, embracing the stereotype and incorporating the idea of the niche guarantees works to performers who, otherwise, would be out of work.

What if my problem wasn't that I wasn't peaking yet—what if my problem was that I had peaked too soon? (AKIRA, 2016, p. xi)

To Akira, being 30 raises another issue that she approached in her first memoir: motherhood. While in *Insatiable* (2014) Akira writes a tongue-in-cheek letter to her “future child”, in *Dirty Thirty* the idea of motherhood materializes in a more dimensioned way, especially after a close friend gives birth: “Zero cavities / Two abortions, One divorce / Thirty years on earth”, she writes in one of the haikus (AKIRA, 2016, p. 13). Furthermore, being childless at 30 as well as being uncertain whether she wants to remain that way becomes a recurrent topic in her writing:

May 9.

People on Twitter keep wishing me a Happy Mothers Day. Does this mean they see me as a MILF? Don't they know none of my children made it past the first trimester? (AKIRA, 2016, p. 146)

October 17

I've seen so many Spiegler girls that I haven't seen in forever in the past week. Bonnie Rotten was here yesterday; she's soooo pregnant and I couldn't stop saying “I can't believe you're growing a human being.” She's having a girl.

Do I want a baby? Yes no yes no yes no yes no... I don't know. (170)

Another year of wasted eggs because I chose to whore instead. (AKIRA, 2016, p. 193)

“Maybe I should have a baby,” I'd think as I hung up.

Then I'd drive to my set for the day—a double penetration scene—and imagine myself going home later that evening with cum in my hair from two men who were not my husband, who were not the father of my imaginary baby.

I'd decide I was not yet ready. (AKIRA, 2016, 196)

Unfertilized eggs

Go ahead, bleed down my leg

I'm not done whoring.

(AKIRA, 2016, p. 261)

Akira is aware of the implications that having done pornography might have in her civilian life, and she discusses this specifically in relation to having a child, when she says that

I flew home to LA sure I would never bear a child. It was too late for me. I had done too much. Not only had I fucked too many people, but too many people had seen me fucking too many people. It wasn't something I regretted—but I supposed this is what they meant when they said you couldn't have it all. It saddened me. The same way I knew if I had never done porn, I would've forever looked back and regretted it, I knew that if I never had a child, I wouldn't feel fulfilled in life. (AKIRA, 2016, p 197)

Similar to the discrimination faced by same-sex couples raising children, women who work in the adult industry are thought to be incapable of nurturing healthy children and imparting good values because their lifestyles and careers are perceived to be immoral: “For parents who earn a living in the legal yet publicly-shamed world of pornography, this is another in a series of reminders that mixing parenthood with sex work is seriously tricky

business. Parents in adult entertainment are faced with having to build a wall that separates their work and home lives” says performer Aurora Snow (SNOW, 2015). Snow is not an anomaly in the adult industry, and when asked if other adult actresses have children, adult performer Stormy Daniels round up to 50% of the performers being parents, unbeknown to fans. She says veteran adult stars typically do not share their mom status openly for safety reasons – for both them and their families –, and newcomers to the adult business think divulging that type of information might be a “turnoff” to their fans and that it would hurt their careers (BATTISTA-FRAZEE, 2012).

The cross between motherhood and pornography, therefore, configures troubled waters to sail. All women involved in sex work fall under the category of what Associate Professor of History at the University of Florida Luise White describes as “reproductive labor” (WHITE, 1990), even though pornography and prostitution differ immensely. However, since White poses “the labor of sexual intercourse” to be “divorced from human reproduction, separated from kin and marriage relations”, sex workers in the pornographic industry would fall into White's category of “domestic workers” because they fail to be seen “simply as pawns in the patriarchal power game”, performing it for pleasure and profit (WHITE apud PARPART; STICHTER, 1988), just like prostitutes who “sell as transactions all that is legitimately available in marriage, and that they are paid out of male wages” (WHITE, 1990, p. 11). While some sex workers’ accounts reveal various benefits of performing sex work while parenting (including flexibility, higher incomes and economic independence), numerous barriers have also been reported by sex workers, including a stigma that implicates directly on the social life of the family. As written by Susan Dewey, Assistant Professor of Gender & Women's Studies and adjunct in International Studies at the University of Wyoming:

Sex work is both a learned process and a set of circumstances involving a performed identity that dramatically affects all other aspects of life. Dancers with children beyond the toddler years were particularly aware of the weighty stigma that their profession carried with it. Such women often expressed a conflicted sense of motherly responsibilities and desire for public respect that had profound consequences for their relationships with their families, children, clients, and themselves. (DEWEY, 2011, p. 90)

Consequence of this stigma, the severing of social ties can vary from being banned from the child’s school grounds to losing custody of the children. Alana Evans, an adult performer who has spent two decades in porn whilst raising a family, recalled how she was even banned from going to the school grounds where her stepdaughter studied after teachers

became aware of the nature of her work (SAUL, 2016). The legal implications of doing sex work on parental rights are discussed by Dewey when she explains that

[m]any women were excessively concerned with the possibility that increased state involvement in their lives via social-service provision might increase their risk of having the Department of Social Services (DSS) take their children away. Cinnamon [a stripper dancer in the city of New York] had countless stories from her decade-long long career in upstate New York's sex industry of biological fathers who had successfully used the “immorality” of their child's mother's lifestyle to obtain custody. (DEWEY, 2011, p. 62).

Sex work is a stigmatized profession culturally constructed as incompatible with motherhood. It comes with no surprise that the issue of motherhood, while complex for all women, is even more complex for pornographic performers. Many choose to quit the career before they consider motherhood but are aware that the internet has made it virtually impossible to erase that digital fingerprint. Akira considers it: “Whenever I quit porn, I'll be starting at square one again—I am going to be where all my friends were ten years ago. I don't know if I want to have kids, so that is a huge issue right now in my mind, too...” (AKIRA apud EUSE, 2016). The preoccupation with an impending motherhood is illustrated by Akira when she narrates her cooking experiments:

I decided on making salmon with a side of mashed sweet potatoes, along with a kale salad. I wasn't sure if fish and sweet potatoes went well together, and I was pretty certain [my husband] had specifically told me once he didn't like salad, but these were the only three items I had ever prepared in my life, so I figured it was the safest bet. Besides, the meal would [provide] a good balance of carbs/protein/fat, and maybe that would make him realize that one day, after I was done sucking dicks on camera, I'd make an excellent mother. (AKIRA, 2016, p. 52)

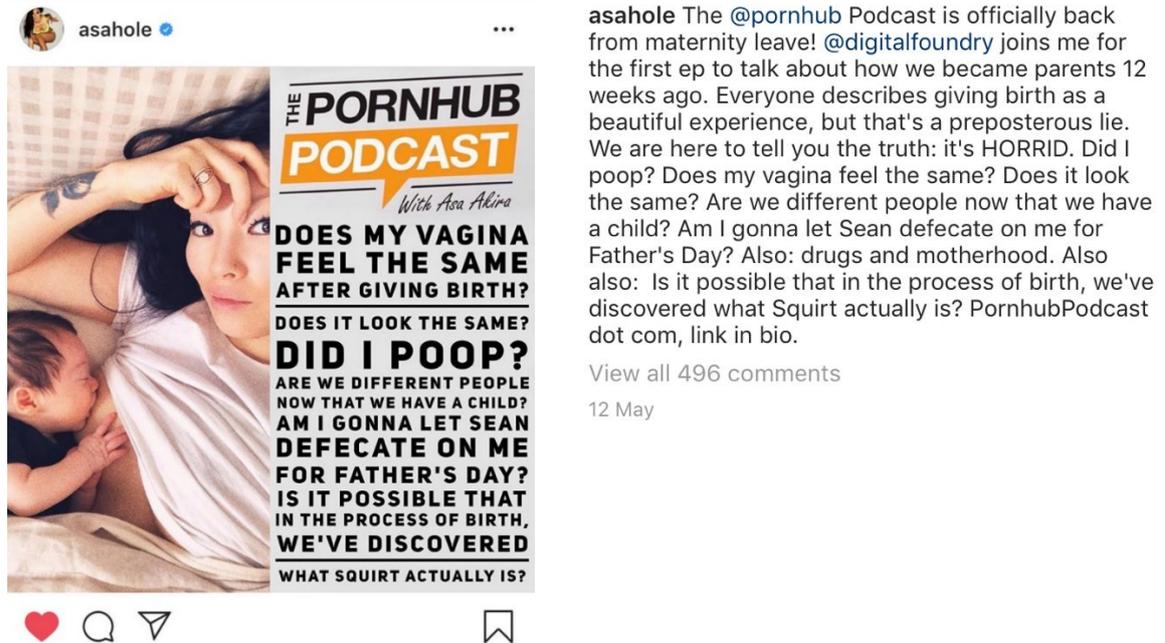
Akira gave birth to a boy on Feb 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019. She has not retired yet. Although she is not taking part on scenes, she is still quite active in social media (Figures 34 and 35).

Figure 34 – Asa Akira’s social media post on motherhood



Source: The author, 2019.

Figure 35 – Asa Akira’s Podcast on motherhood announcement



(a)

(b)

Caption: (a) – social media’s picture; (b) – picture’s caption by Asa Akira.

Source: The author, 2019.

### 4.3 Another afterthought

While for most people the idea of being nude in front of a camera might be extremely uncomfortable, all four pornographic performers featured in this discussion claim the writing of their autobiographies and memoirs signified a much more intimate moment than their performances on camera. One reason for this might be that, while on camera, only the pornographic persona is active and, when writing, the civilian aspect must come about – and that aspect of their identities had been, until then, kept away from the public eye. In a way, for these performers, self-writing poses as another initiation that will result in being scrutinized by the public eye once again, this time without the distraction of corny soundtracks or shiny lights.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the autobiographies and memoirs of pornographic performers stem exactly from their position inside an industry which, people believe, does not care for content as much as it cares for form. Writing a self which, in itself, is already discredited by its audience is no easy task. Coming from an industry that is perceived as not a legitimate artistic space does not help either. What these four performers did was to claim their place of discourse and prove, beyond doubt, that there is more to pornography than meets the eyes.

The act of self-writing is a performance in which the author is, at the same time, actor, camera person and director. The choice of which aspects to highlight and which to push into the shadows resembles the work of a camera crew member in search of the best angles to film, angles which will enhance the final product. But a cameraman has the advantage of following orders from a director who, if not responsible for the screenplay, at least has received it beforehand. Self-writing, then, would be equal to making a film while the script is being written, and angles must be instantly discovered while lines need to be performed *in loco*, without time for rehearsal. Of course, there is always the possibility of rewriting. But, in narrating oneself, no rewriting is allowed. It is a good thing then that pornographers have never cared much for rules.

## CONCLUSION

In 1984, British writer Angela Carter presented to the world Sophie Fevvers, the winged wonder who hatched from an egg laid by unknown parents and later became a celebrity aerialiste at Colonel Kearney's Circus. *Nights at the Circus* begins with Sophie's interview to journalist Jack Walser, who gradually falls entranced into the performer's personal history as it is being slowly and hypnotically crafted right before his eyes. The resolution to uncover the truth behind Fevvers' slogan – "Is she fact or is she fiction?" – completely eludes the journalist as he is dragged by Sophie's words into the postmodern, magical and fairy tale-ish world created by Angela Carter.

When I started this research, the female pornographic performer was Sophie Fevvers to me: immersed in a haze of seduction and mystery, the factuality of her identity was as elusive as Sophie's. As people, they were facts; as performers, they were fictions. Their aliases functioned as names, yet their true names were unknown. While they presented their bodies to the camera, little was known about their private personas. Who were they? What had driven them into an industry which is considered, at best, controversial?

It was in the most mediatic of contemporary circuses – the social media platforms – that I initiated this research. Twitter, most specifically, has bridged the gap between the 'civilian' and the pornographic worlds – civilian being the term through which people in the pornographic industry refer to outsiders. This direct interaction with their audience allows pornographic performers an unprecedented modality of self-expression: the construction of the social identity as "porn performers" happens dynamically and in real time. New performers 'are born' with profiles on several social platforms, and they will manage these profiles independently, far from agents, studios or other mediators. The performers themselves create, describe and interpret contents and contexts based on what they want to communicate. By inventing themselves in real time, pornographic performers also invent themselves as autobiographical writers. This self-conscious, metanarrative, and online autofictional discourse proves itself fertile enough for various research pathways, but I wanted to explore what happens at the intersection of Fevvers' conundrum: fact and fiction. This is why I turned to autobiographies and memoirs written by pornographic performers to explore how they worked the personal representations of their dichotomized identities.

The preliminary theoretical boundaries for this proposal owe much to the theories of the postmodern field and of identity representation, without interdicting "other" voices that

explicitly and implicitly take part in this dialogical reading of authors and languages that intersect in various ways despite looking different. Starting from the concept that the effects of a text must always be established in terms of their contexts, and that the notion of context itself must be taken contextually, I recognized the need to constantly question a discourse's connections with contemporary power relations, as well as their own interests; the meeting place of varied views of the modern identity is constitutive of this field. It is also a stance that utilizes many of the most influential theoretical bodies in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. But it was always very clear to me that the theoretical concepts that already existed would not be able to fully encompass the complexity of this type of self-narrative. There was a gap between the existing theories of autobiographical writing and how they could manifest over the autobiographic works of authors who were, in reality, narrating a persona that had been purposefully created by themselves and, yet, did not (at first) represent them outside a specific social sphere. It is a self-writing that is, at the same time, autobiographical and autofictional, because it narrates both a personal story and a constructed one. It is as metaphorical as it is metanarrative; deconstructive as it is constructive; auto representational and auto interpretational; elusive as it is tangible.

Therefore, a new way to approach this kind of production emerged, a concept which understands these autobiographies (in which the life described is not the only one that belongs to the author, but is accompanied by a conscientiously created public profile that only functions under specific circumstances and, yet, possesses its own name, characteristics, and even 'personal' history) as a self-writing process that takes place while it is in itself constructing a double narrative: the *metamoir*. Although it is not a closed concept, it is possible to understand better the complexities of a discourse that is self-conscious and that understands itself as constructed as the personality it is supposed to narrate through the *metamoir* because it is an inductive theoretical frame of reference deriving from the specificities of elements found in life-writing of pornographic performers. These elements, when applied to a broader concept of auto-fiction, embrace the idea of plural, separate identities serving different social roles while hosted by a single body.

In this context, the main challenge would be to map out what elements were present in the autobiographies and memoirs of pornographic performers that would set them apart from 'civilian' autobiographical writings. What *a priori* breaks Lejeune's author = narrator = protagonist formula would characterize the autobiographical writing of pornographic performers outside the scope of autobiography: the narrated identity is not the same as the narrator's, starting with an alias that is constructed like a body (LEE, 2016). By choosing a

different name to identify the persona to be introduced as part of the pornographic industry, performers challenge Lejeune's idea that the pseudonym functions simply as a differentiation that does not affect identity: there is an undeniable difference between given name and performer identity, even though both inhabit a body which is, at the same, narrative narrator. While one strips – literally – on camera, another lurks in a “civil” world, often concerned with the social repercussions that unveiling her professional activities might have on her physical safety and family life. That, in itself, would also dismiss Eakin's view of autobiography as "not only something we read in a book: in fact, as an identity discourse, delivered slowly in the stories we tell ourselves day by day, autobiography structures our lives" (EAKIN, 2004, p. 122). The clear separation of civilian and pornographic lives would make it impossible for performers to write an autobiography which embraces both these aspects of their person – in Eakin's view. Therefore, looking for comparative elements between civilian and performer autobiographies proved to be a moot point. It was, then, a matter of accepting the pornographic performers' self-writing as a category in itself, casting elements that would reposition it as a unique narrative genre.

It was the possibility of a double referentiality, echoed in Mary Evans' argument that autobiography as a genre was in "urgent need of reclassification; that its place on the library shelves is not with non-fiction but very much closer to fiction" (EVANS, 1999, p. 202) that solved the equation. Pornographic performers could, now, narrate a factual and a fictional life. It is in the loophole created by the need of a rigorous systematization of autofictional representation as a literary genre that the genre continues to elude classification. The myth of the unified identity, of a "coherent self", a "stable, immutable self that can remember everything that happened in the past" (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 61) allows pornographic performers to present a dichotomized autofiction that cannot be dismissed as such for lacking unity. It borrows from Doubrovsky's look at the outside of the syntax of the novel (DOUBROVSKY, 1977) and from Gasparini's "nonsense and self-commentary" (GASPARINI, 2008) to speak from the outsider position, as an outsider, but with no intention to be invited in.

A second demand was to explore how intimate the narration of personal history is for those who expose the naked body to the lenses and public eye as a daily task. To answer that, I started from the premise that performers have, in fact, two roles in the scenes they take part in: they are both performers and spectators. The voyeuristic pleasure that derives from observation can be accounted for from both the spectator and from the 'object' observed. The objectification of the self through the gaze of the other allows performers to take on both

passive and active roles of agency, subverting notions that deny the overlapping of narcissistic and scopophilic pleasures. The exacerbation of the gaze in pornography, when translated into autobiographical writings, continues to blur the frontiers between reality and fantasy, between fact and fiction. When watching a pornographic movie, spectators can fantasize that they are given access to moments which were supposed to be private but, somehow, became public. The same happens in the autobiographical writings of pornographic performers: the idea that what was written represents a deeper level of exposure is a notion agreed upon by writer and reader, mimicking the pact coined by Lejeune. As a result, anything can be perceived as fact or fiction. Or both. Or none.

As a third point, it was pivotal to investigate what function – if any – the autobiographies and memoirs of pornographic performers have in contemporary society. Since the autobiography is positioned among the narrative genres as one of the main intersections of identity process and political resistance, a self-narrative written by a female pornographic performer presents itself as material with great potential for the restructuring of social relations by encompassing issues of gender, class, race and sex, to name a few. Such works, which used to act as a warning against the porn industry or simply to be a listing of scenes and humorous comments about peculiarities that happened on film sets, now foster a deep debate about the process of identity creation, performance, political positioning and gender issues inside and outside the pornographic industry. The active participation of women in the crafting of the pornographic product, together with a change in the profile of new performers to the industry, a greater regulation of the final pornographic product and stricter legislative regulations of scene shooting procedures have brought pornography and its discourses to the scope of public discussions not only about elements that make up this universe, but also its impact on contemporary society. Thus, these new autobiographies not only present the history of sexual obscenity but give readers a personal history mixed with a public one, allowing a broader perspective on the real social-political role of the pornographic performer.

Finally, this paper repositions feminist concerns about pornography, mostly in relation to the female objectification, a critical issue for the understanding of new pornographic forms. No category used here presupposes a totalitarian unit. They are complex categories of feminisms, subjects, subjectivities, and even pornographies. To assume that feminism can agree in all instances is to assume that there is only one static and unchanging format of pornography, as well as a single female subject free of specificities. It is vital to keep in mind that the particularities of feminisms also occur when considering other categories of identity,

such as culture, class, race, territoriality and sexuality. Although it may seem that mainstream pornography insists on normative standards, it is important to understand that a new view on the issue of subjectivity/subjectification in the writing of female performers can foster changes and resignification of spaces and gazes that, until recently, have only objectified these agents. Thus, the task of analyzing pornographic performers' self-expression is fundamental to the issue of representation of female identity, subordination, outreach and power relations.

Undoubtedly, the universe of pornography is seen to belong almost exclusively to the male sphere, both in its production and consumption – an idea reinforced by the inference that pornography objectifies the woman's figure to the point of turning her into the mere simulacrum of male desire. But what is found in the texts written by pornographic performers is a simplification – without being reductionist – of the relations between the woman subject and the pornographic product done precisely through the questioning of the elements that could circumvent female identities – if viewed exclusively as imposed and not voluntarily chosen. It is through the inclusion of diverse bodies in the pornographic universe, including bodies formed by the regulatory discourse itself, that the analysis of these female/feminist narratives deconstruct the myth that a woman is objectified by the pornographic desire. She now owns the same desire she subscribes to and writes about it in first-person narratives, shifting her voice from the invisible edge to the center of the scene. When the camera rolls, she is the one that talks. And it has been an adventure hearing what she has to say. When answering to Fevvers' dilemma, the pornographic performer once again breaks expectations. In her new slogan she is, at the same time, fact *and* fiction.

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## APPENDIX A – Afterword

The researching process is a permanent exercise of Sophie's choice. We often cross paths with texts we lament having to leave out of a specific project, and we find solace in trusting them to further scholarships that – we hope – will punctuate our (not so far) future. When going through the texts I have worked with in this research, I encountered several new trends of written production by sex workers which called my attention. Unfortunately – or fortunately, because it might mean a continuity of my studies – I could not fit them into the scope of my research. However, I would like to point two of them out, hoping it will spark the curiosity of scholars everywhere.

The first trend I would like to address is a first-person narrative of sex workers which is not necessarily autobiographical, but at the same time is embedded with a testimonial tone that should be examined as a very peculiar place of discourse. These are writings which involve not only the description of the daily routine of the lives of sex workers, but dig deeper into issues such as philosophy, labor laws, social relations and even erotica. I would like to point out specifically four of these most recent works.

- 1) LEE, jiz, ed. *Coming Out Like a Porn Star: Essays on Pornography, Protection, and Privacy*. Berkeley: The L Media, 2015.

This anthology shares intimate personal stories of porn performers "coming out" as performers to family, friends, partners, lovers, and community. The 57 contributors represent a wide range of races, ethnicities, and genders.

- 2) AKIRA, Asa, ed. *Asarotica*. New Jersey: Cleis Press, 2017.

In a project similar to Darling House's *Bibliophile Érotique*, Asa Akira edited this anthology of sex workers writing erotica. It features 22 erotic short stories by porn performers, answering the question: "What do porn stars find erotic?"

- 3) STOYA. *Philosophy, Pussycats and Porn*. Los Angeles: Not a Cult, 2018.

*Philosophy, Pussycats, & Porn* is a series of essays, blog posts, and stories from writer, actor, and pornographer Stoya, in which she provides crucial examinations of systemic biases toward sex workers and how sexuality is reflected in society. Stoya often points her journalistic lens inward, providing us with personal, detailed stories of her life, her

collaborators, and how she has built a flourishing media haven in the face of a culture that is still learning how to handle public discourses on sex work.

4) HOPKINS, Blair. *All In A Day's [Sex] Work*. New York: Soho Printing, 2018.

For 3 years, Blair Hopkins travelled the United States, photographing and interviewing escorts, exotic dancers, adult film performers, dominatrixes, professional submissives, phone sex operators, and webcam performers. Her aim: to fill in the holes in our cultural narrative about sex work. *All In A Day's [Sex] Work* is a photographic investigation into the daily lives of the intriguing, oft maligned, and dedicated professionals who occupy our fantasies and indulge our deepest erotic urges.

### **The guys**

Another trend is related to the studies of masculinity inside the pornographic industry. While the dissemination of much needed women studies has focused exclusively on the female performers, we have failed to properly address the process of construction of masculinity in pornography. The old notion of the male porn performer as the Italian stud is long gone, substituted by a less simplistic portrait of male (hetero)sexuality. Evolving from Peter North, John Buttman Stagliano, Rocco Sifreddi and arriving at Tommy Pistol, Manuel Ferrara and Xander Corvus, the construction of the male pornstar image has undergone many processes which changed the way masculinity is perceived – or, perhaps, the other way around. This remains to be studied.

Three memoirs were left out of this research but compose a wonderful corpus of study for the male voice in the pornographic industry. Zak Smith's *We did porn* (Portland: Tin House Books, 2009) inaugurated a new approach to the memoirs of male porn performers by not relying exclusively on the written word, but also including other art forms. Smith's work carries a very conscientious analysis of the lines between fiction and reality, as he states in the opening of the book:

#### Author's Note

There are drawings and paintings in this book, and there are words. The pictures and the words do not go together in any consistent relationship; although they feature many of the same places, ideas, and people, the order of the pictures has no particular meaning.

**This is nonfiction—both parts record what things looked like from where I was standing.** However, in the text, **I consciously distort reality** in three ways:

1. I have changed people's names, along with the names of film companies and movies. This is not so much to disguise people (obsessives will be able to trace all the main characters back to their actual stage names) as to remind readers—and myself—that there is probably more to them than I managed to see or record.
2. In very rare cases involving physical danger, I have altered inessential details (names of birthplaces, et cetera) and divided people in half (for example, splitting characteristics and adventures of Diana from Austin between “Lisa” from Austin and “Carla” from Jersey City) in order to protect them from their enemies.
3. Since very famous people who aren't in porn, or at least gossip about them, is essential to the texture of life in Los Angeles in general and the adult industry in particular, **realism** demands I include them. For legal, artistic, and humanitarian reasons, it's important to disguise the very famous people while still making it clear to the reader that the people being referred to are very famous, all without interrupting the flow of the story. How famous? About as famous as Dwight Eisenhower. Therefore, unless there is some reason to be specific, whenever any very famous person comes up in this book, I refer to him or her as “Dwight Eisenhower.” Needless to say, the actual Dwight Eisenhower is not directly responsible for any of the events or behaviors discussed in this book (SMITH, 2009, our emphasis).

Tyler Knight opens *Burn my shadow: a selective memory of an X-rated life* (Los Angeles: Rare Bird Books, 2016) already advising the reader that he is an unreliable narrator. He is aware of the impossibility of being trusted due to his proximity with the ‘facts’ to be narrated: his intention is not to function as a register nor as a token of a pornographic performer. On the contrary, Knight eliminates the gaps between performers and other professionals, recovering ‘the human condition’ as the ‘line that unites us all’, regardless of any sorts of categorization.

Through his writing Knight sets himself apart from the vast majority of autobiographical authors, independently of their profession. The 23 chapters of *Burn my shadow* present the reader with independent façades of a same industry through a narrative that is precise and sharp as a surgical scalpel, making the scenes bleed copiously and without mercy. Knight is relentless in his falsely candid approach to the pornographic industry, its participants, the referential dimension in the specific discourse of pornographic literature secured by the two main requirements to place a discourse as pornographic: the configural dimension, which allows the reader to easily picture the scene; and the ‘euphoric affections’ dispersed throughout the many consciences in Knight's writing. His language is an unapologetic performative spectacle, echoing the sexual aggressiveness expected from the derivation of the pornographic – in a narrative that does not deliver only the plenitude proposed by the pornographic device, but provides through void and descriptive scenes a metaconscience of the entire pornographic discourse. Between what is said and what is represented is a mirror play in which Knight's narrator undresses the language of all

ornaments which might hinder the eye and hide the hard cored truth, exposing the raw matter of his life just like pornography presents a basal sexuality through the unveiling and manipulation of bodies.

Knight clearly cares about the aesthetic function of his literature, therefore enabling it to migrate from the pornographic to the erotic – though it refuses to do so by complying with the structural format of pornography. In the gangbang scene, for example, he eliminates the heroic image of the self, expected by the doxa, by placing himself nameless, incognito, unidentified amidst all the other participants. The scene ends within the emptiness found in entire experience itself. And here lies one of the most valuable aspects of *Burn my Shadow*: it claims its place in the realm of pornographic writing while attentive to the aesthetic morality of the so called higher – erotic – literature unapologetically, because it is honest. Going against the debatable pornification of literature, Knight constructs his memoirs the other way around: by literalizing his pornographic self, turns his literary aphrodisiac into porn poetry without rhymes.<sup>79</sup>

### **Chris Zeischegg, aka Danny Wylde**

But perhaps the most fertile ground for the study of masculinity inside the pornographic industry is found in the works of Christopher Zeischegg, aka Danny Wylde. Born in California, in 1985, Zeischegg has appeared in over 660 features in straight, gay and bisexual scenes despite the controversy that is generated by being a “crossover” male performer<sup>80</sup>.

I first came in contact with Zeischegg’s writing in 2012, when I was curating a project entitled *Bibliophile Érotique* in Darling House. The project consisted of an anthology of erotica written exclusively by people who are, somehow, involved in the adult/sex industry,

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<sup>79</sup> Adapted from VOLK, Anna B. *Burn my shadow: a selective memory of an X-rated life* By Tyler Knight. Book review. *Anna B Volk: writings*, Rio de Janeiro, 2017a. Retrieved from: <https://annabvolk.wixsite.com/home/review-burn-my-shadow-2017>. Accessed on 5 Sep. 2019.

<sup>80</sup> A cross over male performer is one who has done both gay and straight porn. While women performers suffer no stigmas for fluctuating between girl/girl and boy/girl scenes, male performers are often ostracized for doing the same. The source of such stigma, Zeischegg says, come from the different rules about condom use and STI testing explaining that most straight porn requires frequent STI testing but no condom use, whereas gay porn requires condoms but no testing – although there are exceptions to both these rules (BLAIR, 2017).

be it as a performer, director, photographer, writer, blogger, model, cam people, escorts, etc. The idea was to publish erotica written not aiming at pleasing the audience, but the authors themselves. We wanted to provide the readers with the possibility of experiencing erotica through the eyes of those who often populate or help build the public's own erotic imagination. The invitation email read as follows:

*“Your job would be to grab a cup of coffee, sit quietly for some time, and write a piece of erotica that appeals to YOUR senses: it can be prose, poetry, a letter, a note, any format you want – even video. Then mail it to me with a short bio, and I will see that it gets published on a specific section that is being created in Darling House to host this project.”*

Zeischegg's contribution – published on October 4, 2012 – can be read at <http://www.darlinghouse.net/beta/bibliophileerotique/2012/10/04/dannywylde/>

Besides being included in many anthologies – both of fiction and non-fiction – Zeischegg has published three novels<sup>81</sup> and is publishing a fourth one in 2019. About his second novel, he says: *“The Wolves That Live in Skin and Space*, I think, fits into the genre of auto-fiction. So it starts with the mundanity of my life, and then exaggerates whatever conflicts I was experiencing to their extreme”.<sup>82</sup> About this new book, he says: "if you think of *The Wolves that Live in Skin and Space*, *Body to Job*, and this new book (*The Magician*) as a spiritual trilogy, *The Magician* would be the finale. It's a mix of autofiction and horror"<sup>83</sup>.

Zeischegg's trilogy is a great fertile ground for research on the new configurations of the construction of masculinity in/to the pornographic industry.

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<sup>81</sup> *Come to my brother* (2013), *The Wolves that Live in Skin and Space* (2015) and *Body to Job* (2018).

<sup>82</sup> Zeischegg's, Christopher. Christopher Zeischegg's "The Wolves That Live In Skin And Space" & "Come To My Brother". [Interview given to] whoaskedyou. *WhoAskedYou?*, [S.l.], 2017. Booktalk. Retrieved from: <https://whoaskedyoublog.wordpress.com/2017/10/18/christopher-zeischegg/#more-2489>. Accessed on: 21 July. 2019.

<sup>83</sup> On a personal message to me.