

But What Does “*It*” Mean: An Analysis of Feminist & Mainstream Pornographies

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I. Introduction

When I was six years old, I stumbled upon some Playboys in a closet. The sexual positions were completely in the periphery for me; what held my attention were the neon backgrounds. In retrospect it wasn't only the bright backgrounds that held my attention; it was the idea of the bodies suspended in it, taken out of context, and reformatted in a way I'd never seen before. I was curious, in some ineffable six-year-old way, about what the magazines were *for* and what possibly they might have meant. Ever since then, I've been quietly obsessed with finding out the one thing my younger self lacked the faculty to ask: how do we talk and make stories about pornography?

In this project, I am interested in how we talk and make stories about heterosexual non-fetish pornography that contains fellatio scenes. I chose fellatio scenes primarily because of the act has a large prevalence in heterosexual non-fetish pornography, but I also chose to use fellatio as a sample lens because it is fascinating from a cultural studies standpoint. Agency, the voice, and knowledge are articulated by the mouth, and thus to put genitals¹ in a mouth or to have genitals placed in one's mouth creates an interesting juxtaposition of cultural power². Fellatio, being a site of social power and relation, can be conceptualized and portrayed in different ways based on the ideology and intentions of the context a text portraying fellatio it is created in. In this project I reasoned that mainstream pornography and feminist pornography would show fellatio in different ways, revealing the basic differences in each genre's content and execution.

In this project I identify feminist pornography as pornographies that identify themselves as

¹ Genitals are sacred/taboo in Western culture.

² As cultural historian scholar Thierry Leguay posits: "Fellatio sexualizes the mouth, makes the mouth a sexual organ in and of itself" which is concerning to cultures that view sexuality as sacred or taboo because it takes the mouth (an orifice of everyday life) and changes it into something else more powerful or something other than itself. The mouth to many cultures is "an organ of the spoken word, of the truth. Fellatio, in this light, sullies the mouth" (Auguste, "The History of Fellatio", 2000).

feminist and encourage sex positivity, sexual equality, and mutual pleasure while being produced in safe way for its performers. Conversely, mainstream pornography is any pornography produced by a large scale production company, with the primary intention of making a profit instead of advancing equality or more diverse representations. This profit-based ideology certainly has room for alternate ideologies and potentialities of gender relations, but it is a secondary goal. Mainstream pornography is designed to appeal to the greatest number of consumers, and thus is very unlikely to feature fetishes, or performers whose bodies deviate from the Western ideals of sex and beauty. Feminist pornographers by contrast have declared that part of the point of making feminist pornography was to depict alternative views of sexuality deviating from the Western norm.

When examining these two different genres of mainstream and feminist pornography via the shared lens of fellatio scenes, I found that the elements that made up the eroticism of mainstream and feminist pornography were primarily socio-cultural and depended on the inclusion or un-inclusion of degradation. Both genres contained degradation, which is defined in this project as an instance where one character does or says something to their sexual partner that establishes that the sexual partner is less than (as in socially lower than or not as valid or autonomous as) the person inflicting the degradation. In my sample scenes, only women were subject to degradation. Because both genres contain degradation, I have come to the conclusion that feminist porn is not solely “feminist” and mainstream porn is not solely exploitative and “degrading.” Pornography films are often a mixture of feminist and degrading symbols—a state of in between that fluctuates among perceptions and standpoints. Differing ideologies and readings can even be found in the same scene! Designations like “feminist” or “mainstream” may label an overall ideology of a pornographic film, but these labels do not reflect the

inconsistencies within a genre and do not reflect the potential for an opposite or negotiated readings (Chandler, 2014). Media texts, much like the humans that create them, are not absolute. While feminist pornography can have “feminist” fellatio scenes, so can mainstream pornography. Likewise, sometimes feminist pornography does not appear to be feminist in a fellatio scene, yet a mainstream pornographic film can adhere to feminist pornography ideals in either content or creation. Pornography studies needs new language to better describe pornography.

This project deviates from the historic purpose of porn studies, which was to “determine” whether pornography was harmful to society. Instead, this project adheres to newer porn studies scholarship that examines the production and meanings of pornography. Attwood and Smith (2014) write, “There are media spaces for plural and divergent opinions on pornography but too often public debates revolve around whether or not pornography is good for us – a focus that renders invisible those arguments which derive from different kinds of research questions” (p. 10). Simply put, pornography studies has historically been at a loss on how to research different questions like my own project that deal with pornography as a cultural artifact and not an ethical quandary.

Since pornographic films are cultural artifacts, they have power to upheave and speak to authority. However, pornographic films (like any cultural artifact) also have the power to reinforce the hegemonic institutions of the culture that made them. As Passonen (2014) notes, pornography is “a symptom and symbol of patriarchal culture, of heterosexual masculinity in crisis and of cultural resistance alike” (p. 136). Pornography amplifies cultural ideas about sex. Thus, rather than asking whether this is harmful or beneficial, scholars need to ask how does pornography reveal or resist cultural ideas about sex and power by exposing or masking

patriarchal ideals. The way the fellatio in mainstream and feminist pornography is written and portrayed thus reveals how cultural producers (in this case, pornographers) think about sex and what they think audiences will find desirable. My project looks at fellatio in order to see how sex and sexual power are positioned by the many differing ideological movements at play in pornography in hopes of seeing how this revealing or resisting of sexual concepts works. In order to understand both the history and current state of ideologies surrounding pornography, I must take the reader on a tour through the two dominant ideologies surrounding the value of pornography. This tour will illustrate for my readers that creating a binary to understand pornography (e.g. feminist versus mainstream) is not a productive way to study the medium. After this tour through these dominant ways of looking at pornography, I will propose and demonstrate a different way of looking at pornography.

Porn Studies: a review

There are two major camps in pornography studies: Pro-pornography & anti-pornography. Feminists, religious leaders, and viewers fall along both sides of these ideological lines and can often switch back and forth or move ideologically somewhere in between based on the specific type of pornography. The focus here will be on the various feminisms that have engaged in the ideological “sex wars,” which have engaged the beneficial/problematic nature of pornography.

Feminism is a complex ideological movement that considers “men and women as equal, emphasizing the similarities between them and arguing that women can be as capable and as rational as men” (Davies, 2010). From this foundation, numerous divisions emerge among

different varieties of feminisms. In this paper, I am solely discussing sex-positive feminism and radical feminism.

Sex positivity³ is defined by Attwood & Smith (2014) as “the cultural philosophy that understands sexuality as a potentially positive force in one’s life, that ‘celebrates sexual diversity, differing desires and relationships structures, and individual choices based on consent’” (p. 13). Sex positivity is a facet of third wave feminism. Those that are sex positive believe that watching or creating porn can be liberatory, or therapeutic, or even a form of activism if that the porn production and viewing is done ethically, with the fair treatment of the sex workers, and done so with critical engagement of the media product.

Sex positivity takes issue with the wholesale rejection of pornography. Attwood & Smith (2014) state that sex positive feminists traditionally have taken issue with anti-pornography positions because “anti-views have tended to be underpinned by puritan ideas in which spiritual and moral values are associated with a suspicion of sensual pleasures and a view that these undermine the family and devotion to work” (p.12) Sex positivity takes issue with anti-pornography scholarship’s lack of analysis or critical thought regarding pornography as media. To sex positive frameworks, anti-pornographic positions reduce all media to mere singular messages whose consumption is presented as forms of exposure. In addition, the literal readings of anti-porn discourse discounts “the transgressive–fantastic element of pornographic texts” which a facet that feminist pornography heavily uses in its texts.(Attwood & Smith, 2014, p. 12).

Sex positive feminism also problematizes the idea of rejecting pornography because doing so supports the binary of good/bad sex, which then supports oppressive power institutions

³ Also known as “sex-radical”

of heterosexual patriarchy. The good/bad sex binary is most often known as “normal” sex versus perceived sexual deviancy. Attwood & Smith (2014) think that this “conception of ‘normal’ (and therefore ‘good’) sexual practices and their opposites at the ‘outer limits’ of ‘bad’ and ‘abnormal’ sex” is used to justify policy, social norms and is a root of taboos about sex and procreation (p.12). Foucault argues that at the heart morality systems like this binary of “good” versus “bad sex” are “codes of behavior” and “forms of subjectivation” (Foucault, 1985, p. 29). The very notion of good/bad sex enforces a code of behavior that subjects people to regimes of sexual power. Codes of behavior to “good” and “bad” sex are reproduced by media messages, legal/spiritual realities and subjectivations (such as incest laws, spiritual and legal prescriptions against dildos.) People also internalize these codes and institutional positions and then reproduce them as expressions of self. In the end, the many working parts of these codes of behaviors and the ways hegemonic institutions enforce them collude to make mainstream culture. This creates difficulties for those outside the definitions of hegemonic sexuality, who do not wish to engage in “good sex” or cannot engage in the approved sex. Attwood & Smith (2014) posit that “‘Good’ sex is associated with heterosexuality, marriage, monogamy and procreation. It includes sexual encounters that take place within the same generation, involve couples, and are carried out in private. ‘Bad’ sex includes encounters that are cross-generational, casual, sadomasochistic, or homosexual, those that are forms of solo or group sex, and those that are carried out in public” (p.12). “Roles and identities that play or experiment with gender and sexuality – such as butch/femme, trans and SM practices – have also been associated with ‘bad sex⁴’” (Attwood & Smith, 2014, p. 12).

⁴ It is crucial to understand this binary of bad/good sex because many feminist pornographies used in this project contain BDSM in their film samples and still position themselves as having ideologically feminist “good” sex.

Such a binary understanding of sex often leads to question of “ethical” sex, which too often falls into a of delineating sex acts and marginalizing non-normative groups. “Defining certain acts or practices 'feminist' or 'non-feminist' brings to the fore the hierarchizing of some desires as 'more ethical' than others, a worrying possibility whereby some desires – for example, Bondage/Dominance/Sadism/Machoism, consensual and risk-aware violence, extreme fantasy, or desires that are sensitive in political terms – are delegitimized as failing on some ethical standard and are therefore ruled out as viable and feminist desires” (Mordin, 2014, p. 191). This negotiation of who can and cannot sit at the feminist pornography table must be reconciled if feminist pornography is to become an ideologically consistent genre. However, there is in feminist pornography communities interest in defining and negotiating what this table looks like and they are “committed to envision, create and promote new ways of representing all kinds of desires with awareness and reflexivity... they are working towards re-appropriating and reconfiguring tropes, genres and stereotypes, along with the cinematic, narrative, visual markers that signify that these practices can be feminist and can be represented in feminist ways” (Mordin, 2014, p. 191). Feminist pornography does need to not exclude (and traditionally has not excluded) consensual activities between adults like BDSM or spanking, and that “images of dominance and submission are not anti-feminist in and of themselves, but one of the reasons feminists critique them is because consent is not always explicit and because of the repetition of men dominating women, making it the main type of power exchange we see in a lot of mainstream pornography” (Breslaw, 2013). It is not sex acts that feminist porn objects to; it is the framing and the larger world outside the films themselves.

What the feminist pornography industry calls feminist pornography was formed in reaction to what mainstream pornography was *not*, but a cohesive unified definition of what

mainstream pornography *was* did not emerge in my research. Common critiques of mainstream pornography are that it is solely “male oriented” and that it does not promote safe sexual practices since condoms are not commonly shown in mainstream heterosexual or homosexual pornography (Lust, 2010, p. 75). When critiquing mainstream pornography it is crucial to not negate the possibility of open reading and of play with mainstream pornography texts by women and other genders despite these audiences not being the target demographic of these texts. Pornography and film scholar Linda Williams, for example, charges that “ {mainstream} Pornography is perhaps one of the few popular genres in which women are not punished for knowing, pursuing, and finding their pleasure” (Lust, 2010, p. 87). This pursuit of pleasure is an important point in both the narrative of the viewers and the narrative of the text, but the fact remains that the genre is problematic due to the business practices and protocol of the mainstream pornography industry. For example, female orgasms in pornography⁵ are often overtly faked for the male eye or in response to only a male’s orgasm/ejaculate (Lust, 2010, p. 88). Moreover, mainstream porn oftentimes features as its climax a male actor ejaculating onto a woman⁶ while female performers have no equivalent glorification/ sexual agency driven scene of their own (Lust, 2010, p. 14). The politics of pleasure in mainstream pornography are fraught, to say the least.

Anti-pornography feminism seek to eradicate pornography for because in its framework feminist pornography cannot exist. In an anti-pornography frameowork, all pornography is characterized by the above mentioned critiques of mainstream pornography. Anti-porn critiques

⁵ This critique applies to feminist pornography too: an orgasm for work is still labor. Orgasms still can be fake in feminist pornography as well. There may be pleasure in the labor but the fact of labor remains. Colluding sexual pleasure with monetary compensation/labor is a very ethically quagmired area and unfortunately not a topic I have the breadth to go into in my paper since to debate the above mentioned point is to go back into the Sex Wars of the 1980s and 1970s, which is not my intention.

⁶ It is industry practice to do so due to the fact that it is sexually hazardous for cisgender male pornography performers to ejaculate inside a cisgender woman.

range from many ideological positions, from viewing a rejection of porn as a component of dismantling patriarchy to an evangelical Christian rejection of sexual pleasure or non-procreative sex. Anti-porn perspectives usually are centered in either a place of “radical” feminism or in a conservative viewpoint and share in common the notion that pornography is harmful to the general flourishing of society. Radical feminism is a branch of feminism that calls for the elimination of male supremacy in all facets of society—economic, political, religious and cultural and does so not only by political processes. They challenge gender norms, gendered behavior and view patriarchy as one or even the most important root causes of oppression in the world. Radical feminists like Andrea Dworkin and others have famously been hyper-critical of heterosexual relations, pornography, and sex norms. This branch of feminism eschews pornography as a valid media text at all because they argue that it objectifies and commodifies women both of which keep patriarchy in place. The sexually objectified woman, the radical feminist argues, is prevented from being fully human in the world of patriarchy dominated life. Dworkin says of this woman: “The woman has no human dimension, no human meaning..... She has no internal life, no human resonance; she needs no human interpretation.... Photograph what she is, painted pink; the camera delivers her up as a dead thing; the picture is of a corpse, embalmed” (Dworkin, 1987, p. 9). The preserved, dimensionless women on screen in pornography is another symbol of deeply embedded misogynistic hate in Western culture, so it is impossible to think consider pornography as liberatory in any way. Pornography is monolithically negative regardless of intentions while making it, according to the radical feminist point of view.

A primary frustration of researching pornography is the fact that historically, much of the bulk of scholarship has been focused on refuting or investigating ethical questions that radical

feminism has raised against pornography. The ethical debates about pornography are hardly settled even today. However, I am not interested in those questions and am much more interested in the idea of pornography as a text, an area of inquiry that began to emerge in the 1980s.

In 1981, Ellen Willis coined the term, “pro-sex feminism,” in work that criticized the more puritanical approach to pornography notable in the “sex wars” (Braganza, 2015). Willis’s and her sex-positive peers’ writings slowly snowballed into the burgeoning field that it is in the twenty first century. Many porn scholars and media scholars are weary of the constant debate and binary framework of “good/bad” and feel that there must be more productive ways to analyze pornography as cultural texts. As porn scholar Rebecca Sullivan notes: “I want to look at this film the same way we’d look at Hitchcock. What’s going on here? What do we learn? How do we embrace or resist it? Let’s move away from the pro- and anti- argument. It’s divisive and counterproductive. And it’s bad scholarship” (Braganza, 2015). I agree with Sullivan. It is simply poor scholarship to try and determine (if such a thing is even possible) if texts are inherently good or bad, meritorious of existence or wastes of matter. It is also dangerous to ignore the links pornography has to power by writing it off as merely “bad.” “Studying porn is vital to an understanding of how power works. Porn brings together realism/representation, with gender, with bodies, with desire and fantasy and packages these as the very ‘private’ of experiences. The best of the scholars of the 20th century tell us that such ‘private’ moments are potent because we imagine these as places where power isn’t active, or, if we think power is active we think it is merely depicting reality” (Noble, n.d.).

Now that this project has mentioned the unproductivity of viewing pornography through a binary of wholly good or bad, more questions outside that binary can be explored. I am more interested in seeking the shape of the power in porn itself and how the signs and signifiers in its

texts show both its establishment of power, its utilization of power, and the difference or similarities in this power between mainstream and feminist porn. “Porn studies have not extensively addressed the power or appeal of porn, its visceral grab and its power to move those looking, listening and reading beyond the ideological affects that the genre is seen to hold” (Paasonen, 2014, p. 138). Analyses of power in heterosexual pornographies have not been conducted as much as their queer counterparts in pornography studies and thus information on heterosexual gender relations in pornography is scant. “Very few published works have tackled the dominant mainstream of moving image pornography and I cannot but think that this avoidance of the heterosexual mainstream, especially of its history, has left a large central plot of the garden untended” (Williams, 2014).

Modern pornographic research that is not explicitly anti-pornography typically takes the form of histories, ethical treatises, or what queer cultural theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick called “paranoid inquiry” and thus does not delve into the many deliberate dialogue choices, directorial decisions, and cultural signifiers in a porn text itself. “Paranoid inquiry” is Sedgwick’s name for her critique of cultural critical theory, and called it a “‘methodology’ that implies a compulsive will to knowledge through false uncovering and revealing the hidden workings of power. These workings, however, are not hidden {as in uncovered through research} but are known to the author from the start, since ‘paranoia requires that bad news be always already known’” (Paasonen, 2014). Thus many works in pornography studies, Paasonen alleges, are flawed because they analyze pornography expecting to see bad news or confirmation of their own negative theories.

Since pornography scholars are exploring new research questions, new ways to think about the way pornography is watched must be created as well. Media scholar Brian Ott

suggests a focus on relocating the pleasure in decoding and viewing a text, and emphasizing decoding's ability to create *jouissance* in viewership once more. In his view, this relocation is key to understand the important pleasure of the labor that goes into viewing a text (Ott, 2004, p. 195). Feminist pornography shares with him that approach as well. Pleasure is essential to pornography, but pleasure in media studies has traditionally not been privileged as a legitimate force. The problem media studies had with pleasure is that it represented "a conservative force—a virtual guarantee of the status quo, of existing power relationships" (Ott, 2004, p. 196). This concept is integral to understand academic suspicion of pornographic studies. The affective and consciously viewer centered nature of pornography is designed for viewers to invent their own relations within the predetermined scenery and is focused on bodily desires, which Ott claims media studies has been lacking in exploring. Pornography is designed to evoke pleasure and so it is perceived as an enforcer of social structure because, according to Ott, many media scholars feel that no productive consumption can come from pleasure. "It is a product of audience passivity and the acceptance of ready-made meanings and {Theodor} Adorno even critiques pleasure as 'Pleasure always means not to think about anything. ... Basically it is helplessness. It is flight; not, as is asserted, flight from a wretched reality, but from the last remaining thought of resistance'" (Ott, 2004, p. 196). Thus, if one views pleasure as inherently unproductive or not relevant to scholarship, one will not view a pleasure producing media product as amiable to scholarship. Instead the urge is to commit paranoid inquiry; to destroy it. When one decodes and "resists the ideological hail to subjectivity; it 'detotalizes the message' and thus destroys *plaisir*," they can find themselves not enjoying the text any longer- they have lost the pleasure inherent in accepting the message. In this case, pornography is rendered unpleasurable from textual analysis. However, it's also true that a "de(con)struction of dominant

meaning/ideology/pleasure” through decoding a text “is itself a mode of (re)construction, of production, and of pleasure” (Ott, 2004, p. 197). There is a way to meld the deconstructive pleasure of analysis to the study of pornography and this is often seen in feminist pornography which prides itself on hegemonic deconstruction.

An important part of pleasure is often enacted by what Ott & Barthes call “cruising” or “drifting” and I call “skimming” in contexts to pornography (Ott, 2004, p. 204). “Cruising is the voyage of desire, writes Barthes. The body is in a state of alert on the lookout for its own desire. Cruising is an act that repeats itself but the catch is absolutely fresh” (Ott, 2004, p. 204). The act of finding pornography or deciding what parts of a pornography to view is culturally relevant because each time one skims a pornographic text one is creating a unique cultural situation and meaning making of the text. There are rewind buttons and pause and play in the medium of video pornography and so when one combines these DVD navigational abilities with a viewer’s bodily desires and (dis)comforts, the cruising and navigations of the media product, and the text rules viewers negotiate with what the text dictates, one creates skimming and most importantly new form of pleasurable text reading.

In the pages that follow, I will demonstrate an approach that is both sex-positive and pleasurable in an analysis of fellatio scenes in feminist and mainstream pornographies. I chose to compare feminist and mainstream pornographies because of the oppositional defining claims feminist pornographies make about mainstream pornographies and for the fact that feminist pornography emerged in reaction to the hotly debated argument about the value of pornography. My variegated analysis allows me to take part in this debate and offer a new approach to understanding the complex continuum of hegemony within which pornography exists.

II. Methodology

A. Overview of Methods for Pornography Studies

As Roland Barthes noted: “{there is} no surer way to kill a piece of research and send it to the great scrap heap of abandoned projects than Method” (Ott, 2004, p. 202). Alas, in such a new field as porn studies, method is crucial. There are generally two academic perspectives to porn studies: a social science perspective or a humanities and thus textual analysis driven perspective. It is important to note that the two approaches can and have been fused, and that one way is not more “correct” than the other. My approach takes a textual analysis standpoint that critically analyzes fellatio in pornographic texts in addition to engaging the people who create the text and factor their personal narratives in.

Textual analysis is concerned with the content of a text. A text can be read in a multitude of ways but it is most common in the case of pornographic textual analysis to “look for hidden ideologies in a text – such as patriarchy, racism, heteronormativity” (Mckee, 2014, p. 55). A flaw/focus of this sort of textual analysis often features “a lack of interest in the surface level of what texts *appear* to be saying, and also a lack of interest in interpretations audiences *say* they make of texts” (Mckee, 2014, p. 55). This means that in a pornography film, a textual analysis of ideologies would not be so much interested in what the actual script or scenes were saying or performing, but in the implicit power structures and theories invoked by their dialogue or sets. It also means what the audience says about the meaning making of the text is not relevant. McKee also echoes Ott and the theory of “paranoid reading” in his analysis of humanities driven pornographic research, saying “This approach also tends to look for negative interpretations of a text – no matter how positive a text might appear on the surface, ideological textual analysis

aims to find a negative reading” (Mckee, 2014, p. 55). As always: this could be a valid critique of the structure of the academy and modern media analysis, or this could be due to the fact that media formed in Western culture *does* have that many issues. One could also analyze a pornographic text poststructurally, which Mckee feels would be “an analysis of a text that makes an informed guess about the meanings of that text made by the audiences who consume it” (Mckee, 2014, p. 56). This means when I watch a pornographic film, I think critically about what viewers would think about the fellatio scenes based on the dialogue, music, and “surface meanings” in order to make sense of how this media affects the world, and the world affects this media (Mckee, 2014).

A fusion of these two textual approaches combined with an understanding of affect informs my approach in this project. Building on approaches outlined by McKee and Ott, I first conducted an in-depth contextual analysis of the pornography films in my sample and then conducted a deeper analysis of a singular scene of fellatio within those pornography films. For this project, I selected four mainstream films for this project and three feminist films. The mainstream films included in this project are: *Let Me Suck You 6*, *Second Chances*, *Aftermath*, and *Shark Babes are Bikini Bait*. The three feminist films included are: *Pulsion*, *Lovehard*, and *The Sexual Liberation of Anna Lee*. Each mainstream film was an Adult Video Network 2015 winner, and each feminist film was a Feminist Pornography Awards 2015 winner.

The AVN, started in 1984, is a mainstream pornography award show sponsored and created by Adult Film trade magazine Adult Video News, and it is considered by the industry to be the “Oscars” of pornography. To be considered for an AVN, the film needs to be available in at least five wholesale stores or at a minimum 100 retail outlets by the award deadline. There are

no content rules/guidelines for submission. In 2015, there were 89 AVN categories for film and additionally a separate category for product and online retailer awards.

The FPA, started in 2006, is sponsored and created by the Good For Her Store, which is one of the largest feminist sex positive wholesale retailers of sexual goods. It is, to my knowledge, the only feminist pornography award show. The FPA states on its website that the standards for winners are: Quality, as in the film must have excellent “editing, framing, lighting, sound and overall production value.... Story-crafting, acting, music, and direction are all factors (Earnest feminism is not enough.)”; inclusiveness of diversity of both identity and sexual practices in the film; novelty; and affective erotic content (Good For Her). In 2015, there were 18 FPA winners, with three honorable mentions that were not included in my film pool.

I chose the films for this study by narrowing the pool of award-winning films to those that contain heterosexual fellatio. From these, I chose the seven films for this study at random. The feminist sample size was much smaller than originally intended, but some feminist pornographic films featured in the 2015 Feminist Porn Awards were not available for purchase.

Mainstream Films

Aftermath (Wicked Pictures)

Directed by Brad Armstrong, starring Jessica Drake

Aftermath was the 2015 winner of the Adult Video Network Award for “Best Drama,” “Best Director” and “Best Screenplay.” The plot of *Aftermath* is centered on an unorthodox subject: September 11, 2001. In this film, Danny (Tyler Nixon) turns eighteen and receives the keys to

his deceased father⁷'s mustang (Father played by Ryan Driller) and finds some mysterious photographs of a woman: Nina (Jessica Drake.) Nina was Danny's father's employee, and also his mistress. Understandably, Danny's mother (played by MILF genre actress Brandi Love) is very upset to see photographs of her deceased husband's mistress and forbids Danny from investigating the matter. Danny disobeys her and journeys to New York City where he meets Nina and starts a relationship with her, learning about his deceased father along the way. The scene selected for analysis is Danny having sex with Nina in her office after alluding to how his father used to have intercourse with her.

Scene Selected: 2:55:57- 2:57:00 (fellatio scene between Danny and Nina)

Let Me Suck You 6 (Elegant Angel)

Directed by Carlos D; Starring Bianca Breeze, Brooke Wilde, Carmen Caliente, Lola Foxx, Serena Ali, Summer Carter, and Vicky Chase

Let Me Suck You 6 is a pornographic film that is solely sex scenes and no other content. (I am not negating the cultural validity of films like this, only noting that their lack of any other content is an important detail in determining what a "typical" fellatio scene in mainstream pornography is.) The film won Best Fellatio Scene of 2015 at the AVN. *Let Me Suck You 6* exists at the opposite end of the plot spectrum, and is a series of Point of View shots of different women performing fellatio. The unseen man (save his member) makes no noises or has no interactions in the scenes; he is disembodied despite the scene seemingly focusing around his body. These scenes are mixtures of the voyeur watching himself being a voyeur, of self-insertion

⁷ Who passed away in the events of September 11, 2001.

into non-self. Feminist pornography Tristan Taormino claims that this sort of vacant participation is endemic to the larger problem of patriarchy in mainstream creating harmful gender roles for men (as well as creating toxic environments for women) because “men are portrayed as one-dimensional sex robots; they are always dominant, assertive, and rock hard. In a lot of films, we rarely see their faces or the rest of their bodies, they are merely disembodied penises” (Breslaw, 2013). The actresses in this film are not well known actresses and star as themselves and not a character. They also often are fetishized or objectified because of their race. For example, in the selected scene the actress tokenizes her Hispanic heritage while performing fellatio.

Scene Selected: Carmen Caliente’s Scene (DVD operates in a way that you choose what scene to watch, and are free to not watch them chronologically from first scene presented on the DVD selection menu to the last scene option presented. This is an interesting way to skim a text and one I feel overall contributes to message and meaning of the text.)

Second Chances (New Sensations)

Directed by Jacky St. James⁸ and Eddie Powell, starring Carter Cruise

This film details the journey of Madison Presely (played by Carter Cruise, who won the 2015 AVN Award for “Best Actress” for the role) on her journey to heal from a past betrayal. A college senior, Madison was as a freshman in love with a callous fraternity boy Josh Rochette (Chad White) who dated her as a joke and broke up with her publicly. As Madison tries to heal, she works at a bar and has a close friendship with her boss, named Dean (Brendon Miller.) Of course, her friendship is not as simple as it seems- the two are also deeply in love with each other

⁸ St. James is also a performer and feminist porn director. She directed and acted in *The Sexual Liberation of Anna Lee*, which I have used in my feminist pornography sample.

but Madison is too scarred from her past betrayal to admit. The fellatio scene selected for this film is the climax of the film that shows the culmination of the two main character's repressed feelings for each other. The film has producers and cast members that are very loudly feminist in their civilian and performer lives, and yet the industry considers *Second Chances* a mainstream film.

Scene Selected: 1:53:57- 1:55:46 (Madison & Dean have sex together for the first time as the film's conclusion)

Shark Babes are Bikini Bait (Burning Angel Productions)

Directed by Joanna Angel, Starring Joanna Angel⁹

Burning Angel Productions is self-labeled as an "alternative" pornography production company, but is actually a mainstream pornography production company that caters to "goth" and "emo" audiences and does not consciously as their mission statement create pornography that is ideologically different than the mainstream. In this grindhouse style film, Joanna Angel and actress Tori Lux plot to overthrow public pool bullies "The Pink Pussies" by putting a Japanese dildo shark in their pool. (Predictably, the dildo shark attacks everyone.) This 2015 AVN award winner for "Best Comedy" features very stylistically distinct actresses but not actors. All actresses have tattoos and appear to be a commercialized genre of "punk." The idea of Angel's "indie" pornography troubles me, because it seems to be a rebel without a cause. Without a distinct ideology mission statement, it seems impossible for Burning Angel productions to perform any sort of rebellious behavior in anything other than the hardly transgressive hiring of heavily tattooed white slender models with piercings. Many porn

⁹ Who is also the soundtrack creator and writer for the film.

performers I saw throughout my sample process selection had tattoos and multiple piercings and so it seems the way Burning Angel performers present themselves is included into a new millennial standard of “normal.” “In reality, indie porn is just like indie pop. It pretends to be different from the industry, but works with the same business model. Just as punk and indie pop saved the music industry in the 1980s and 1990s, indie porn will save the porn industry of today. It is the research and development arm of the porn industry” (Cramer & Home, 2007, p. 165).

Scene Selected: 54:30- 57:37 (Scene featuring Nikki Hearts)

Feminist Films

As outlined in my introduction, the moniker of “Feminist Films” can be a nebulous one. In order to have at least one standard I could reliably hold all my films to, I decided that I would take at face value any film chosen by the Feminist Pornography Awards, and accept them as “feminist.”

Lovehard (Sensate Films)

Directed by Bobby Harrington and Gala Vanting, Starring Ensemble Cast¹⁰

This “erotic documentary” is about BDSM participants who are not pornography performers and won best documentary at the FPA. There is no sex in this film. At least, not by hegemonic definitions. Despite performing on screen what they deem “intimate” and “erotic” acts of BDSM play, most of the scenes do not feature any sort of sexual intercourse or even fully nude characters. This look into the non-hegemonic intimate worlds of BDSM participants ranges from elderly men interested in being spanked and wearing masks to feminist women interested in humiliation play.

¹⁰ For the film scene selected, the star is a young woman who chose to go by Nio who is into Erotic Humiliation.

Scenes Selected: 5:30- 11:15, 12:30-13:18, 19:45-21:13 (Nio, a woman who is aroused by humiliation play explains the erotic potential of humiliation)

Pulsion (Breaking Glass Productions¹¹)

Directed by Odivie, Starring Emy Russo and Phil Hollyday

Pulsion won the Feminist Porn Awards for “Best Director.” The film follows Eva, a woman who has uncontrollable orgasms, who attends rehab for those with sexual hang-ups and addictions. Sexual hijinks ensue. The scene selected is a surprisingly serious one for the film (which is very wry and satiric) and features the two main characters attempting to make an authentic emotional connection during sex. *Pulsion* contains ample dialogue surrounding sexual politics and the inherent “rightness” or “wrongness” of certain sexual activities, like fetishism or celibacy. This creates an academically interesting text since the pornographic scenes are interspersed with ideological ruminations on the nature of sexuality and sexuality’s influence on our being.

Scene Selected: 58:00- 1:06:49 (Eva & Chris’s first sex scene/reclaiming of sexual feelings)

The Sexual Liberation of Anna Lee (New Sensations)

Directed by Jacky St. James, Starring Maddy O’Reilly

Following the trend of sexual clinics, this movie also features sexual addicts and those trying to sexually heal themselves. Produced by a mainstream production company and directed by a feminist director, this film tells the journey of Anna as she joins an unconventional therapy to rid herself of sexual hang-ups and negative self-talk. During her therapy, she meets Emmett

¹¹ Breaking Glass Productions is not actually a pornographic movie production company, and actually is focused on distributing independent LGBTQ films, horror films, and documentaries.

(Xander Corvus) whose friendship and subsequent leaving (considered a betrayal by Anna, who is infatuated with him) allows her realize that sexual liberation and self-actuality must be achieved on her own terms, not someone else's. This is then seen in the final scene, which was selected for analysis in this project. This scene consists of Anna showing Emmett she has become liberated by performing fellatio on him. This film is notable for its BDSM overtones and for its finale scene to be a lesbian BDSM orgy scene with Jacky St. James as the actress unleashing Anna's sexual pleasure¹².

Scene Selected: 1:46:00- 1:59:01 (Anna Lee & Emmett finally have sex, symbolizing the fact that they have attained the capacity for sexual intimacy.)

III. Analysis

Whenever analyzing these films, I am struck (or more accurately: haunted) by Derrida's idea of difference/differance. Fellatio can be the "a," that silent tomb of textual meaning that Derrida speaks of. There are a multitude of meanings that can arise from one screen and they can be screen printed copies of themselves or surprising divergent meanings. This frustrated me because for the sake of brevity there can only be mentioned one or two textual analyses for each scene. The fellatio scene can never define itself through just be a fellatio scene in this project; they have to be described in other terms and connections or else this project is just a playing of clips. The meaning(s) can thus go on forever. Intercourse is a name for both sexual relations and conversations and I argue that both are situated in what Derrida called an endless signifying chain. In addition, Derrida argues that viewers/text readers constantly have a state of mental flux

¹² Very postmodern.

while reading/viewing/bringing the text to life. I advise my readers to take that in their (fluctuating) minds as they read through the next part of this project.

Mainstream Films

Aftermath is an interesting mash of contradictions and contraindications to its plot. Like many of the mainstream pornography films I researched, it had brief but frequent fellatio scenes interspersed before and in between sexual intercourse, creating a situation where a sex scene could easily be twenty minutes but the fellatio portion studied only took a few minutes¹³. The scene I chose in particular from this movie is short, but it is a representative one since it deals with the relationship dynamics of the two main characters: Danny and Nina, who are in a secret relationship.

The premise of the scene is that Danny shows up unexpectedly at Nina's office after Nina left him sleeping at her home, and he seduces her. (It is important to note that the role of the seducer/seduced also fluctuates constantly throughout the movie.) Nina being seduced and Danny being the seducer in this scene is interesting because Danny seduces her in her workplace environment; thus showing she has less control in her work domain or herself than she previously thought. Despite this (consensual) seduction, there are possible positive attributes to the setting of this scene. On one hand, it is laudable that Nina is shown to be a business woman who is important enough to merit her own office. On the other hand, it is possible that perhaps her career is merely conducive to plausible explanations of the film's scene changes and the exiting and entering of her character. Importantly, none of the women in the feminist films ever mention their careers. The fact that Nina can be sexual and have a workplace of importance, and

¹³ This movie is also a maddening three hours.

that the two facts exist (at face value) comfortably in *Aftermath*'s universe is very encouraging for possible feminist ideological growth in mainstream pornography. Nina can be sexual and also productive and successful. However, the plot of this scene hinges on disrespecting a woman's boundaries between her work life and social life, and the scene really begins when Danny refuses to leave after Nina asks him to. She's a businesswoman, but still cannot or will not throw out a teenage boy. I ultimately conclude that it is important that Nina is a business woman with a successful life, and admit that while it makes perfect sense within the context of the plot of *Aftermath* that she wouldn't *want* Danny to leave, it is still degrading/problematic that her "no" is ignored and that her work life could be upended by her sexual partner. At 2:40:00, Nina tells Danny "You can't be here," and he closes the door and says he's "not going anywhere" and that she is just protesting because she just does not wish her "friends" to know she's "fucking a teenage boy." The usage of "friends" instead of co-workers is very demeaning and degrading. Details like these are important to note when analyzing a pornography text because first the possibility and then inclusion of the detail in the text (even if unconsciously done so) tells a larger story about what the makers of pornography think about sex, and what sexual stories we use to tell ourselves and other about sex.

Nina tells Danny to get out, to which Danny responds to by coming closer and says "I bet my dad fucked you on this desk," and other things to that effect. Belittling a woman about her sexual life in response to her asserting her boundaries is degrading¹⁴. They then begin to make out, and the sexual scene begins. (2:42:00) The fellatio scene in question occurs right after cunnilingus, and is situated within a marathon of sexual acts. My sample begins at 2:55:05, and takes place in Nina's office between her desk and her filing cabinets and is filmed as if the

¹⁴ Also incredibly weird since it's his father he's talking about.

viewer was standing a few feet away observing from the side. There is no music playing in this scene, although earlier in the sexual scene there was dramatic generic instrumental rock music. The set pieces appear to be wood or wood imitation, and the office appears to be disorganized. Danny is naked, and Nina has heavy makeup on, silver stud earrings, and is wearing a short black dress and thigh high garters with black bows, and no underwear. Nina has long blond extensively styled wavy hair (read: very unnatural looking and remains unnatural looking throughout the intense sexual scenes.) Danny has a tattoo of a Celtic cross near his right hip on his groin as well. Both characters are white, able bodied people who adhere to the Western standard of beauty. (There is only one PoC in this film, and she is an Asian woman objectified as a sex doll in an underground sex club.)

After the cunnilingus and several other sex acts, Nina gets on her knees in front of Danny and then while gazing directly into his eyes put his penis into her mouth (2:55:05). She begins sucking and moving her head in a counter clockwise motion, as both people loudly moan. This loud moaning is much different than the feminist films and creates an attempt at simulating the real that renders the scene into the hyper-real in its over exuberance of bodies during sex and exaggerated sounds and motions. However, it does demonstrate that these two characters are engaged and excited by what they are doing and that the characters do not feel coerced by the sexual situation. Danny scoops up Nina's long meticulously manicured hair¹⁵ (2:55:08) in order for her to fellatiate him without being encumbered by it; an act that shows respect and consideration. In response, she begins to deep throat¹⁶ him as he moans increasingly louder

¹⁵ It is details like actress Jessica Drake's hair and outfits that create a feeling of the unreal, and create a situation with the viewer that they must either integrate the film's logic into the erotic experience and possibly take that with them, or reject it and suffer cognitive dissonance while attempting to enjoy the scene. The suspension of doubt is a balancing act.

¹⁶ To take an entire erect penis inside one's mouth & possible into one's throat.

(2:55:15). As she deep throats him, he moves a hand to the back of her head and holds her head in place¹⁷ but this is only for a second. Danny immediately stops and lets go of her head as if he was aware that gesture could be interpreted as forceful or degrading. After this hand removal, Nina goes back to loudly moaning and sucking on his penis as Danny awkwardly places a hand on her clothed breast (2:55:36).

Nina begins to stimulate Danny with her hands (2:55:40). Only Danny's lower half is in the frame, which is the case for most of the scene. The sight of an anonymous man standing amongst an office as a woman pleasures him calls back to misogynist themes of male bosses sexually harassing female employees and possibly subverts these themes by allowing Nina to be the boss. However, this scene is more complicated than Nina merely having sex with a younger person in her work place. Danny has considerable power over Nina in this scene because he loses nothing career wise by getting caught, but Nina will get fired. Disregarding these dangers, the two passionately kiss (2:55:45) while Nina stimulates Danny with her hands. She then stops the fellatio. They are still murmuring and moaning with pleasure. If I am correct,¹⁸ Danny whispers something along the lines of "You want to get that cum?" to Nina. She moans "yes" and Danny begins to cradle her under her chin, calling into play themes of dominance and power over her. It is a strange dynamic, being that his character is an eighteen year old boy and Nina is an older woman. It also suggests that Danny is the person who distributes sexual relief for both himself and Nina, bringing to light an underlying degradation of her and her autonomy. (Like his existence in her work place at all.)

¹⁷ In a way that doesn't allow her to move- Nina's facial expression changes quickly to one of displeasure.

¹⁸ I have played this sound bite over and over again but I am forced to conclude that this piece of dialogue is not very clear or audible.

However, it is not accurate to suggest Nina has no power in this scene. After this dialogue, she tells him suddenly “wait,” and returns to the fellatio. The sex act will not be finished until Nina wishes it to be finished, just as the sex act did not begin until Nina wanted it to begin. She continues until 2:56:23, when she suddenly stops and stands up against the desk, implying she wants penetrative intercourse once more. Nina demonstrates sexual agency and negotiates attempts to take or negate away her sexual agency. (I.e. cues to her partner that she does not enjoy something degrading and her indication of desires for different sex acts.) Danny sees she wishes to have penetrative sex, and he obligingly grabs a condom from a desk drawer. The scene ends.

Due to the briefness of this fellatio scene, I can extrapolate that fellatio is “no big deal” and that it is merely a component or ingredient in sexual activity amidst all the other sexual actions. (Sometimes lack of narrative or prominence is more telling.) This mash-up of sexual scripts does not follow the typical progression of pornography films that contain the narrative of foreplay, fellatio, and then sex. In this text Ott’s “skimming” way of reading and non-linear narratives are privileged for their pleasure providing nature. Skimming can be conceptualized as “the gap, the seam between language as structured and language as infinite” (Ott, 2004, p. 205). When a pornography text does not follow a traditional plot of meeting to sexual intercourse to finish in a linear fashion, the language (also known as the structural elements) of the pornography become interrupted and the seam in which viewers can enter to find pleasure becomes larger- the positionalities that can enter that pleasure affect becomes a little bit closer to infinite. “This gap creates two surfaces, two edges—“one, a conformist edge, the language as culture decrees its use, the other, a subversive edge, the violation of convention. It is the fault that is created between these two edges that is erotic, that delivers jouissance” (Ott, 2004, p.

204). In pornography, the plot is a vehicle for affect instead a vehicle to deliver pleasure solely on its completion or its logical progressions and thus it differs from many media texts.

I posit that *Aftermath* reflects a tense balance between Nina and Danny's emotional liberation, (which is bound up in the other's) and the patriarchal norms that the movie falls prey to. Nina and Danny's relationship is an intentional negotiation (or maybe even a subverting) of the power structure and institutions that prevent it like ageism and patriarchy. In this film, it is Nina the older and fallen woman who is the seducer but she is a composite whole, not merely a seducer with only that plot point at the core of her personality. Nina and Danny are rounded and complex characters, and their relationship with each other and their working through the trauma of his father's death reflects that. However, clear limitations enforced by the patriarchal environment exist within the film and these can be seen through structural elements like Nina's dialogue like when she says she should not do this or that but then ultimately gives in to a man. It might be foolish to separate intercourse from its intercourse with its text but the only way to understand *Aftermath* is to look at it in parts; it is a sexual story but also a larger narrative about ourselves as a whole. I maintain that the characters navigate possible sexual degradation in the scene and transmute it quickly to harmlessness, but that the overall narrative of their situation is problematic. This not to say that there is no feminist elements of the film, and I have noted where they occur in the paragraphs above. As I have stated in the introduction, I do not believe that mainstream pornography is only mainstream, or that feminist pornography is only feminist. They have aspects of both often interwoven and in conversation with each other-- as seen in *Aftermath*. The fellatio scene envisions a more varied and open ended sexual narrative, and also demonstrates respectful sexual relations in addition to negations of potentially problematic relations, but at the same time reinforces patriarchal and racist depictions of both what a

woman's career is worth and what a desirable sexual body is. The film was clearly made with the male gaze because an inordinate time is spent with Nina's body in in the camera's eye, and the focus is solely on Nina when the couple has sex. However, Nina is not Dworkin's dehumanized woman on screen, "very boundaries of her own body become meaningless to her, and even worse, useless to her....those boundaries comes to signify a sexually charged degradation into which she throws herself, having been told, convinced, that identity, for a female, is there— somewhere beyond privacy and self-respect" (Dworkin, 1987, p. 175). She is depicted as a woman with agency and her own desires, and so she is not wholly dehumanized or genericized to be an "every woman" meant for self-insertion.

A film that could potentially be argued as having an "every woman" that is degraded is *Bikini Babes are Shark Bait*, which is a "grindhouse" movie. Grindhouse as a genre is violent, cheaply made, overtly sexual movies that are created for male audiences and stigmatized as for lower economic classes in addition to being closely linked to or fused with sexploitation films. The fact this tribute to grindhouse was directed by a woman is compelling, but in the end I fear that same cliché misogynic narratives about women that grindhouse films have historically perpetuated and alienated female viewership still exist in this pornographic film as well.

The film is almost entirely sex scenes¹⁹, with snippets of plot and dialogue (mainly scenes of dildo shark sightings.) The selected fellatio scene begins (51:30) with actress Nikki Hearts²⁰, and her boyfriend (Wolf Hudson) making out passionately next to the pool bar. They both are white, western conventionally attractive, and able-bodied. Hearts has a simple pink

¹⁹ This was the only film analyzed that had a lesbian sex scene that wasn't also an orgy scene.

²⁰ Hearts is a well-known queer person/queer porn activist, who stars in mainstream pornography while also running her own lesbian focused pornography studio that focuses on depicting consent in pornography. This scene is very impressive to me because Hearts is a lesbian, and Hudson is primarily a gay for pay actor who is straight. The politics of sexual identity and the sheer acting craft of some porn performers is astounding.

polka dot bikini on, a large silver locket, a stomach tattoo of a small figure, and vivid pink nails. She has what can best be described as a ‘brunette mullet.’ Her boyfriend has close cut gelled brown hair in a side part, and is wearing a tuxedo. The pool bar area is a leather upholstered free standing bar with a wood finished counter top, a TV behind the counter, and various objects, like a newspaper and a shirt, on the bar. There appears to be a wood pile in the distance, and a small construction site to the right of the bar. The two actors occupy the middle of the screen, and the camera is aimed directly at them, with the viewers occupying the role of a voyeur who has happened upon them. As they kiss (52:57) Joanna’s voice can be heard calling out to them about the shark. She is panting, and sounds terrified. The two look disgusted to see Joanna. Joanna makes it to the pool bar, and is frantically trying to tell the two about the shark (52:58). She has a blue seersucker bikini on, and black sunglasses. In accordance with her “alternative” image, she has streaks of purple in her black hair and two sleeves of tattoos in addition to a few scattered on her chest and legs. Angel says that the shark is “growing,” but Hearts and Hudson seem unconcerned. “Does that mean someone took a dump in there,” Hudson asks Angel. She tries to explain more, but Hearts interjects: “What the fuck are you talking about? Get out of here, we’re in the middle of something!” and the two return to making out. Angel tearfully leaves after a final warning. Hearts and Hudson kiss (53:19) for quite some time, and grow more and more passionate. He begins to suck on her breast (that has pierced nipples) as she moans in pleasure (53:55). The remarkability of this scene is how unremarkable it is- just two people in various stages of foreplay at each other. It’s almost normcore, which is interesting based on the fact that Burning Angel sells itself on its edginess or alternative status. Normcore is “self-aware, stylized blandness” and is based on idea that being normal is “embracing sameness deliberately as a new way of being cool, rather than striving for ‘difference’ or ‘authenticity.’” (Duncan, 2014). The

alternative edge of *Bikini Babes are Shark Bait* is the sameness of every rebellious teen, and every media signifier of “edgy.” It’s alternative normcore.

The couple takes off their tops, and Hudson picks Hearts up so that she is sitting in his arms as he kisses her breasts. Audible heavy breathing is heard from both parties (54:14). In this scene, it is Hudson that is the enactor and Hearts that is the stand-in sex object. Actions are done to her with her enjoyment but not her initiation. Hudson places her down (54:31) and then tells her to “come down here and get this.” His tone is very aggressive, and as said before, Hearts is not initiating any of the sex foreplay. The text dialogue’s usage of “this” to indicate a penis is fascinating. There is a long history of calling genitalia “thing” or anything other than its name and thus signifying it is part of the body who is naming it. One thing I’ve failed to understand in this project is the estrangement of self from one’s sexual organs through (non)naming in pornography. We exist through our names. Why doesn’t Hudson name his penis, and why does he obliquely reference it as “this?” Why is this a common trope through pornography scripts? Surely it is not to avoid being pornographic in dialogue, as a mainstream movie would do, and so I wonder why this sexual envisioning also dis-cludes naming of sexual organs. After issuing this order to touch “this,” Hudson unzips his pants, and Hearts wordlessly and expressionlessly goes down on her knees in front of him (54:35). Unlike the feminist films, there is no foreplay or acknowledgment of the penis until she suddenly puts her mouth on it. The overall affect makes the fellatio scene seem strange, stilted, artificial, and almost coerced. There is zero pleasure seen for Hearts. Hudson receives the fellatio with his waistcoat and collared shirt still on. It appears he has sparse pubic hair. He wraps his hands in Hearts’ hair, and whispers “That’s right, just like that” as she sucks slowly on his penis, her face blank. The camera zooms in to be as a voyeuristic observer close to Hearts’ face. The shot is showing only her head, Hudson’s penis and hands

around her head. Hudson holds the back of Hearts' head and guides her in place as she fellates him. He breathes loudly as Hearts is silent. He gyrates his hips and tells her to give him "nice long strokes" (54:44). Hearts is still silent and wholly focused on the task. This continues as he holds her hair tightly. This scene is not at all about mutual pleasure between partners, and instead solely the pleasure of the male partner. This sort of binary of pleasure that sex is "a polarity of opposed activity and passivity" has been seen all over literary and pornographic history, and valorizes the penetrator and not the penetrated (Foucault, 1985, p. 215). It's an ancient trope, and a harmful one since its codes of behavior can prevent envisioning sex as existing otherwise and thus harming people who wish to have sex outside this binary.

Hearts stops fellating him and turns and looks up at Hudson- the first instance of eye contact since fellatio started. Hudson asks her "how is that?" and Hearts smiles very slightly and nods before suddenly licking his penis. She is more engaged, and looks into his eyes for a few more seconds before the fellatio resumes. Despite the scene being focused on his pleasure, only his genitals are seen in the frame and he exists as a hip rocking moaning abstraction. One could argue Hearts is equally as disembodied as well since she is only a sucking head. Both partners are in parts and thus there is not a hint of an emotional connection or any connection/intimacy other than the immediate physical intimacy. This scene remains as such until (55:30) when Hudson pulls back on more of her hair and her bangs, revealing her heavy eyeshadow. He begins whispering "suck that good," as he leans in closer to her face. Hudson begins moaning and cursing (55:41) but Hearts still seems unmoved by the situation. Then she stops, and Hudson angles her head upwards to be facing him and then asks to "stick out your tongue." (55:50.) They kiss and the Hearts returns to the fellatio. Hearts still has little to no sexual agency or input in the sexual situation. Hudson tells her to get his "cock wet" and to "get it good." He

then grabs his shirt and clenches it, revealing a tattoo of a Japanese ogre (56:12). The camera angle rises and viewer is directly over Heart's head but still in the close square of her upper torso and his lower body. Hudson tells her to stick out her tongue, and he begins tapping his penis against her tongue as she gazes into his eyes. This tongue tapping seems to me a strangely wonderful example of how in sex "there is nothing private or withdrawn or alienated" (Dworkin, 1987, p. 26). The tongue is sex, the body is sex, and it sends a strange coding signal of the mouth not merely being the site of sexual feelings, but the private tongue as well. However, the use of Hearts private tongue for sexual pleasure in such a visually strong way also could be thought to indicate a further objectifying of Hearts. The interpretation of the tongue being tapped in this scene depends on what weight a scholar wishes to give the fact that she assents to it or is portrayed as assenting to it. Hearts then takes his penis and begins to suck it, but Hudson is gyrating so quickly the penis keeps slipping out of her mouth (56:45). The scene gives the impression that it is two characters enacting fellatio separately side by side, but not together.

At 56:52, Hearts is urged to "stroke it," and she fervently does as commanded while she holds onto Hudson's left thigh. She makes quick, shallow breaths that could be pleasure or symbolic representations of it. Hudson comes close to her face, resting his nose on her forehead and then retreats, these small slices of intimacy illuminating what the scene hypothetically is supposed to represent---a connection between people in a sexual way that is aesthetically pleasing enough to invoke in people a connection to the text in a sexual way. Hearts then asks "does it feel good?" She has a joyful smile on her face as she asks the question, gazing into his eyes. They then passionately kiss as Hearts continues to stimulate him manually (57:01). She goes back to fellate him as Hudson violently thrusts in her mouth and holds her head in place

closely to his crotch. Abruptly but fluidly, he pulls her up into his arms and the two continue making out. The fellatio scene is over, and the next sexual action is cunnilingus.

I admire this film for its equal screen time emphasis on mutual pleasure in the form of oral sex, and for its stylistic commitment of remaining true to the genre of grindhouse, a genre with close historical ties to pornography. However, this film is problematic. Hearts is both put on display and is the display in the scene. This is true of almost all mainstream film scenes analyzed in this project; the woman is always the one most objectified in fellatio scenes. It appears we as a culture either still lack healthy ways to conceive what sex looks like when displayed for other people or for profit. The form of degradation in this film is the lack of self to degrade, an automaton way of Hearts being. This film is neither a resident on the degradation/abjection point of the spectrum, or the sexually positive and instead lies in a gray in between. Hearts receives no pleasure from giving fellatio, but she does receive pleasure right after in the form of oral stimulation.

Bikini Babes does not exist alone in problems. “To read a Text for significance is to read it intertextually, to disperse rather than to decipher its meaning” and so *Bikini Babes* exists in conversations with the larger body of bodies performing pornography (Ott, 2004, p. 203). This mainstream pornographic text accepts parts of onscreen misogynist mainstream pornography traditions like women being the passive recipient and object even when they are the ones performing the action while attempting to distinguish itself as stylistic different than other mainstream pornography. *Bikini Babes* has degradation because the material it recycles in attempts to be “alternative” is flawed to begin with and does not reflect a true departure from any mainstream ethos.

One of the sources of “flawed” material is exploitative gonzo pornography. *Let Me Suck You 6* is created by Elegant Angel Productions, one of the pioneers of gonzo pornography. Gonzo pornography is a genre of pornography that emphasizes tight shots of genitals, and inserts viewers directly into the scene. This style is also called “Point Of View” pornography. It is less plot based, and thus usually more sex scene oriented. This film’s premise is very simple: it is a series of scenes of fellatio. All of the scenes feature a woman talking into the camera, and involve little to no interaction from the male they are fellating. The women initiate the fellatio, and are the controllers of the sexual scene. This film has the longest fellatio scene analyzed of this project: over twenty minutes. This twenty minute scene stars Carmen Caliente, a Latina actress and the only person of color analyzed in my samples²¹. Carmen Caliente is a light skinned Latina with blond hair and is skinny as well, and her appearance suggests that even when a PoC is in a mainstream pornography they still typically fit into the Western ideal of beauty.

An appropriate place to begin an analysis of *Let Me Suck You 6* would be its title. The “let” implies that the sucking is something proffered as help or a gift. The title also indicates the directionality of the action and who is the enactor of the action. The fellatio in this film is a one way action, something performed on someone who is inactive. The partner only sits back and enjoys the sex act while their main contribution to the act is providing the physical object to be sucked on. This approach and franchise is clearly profitable, as it is the sixth iteration of the series and the whole of the DVD contains scenes that convey attitudes about active/inactive participation in fellatio that are identical to the attitudes expressed by my sample scene. *Let Me Suck You 6* ‘s existence suggests that mainstream consumers fetishize or desire fellatio in this

²¹ It is important to note that *Let Me Suck You 6* also has other WoC in their scene offerings, like actress Serena Ali.

heterosexual form so much that a DVD consisting solely of different iterations of fellatio can be a profitable enough product to make six different DVDs about the same topic. This dislodges heterosexual penetrative sex from a privileged position, which is in the United States what many define as what “intercourse” is. The existence of this franchise establishes that fellatio could be “enough” or equally if not more desirable than penetrative heterosexual sex in the minds of the mainstream pornography consumer. The DVD also establishes in all of its scenes that the pleasure of the woman in heterosexual intercourse comes from giving pleasure, or that one should not provide or it is not important to provide any pleasure for one’s partner before or after the fellatio act. This film is then essentially a subversion of patriarchal hegemonic heterosexuality norms, but using patriarchal ideas about female pleasure to achieve this subversion.

Caliente is introduced in the selected scene lying down on her back in a matching red lace bra and panty set. She has tattoos, heavy makeup, a belly button piercing, and rainbow knee high socks. There is an orange blanket and what appears to be a blue sparkly terry cloth background, and a silver and white pillow. Her name in a large blocky font appears in the upper left of the screen as electronic music plays (23:40). This music discontinues once the fellatio scene commences. The camera pans very close to her face and torso in a tight shot and she begins to rub her breasts. Caliente exposes her nipples, and displays them for the camera and thus the viewer’s gaze. The viewer and camera is by proxy her partner in this gonzo pornographic movie, and so the viewer sees what the male actor in the movie would see. Caliente performs a sort of strip tease while lying down for the viewer, showing the slowly the private parts of herself. I am continuously interested in the fact that the actresses are not characters in this film-- they are avatars of themselves or personas that they play when they engage in their work. They are

reflections of themselves, and what they as people think will be or is desirable and consumable for the viewer. They are their own gaze; a place holder for what they interpret is the desire of many. With “intercourse being ultimately the self in the act of meeting the world” one is unsure which self or who is exactly doing the stripping and if the intercourse in *Let Me Suck You 6* is the viewer meeting the world or only the world created by the actress (Dworkin, 1987, p. 27).

As Caliente strips herself, one becomes aware that this text can be very negotiable for the viewer. The viewer can project his or her desires, narratives, and subjective experiences on the silent Caliente. The movie is designed for many meaning makings with only one definite guideline: the meaning making must be sexual²². It is what porn scholar Sarah Schascheck calls “seductive seriality,” or the idea that the porn viewer is aroused by the continuous satisfaction of his/her expectations (much like the ideas presented in Ott’s article about the erotics of text viewing) and a feedback loop is created. “By way of sexual pleasure, viewers take part in the scene; their arousal can even be said to be part of the text” (Schasche, 2013, p. 46). The consequence of the film’s nonlinear plot structure is that viewer negotiated orgasms are independent of a formal structure, which makes the film a fairly anarchic experience. The viewer orgasms from the text based on their personal negotiations, physical experiences, and past memories associated with the text and not when the text portrays orgasm. This format appearing in mainstream pornography (and echoed in other mainstream pornographies analyzed) indicates to me that viewers are not merely “playing along” at home with their pornography; they are skimming and surfing the text to construct their own unique experiences and meanings. Pornography studies needs to find a way to “capture” in research this sort of anarchic and affective understanding in order the better understand pornography.

²² This does interestingly open up this movie to be accessible by queer woman in this scene.

The strip tease continues as Caliente undresses herself, the camera panning over her body head to toe (24:43). There is suddenly a very tight shot of her vagina, which is not seen in other pornography films analyzed. What does it say about Western culture that the penis is so frequently and tightly filmed, but the vagina is never filmed in such “graphic” detail? The filmed vagina is not a major part in any mainstream pornography scene in my samples and in addition during the various feminist films analyzed for this project the penis is intimately and almost lovingly shot but the vagina is never closely depicted. This shot of the vagina is a calling card of the gonzo film genre, but its relative rareness in mainstream genre as a whole is a hallmark of the implicit and institutional patriarchal biases that exist in pornography.

This vagina shot is sustained for a few moments (24:53) and then the camera switches perspective to view Caliente masturbating for a while. She is autonomous and “alone” with her own pleasure as the camera films from a distance of a few feet standing above her. Her pleasure is a show, and one is unsure if her pleasure arises from the spectacle, the sensation, or the synthesis of those two facts. Caliente is pleasuring herself for what appears to be the goal of pleasure for herself but this act is done for the viewer’s gaze. It is strange that Caliente is depicted as alone when in reality there is in a way all of her viewers contained in the camera lens. There is a deeply visually striking moment (25:27) where Caliente is pleasuring herself but her whole body is in soft focus, and the viewer is watching as if crouched behind her head. Only her vivid pink lips are in clear focus, and the activity of her masturbating is almost obscured by the distance and soft light. Her pink lips are in a strange place- the bottom right of the frame. It’s a human shot, not necessarily erotic. For a moment in the pornography film, all the viewer can see clearly is a woman’s lips.

Caliente's pleasure for the camera continues and then the shot shifts to her butt and then breasts. This silent strip show of her body parts continues for a while, and so in the interests of time let I will fast forward this project to the true fellatio segment of the scene and not Caliente's prologue solo²³ masturbatory foreplay. When the fellatio scene begins, it is immediately and almost overpoweringly dominated by what appears to be a white man's POV. His penis takes up most of the visual focus of the bottom frame. Caliente is in soft focus a few feet away from him on the couch, which is the blue background it appears she was on earlier. There are wood floors in the room and everything appears to be very clean. The only furniture in the room other than the couch is a small set of wooden dressers on each side of the couch with blue-green glassware on top. The room is a purposefully non-descript space, but establishes that it is at the very least a home and thus re-affirms the Western binary of sex belonging to the private domain of life. Caliente crawls towards the man (27:27) slowly and deliberately, with strange mixture of horror movie monster²⁴ and cat-like qualities. She crawls to him, and he does not acknowledge her or perform any sort of sexual actions. The male actor and cameraperson are in the room but Caliente might as well be alone. Caliente laughs while she comes very close to the camera, and then licks the man's circumcised penis (27:34). She asks the man and viewer "What do we have here" while gazing at the penis²⁵. She then licks and moans the penis while engaging the viewer's eyes. I posit it is the viewer Caliente means to look at because if she were looking in the man's eyes she would be gazing up, and instead she is gazing directly ahead of her and thus

²³ As much as any filmed scene can be solo.

²⁴ It is not for nothing George Bataille and many other philosophers talk about the link between seduction, horror, and voyeurism.

²⁵ A rhetorical question yes, but is there a truth here about the way the completion of forms in a text can be erotic/pleasurable? Caliente asks what it is, the viewer subconsciously says "a penis" and there is excitement associated with the promised performance of fellatio with that penis.

engaging the viewer only. She then adds “Just what I’ve been looking for!” as if in response to the question she posed a few seconds prior of “what do we have here?” (27:58).

Her expressions indicate she is experiencing pleasure or performing pleasure at fellating the penis, and she is confident at the process. This confidence is seen in the fact that she spits on the penis quickly, assuredly, and without even looking down to aim. The way Caliente approaches fellatio is unlike most fellatio scenes analyzed in this project. It is what Caliente calls sloppy, which means the fellatio involves a lot of spit. All the fellatio scenes in this project contained spit but the difference is that Caliente makes a point to include the act of spitting as a tactic to inspire arousal. It is spit for lubrication, but also spit for show. Caliente asks the man “do you like it sloppy,” (28:32) but one must wonder: What is the alternative to sloppy? Could there be neat fellatio, or restrained fellatio in pornography, and moreover how does one qualify a scene of fellatio as “sloppy?” A cursory google search reveals page after page of pornography featuring this type of fellatio as its selling point but no definitions or cultural signifiers of what it means. The only “authoritative” source I could find was a Cosmopolitan article with advice from pornography actress Chanel Preston who defines a sloppy blowjob as “one which uses a lot of spit” and says that “there’s no rule book, so make it up as you go along” (Moore, 2015).

Sloppiness aside, this scene is almost homogenous and can be skimmed, paused and rewound and the basic meaning would stay the same. It is a simple set of actions during fellatio done ad infimum until the time of ejaculation. Thus as mentioned above the text is open to allow participation and renegotiation within its parameters by its viewers. In its sameness is a surprising amount of freedom for the viewer. Just as Barthes posits that is it possible to read when one is looking up from their book, it is possible for the viewers of this scene to interact and view the text while still looking away (Ott, 2004, p. 205). This trait of freedom is also afforded

to Caliente as well in the fact that within the parameters of fellatio, she is in control of her sexual agency. There is no man holding her head, and when she gags she is the one gagging herself. She is performing for show but the iterations and variations within the scene are hers (28:29). This does not mean her freedom within her performance isn't at times eerie or perhaps exploitative in essence since she is after all performing not for the man she is fellating but instead for the consumers of this movie. She laughs constantly at no impetus while fellating and says she wants to "choke herself" on the man's "cock" (29:45). There is nothing inherently wrong with doing either of those things during fellatio but the possibility that she is doing these things as a performance for the male gaze is a strong one. In this film, Caliente sells to the audience the fantasy of a woman who is joyful at the prospect of servicing a man and wants to choke and suffer at how large he is. It's not degrading by itself, but it is degrading in conversation with the whole pantheon of misogynistic behaviors and practices towards women that exist within both pornography and the larger Western media. These actions may not be authentic behavior to Caliente²⁶, and so one wonders who it is supposed to be authentic to. A sexual fantasy the producers and Caliente think many men have? Moreover, the fact that this fantasy sold features her partner not touching her is potentially problematic. I am loathe to say that de facto a sexual encounter where one partner experiences no sexual stimulation is inherently degrading because of the existence of valid sexual identities or descriptors like "stone butch"²⁷ and "submissive," who do not gain sexual satisfaction through traditional sexual touch. However I am firm in the fact that the *ignoring* of Caliente and the lack of dialogue with Caliente treats her as not a valid

²⁶ In a perfect world, Caliente would be performing mimicry a la Luce Irigray but I don't think that with this fellatio performance was intended by her to bring down the patriarchy. It is more likely she is pandering to misogynistic ideas/directions. Once again: it is totally okay for one to want to gag on a penis during sex. There is nothing inherently wrong with that. It is when this action is placed within a performed spectrum of texts that are infamous for perpetuating the dominance of straight white men that the notion becomes a little bit suspect.

²⁷ A masculine lesbian who only wants to pleasure a partner and not be touched sexually or pleased.

human being and is very degrading. There was no depiction or indication that is what Caliente wanted, and so this aspect of the film is very objectifying and abjectifying.

The ignored Caliente begins to pleasure the man's testicles (29:51). Testicle play has a high occurrence in the scene and is overall part of what I call the "penis worship" that takes place within the text. This penis worship is interesting to me because the man also expresses no enjoyment of it and is instead stoic. Caliente asks the man if "you" like it "when I use a lot of spit?" The man doesn't answer and so the question is most likely intended for the viewer. Caliente seems unfazed by her silent partner, and puts his penis in her breasts and starts rubbing them together while giggling (33:50). She then rubs the penis with her breasts, creating a unique action not seen in other pornographies analyzed. The transformation of the breast as *giving* physical pleasure instead of being a passive source for or of pleasure is a new and crucial concept in the question of Caliente's sexual autonomy. She is an active pleasure giving source and gives pleasure because of her body with her body. Caliente then smacks the penis against her breasts almost like a flagellant, and goes back to performing fellatio (34:56). Caliente asks the camera "do you like all the slurping noises?" and once again the man does not reply (37:13). Caliente then later indicates that fellatio is exciting for her as she says "Oh, so good" and that she "loves me some balls." The naming of the genitals is also unlike most pornography analyzed in this project, as mentioned above in the analysis of *Bikini Babes*. Genitals in this film are called by their (sometimes crude but not euphemistic) names, which is perhaps caused by the close shots of genitals in the film or the attempts to create a direct link between viewer and Caliente. It is also possible that it is the film's close and consistent gaze of the camera on the penis that makes it so possible to name the genital since the penis is right at the visual focal point of the frame and any attempts to euphemize seem futile. I think it is important to mention that despite

the fact the vagina is clearly shown, it is never named or mentioned-- thus representing a lack of concern for female desire/female experiences.

Caliente's ethnicity or otherness is only signified once in this scene in an awkward and fetishizing way. Caliente says "muy bien" (39:38) seemingly out of the blue, despite the fact that she says the phrase's English equivalent "very good" frequently throughout the scene. It is clearly a tokenizing attempt to establish her "otherness," and to play into the hypersexualized "spicy" Latina stereotype that perpetuates media. It is of course possible that the utterance is authentic to her self but I feel it is more likely that it is said in a token attempt at eroticizing the "other." Her Spanish speaking ability is never demonstrated again. After her one Spanish line, Caliente rubs the man's penis on her nipples (40:06) and the camera goes even closer to her face. The viewer is now claustrophobically close to Caliente's face and it is a bit surreal since if the viewer were to be self-insertional, it is not even physically possible to be in that position close to Caliente's face. The shot is a fusion of extreme voyeurism and fantasy.

Continuing the film's trend of problematic racial dialogue, Caliente tells the man "You know what I wanna do? I wanna twerk on your dick." (40:47) Twerking is a black culture based and practiced dance move. By Caliente co-copting this dance, she is appropriating black culture. She continues "I just want to shake my fat ass on that cock." She then proceeds to "twerk" on his penis (41:11) and after finishing the dance gets on her knees and resumes sucking his penis. After the seemingly random statement, Caliente then reveals her new desire: she wants to "drain that cock of all that cum!" (44:25) Caliente is moaning slightly as she tells the man she wishes for him to cum all over her. The man gets up from his sitting position (45:05) as Carmen continues to suck on his penis. She urgently says to the standing man, "Yeah, I want your cum all over my fucking face" and keeps repeating variations of this (45:12). The man then silently

ejaculates on her face as she laughs. Despite the man already having ejaculated, she continues to rub and suck his penis offering by way of explanation that she'll "milk your cock." This narration (which doesn't have the verb tense or pronouns typically used in this situation) indicates that Caliente is telling the viewer that she will "milk their cock" and that she is "in" on the implicit audience in the scene. She is telling the viewers what she would do or can do in response to their own navigations of the text and acknowledging their insertions of herself into their fantasies. She stops and the camera pans to only her, leaving out the man. Caliente addresses the camera and says, "It was a pleasure to drain your cock today." The scene fades to black (46:26).

I posit that *Let Me* walks a finer line between degradation and non-degrading sexuality than other film analyzed. It lives in "a universe of borders, seesaws, fragile and mingled identities" where Caliente puts a or her self on display and interacts through the screen with her viewers (Kristeva, 1982, p. 135). The film could be a narrative about Caliente's agency of self and her disrobing or re-clothing of identities in efforts to sell a media product and provide a show for payment. This sort of interaction and film could be exactly what someone wants, sexually, but its void of relations and capitalizing on identity also could be exactly what someone identifies as problematic with pornography. There is no violence against Caliente in this film, but there is also no love or emotions shown towards her. The film is as real as you let Caliente be when you navigate the text.

Second Chances differs from films like *Bikini Babes* or *Let Me Suck You* because it is a film that explicitly tries to create a specific romantic reality instead of opening itself up to viewer negotiated realities—much like the feminist films or *Aftermath*. *Second Chances* does not feature any PoC, creating a white romantic reality that precludes PoC from romance. I strongly

believe that the lack of PoC in any of my pornography indicates a troubling aspect of the production and viewer consumption of the pornography. This lack of representation sends the message that pornography films are *for* white people because they are stories about white people engaging in sexual activities and participate in stories about white people. The PoC actor or character exists only as a highlight to the white character, as seen in Caliente's tokenizing of herself and her existence as something only to service a white penis that does not interact with her. Any attempts to find PoC in pornography films outside my samples were resulted in "race play" films or films that used a performer's race as a plot or selling point in scenes. It is degrading to treat race in terms of exceptionalism, and it is degrading to PoC to make an entire film without casting anyone other than white people. We as a culture simply do not have big name PoC performers. It is not unreasonable to posit that the reason why few to no PoC appeared in any of the analyzed films is that we as a culture still lack healthy ways to talk about non-white sexuality and expressions of that sexuality and thus must ghettoize any performer who is PoC. Jenna Jameson is a porn performer, not a white porn performer but any porn performers who are PoC invariably have their ethnicity or race always tagging along after them in descriptions.

As mentioned above, *Second Chances* is a "romance" film, meaning that there is more emphasis on emotions and relationship as opposed to the sexual scenes.²⁸ This scene begins when Madison, the main female character, realizes she is deeply in love with Dean, her boss, best friend, and longtime admirer. Madison arrives at his house in the scene selected for analysis to "consummate" this love she realized she had for him. Dean and Madison had previously in the film had sexual relations but they ended with Madison either changing her mind (which Dean

²⁸ However, one could just watch only the sex scenes if they wanted via the DVD scene selection.

respected) or Dean saying Madison was drunk and unable to consent. Dean at the beginning of the scene repeatedly asks Madison if she is sure she wants to have sex with him, which she enthusiastically confirms to Dean's obvious relief. A main point in all the sexual scenes of this movie is consent and consent's importance in sexual activity, making this film very different in tone from all the other mainstream films and instead more similar to the feminist films analyzed in this project.

Madison is blonde, has nipple piercings, and is able bodied and conventionally attractive. She is wearing in this scene a lacy white crop top and cut off shorts. Dean is also able bodied and conventionally attractive, with a sleeve of tattoos and ring gauges of a medium size in his ears. He has closely cropped brown hair, and is wearing a black muscle t-shirt and jeans. The two are in Dean's home, a clean spacious well-lit house. (Dean is a bartender, but has a definitely upper class home. The bar must pay well.) Dramatic piano music is playing. Dean pushes Madison against a wall and plays with her nipples as they make out. Madison then unzips his pant fly²⁹, indicating she wishes to perform fellatio (1:53:48) and gets on her knees. Deans holds her hair and head as she kneels in what appears to be an attempt on his part to help her balance as she lowers herself down, and he lets go as soon as she is sturdily on the ground. Once in a sturdy position, Madison places Dean's penis in her mouth (1:53:52). The viewer is watching all of this from the side, a few feet away from the couple. Dean's lower body is to the viewer's right, and Madison is close to the wall on the viewer's left. Both characters have equal screen time and visual emphasis on their bodies, with the camera often switching to show full body shots of one character or full body wide shots of the couple. This emphasis is unlike the exclusive male gaze I have encountered in other mainstream films, and also acknowledges and emphasizes Dean's

²⁹ Dean has a trimmed landing strip of pubic hair.

experiences instead of reducing him to faceless genitalia. Madison does not receive physical pleasure or any stimulation of her genitals from the act of fellatio and moreover does not “act” or perform approximations of arousal during the scene. It is understood that she is performing the fellatio because she wants to do this physically intimate act. The scene’s focus isn’t penis worship, hyper-real sex noises or implausible sexual situations; the scene focuses on mutual connection, a goal that is seen in Jacky St. James’ other works.

As Madison places his penis in her mouth for the first time, Dean loudly proclaims “Oh shit!” in surprise (1:53:56). Madison then gazes up at Dean for a few seconds before vigorously deep throating him. The most common shot in the scene is the viewer watching the performers watch each other because the two gaze at each other and not the camera for the whole scene. The viewer’s gaze is never acknowledged by the characters, unlike in *Let Me Suck You 6*. Dean perpetually moans “fuck” throughout the scene and other expletives, but Madison is totally silent throughout the whole scene. Despite all the sexual agency Madison displays previously in the film, she is silent and conveys her emotions through physical actions or signifiers in this scene. The camera shifts from depicting Madison’s head and Dean’s crotch to solely Dean’s face. He grips his shirt in excitement, while gazing down at Madison (1:54:04). He whips off his shirt and is now fully naked. The camera then watches Dean’s face as he experiences pleasure from the unseen fellatio (1:54:13). Dean’s emotive cries of pleasure are made while looking into Madison’s eyes, showing to the viewer their emotional connection. The camera follows Dean’s gaze down to Madison, and the viewer is then watching Madison as if they were standing behind Dean. It is clear Madison is gazing up at Dean, and she is in soft focus. A gold necklace chain that drapes down to her cleavage is the most visible thing about or on her body. Dean cups Madison’s face (1:54:19) and she rises to kiss him. This break in the fellatio for explicitly

romantic activity establishes that fellatio does not need to draw its eroticism from notable power dynamic disparities and can instead exist as an act of love in pornography. Madison returns to fellate him after the kiss (1:54:24) and Dean rests a hand on her butt cheek. The camera shifts to only show Madison and her gaze on Dean is unbroken as his moans intensify. He begins to thrust his hips and rock on his heels as he cups her face (1:54:55). He stops cupping her face when she deep throats him to allow her more access. Madison is free to touch or not be touched as much as she likes, which is an important contrast from the void of contact in *Let Me Suck You* and other films analyzed.

The camera pans up to Dean from an upwards angle, again showing his body and his responses to the fellatio (1:55:06). Dean's pleasure is clearly shown, unlike the male characters of mainstream pornography and to some extent feminist pornography since the camera traditionally stays on the female fellator. This focus on both characters allow them to be sexual wholes. A main problem in pornography is that the male gaze in many mainstream pornographic movies can only allow characters to be silent "things in the world" and not allow for full depiction of each character's sexual experiences. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 164). "Personal existence is the taking up and manifestation of being in a given situation" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 166). Dean and Madison are manifestations of being, but instead of being their own beings they are characters played and in a way they take up the personal selves of the actors.

The camera then pans out to a wide shot of the two, and Dean whispers "Let me see your mouth," which is a vocal avowal of the connection between Madison's desirability as body and her being inside her body. Madison rises to kiss him. As the two kiss, Dean circles around Madison to stand pressed against the wall (1:55:37). This is an inverse of the position the two began in, and indicates the fluidity of their power dynamics. Dean is now the one against the

wall, a visual call back to how they began the scene with Madison pressed against a wall and receiving pleasure from nipple stimulation. Dean holds Madison's hand as she fellates him (1:55:40) and then whispers for her to "stand up." He then tells her he wants to "take those fucking pants off." She stands up and he disrobes. Madison is still pleasuring him with her hand, and then stops as Dean begins to perform cunnilingus. Fellatio is a stop on their sexual journey, and part of a reciprocal process.

This mainstream film is clearly created with feminist ethos and yet is not described or marketed as such, but the film was absolutely one of the most "feminist" films in the samples in terms of actions in its sexual scenes. Texts like this pornography exist in an ocean of ambiguous cultural messages and negotiations of reality that is difficult to parse through while looking through a single lens that searches for a single defining ideology. For example, *Second Chances* was a mainstream film with mainstream actors, a large budget, and with awards from the AVN but it also was one of the two movies in the project sample size that had no overt instances of degradation during the fellatio scene. When analyzing these films, I am always struck by the complex and varied narratives that arise out of our media texts. Media texts present a road map to cultural values and beliefs and often delineate normality and what is possible in a cultural landscape. Most importantly, texts can envision new ways of being and influence culture to modify itself. This can be done via texts that function as a mirror to culture and through texts creative re-imagining and re-assembling of already existing cultural facts and so media texts or any cultural text could synthesize cultural facts to present them in new or illuminated ways that inspire action. I firmly believe that *Second Chances* is one of these texts, and also that it is a perfect example of the way that labels such as "mainstream" or "feminist" can be too rigid and evoke a false binary: a film could be accurately called either of those genres, but since there are

so many ideologies dwelling inside this single text it is does not seem appropriate to call it a “mainstream” or “feminist” film.

B. Feminist Films

The *Sexual Liberation of Anna Lee*, also directed by *Second Chances* director Jacky St. James, has at its the core the question of how one integrates their mind and body with their sexuality. The film follows Anna Lee, a young woman whose conservative upbringing left her with trauma concerning her own sexuality, enters an unconventional therapy program that consists of her living in an isolated house while completing tasks that push her to both embrace her sexuality and embody it. During this therapy, she meets an unfriendly young man named Emmett. Emmett checked into the house due to his inability to have sexual relations with anyone he knows, and instead prefers to pay for violent BDSM inspired sex with masked prostitutes³⁰. The two are eventually partnered together since at the root of their sexual dysfunctions is a fear of intimacy, and the two grow close until Emmett abruptly leaves the program when his intimacy related fears proving too challenging for him to overcome. Anna is devastated because she thought Emmett was the key to her sexual liberation, but comes to realize that she alone is the source of her sexual autonomy and only she can give herself to have “liberation” from her sexual anxiety. This is culminated in an orgy-like BDSM scene with Anna having sex with all of her therapists and therapist assistants, and “freeing” herself from being afraid of being a sexual being. Anna leaves her therapy house cured and asks her therapists to send Emmett her video diaries, in

³⁰ I found this decision to have Emmett pay for prostitutes because they could be nameless and faceless, thus generic and interchangeable very troubling and problematic since it suggests that sex workers are interchangeable and not someone who must or can be “known.” This is point is especially interesting because this film purportedly is a feminist film and feminism has a fraught relationship with sex workers. It is my understanding that the sex positive perspective of feminism also advocates for the safety and career validity of sex workers and so this treatment of sex workers is confusing and inconsistent with feminist porn ideology.

which she confesses her deep feelings for him. Emmett watches the tapes, and comes to terms with his deep feelings of Anna. She appears at his house and they have sex, and the film ends with Emmett describing to Anna what a sexually confident person she is.

The film sends a message that sexual feelings cannot be told to happen and instead must come from a confident and secure within. The message of the text is clear: embrace all of the “mosaic of emotional states, of pleasures and pains concealed within itself, mutually incomprehensible and explicable only in terms of the body system” that exist inside yourself in order to reach sexual liberation (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 154). This complex system inside the self has the opportunity to go haywire, as in the case of Anna Lee’s. Her unveiling of her sexual self serves as both the plot premise of the film and a demonstration illustrating how feminist pornography talks about or shows the site of the female body as a sexual/unsexual self³¹ in contrast the mainstream pornography. The scene selection for this project’s analysis is the scene of Anna and Emmett showing their ability for sexual intimacy as signified by a passionate fellatio scene. This film places a valuation of intimacy and emotion in this film over overt “sexiness” or “eroticism.” *The Sexual Liberation* distinctly states to its viewers that it can be sexually “better” or more pleasurable to have intercourse with a person one wants to be intimate and open with because it allows access to one’s true sexual self. At one point in the film, a therapist asks Emmett: “But haven’t you wondered what it would be like to have sex with someone you had a connection with?” Emmett shrugs this off immediately, and says that it would be too complicated and “messy” to do that, and that intimacy ruins the fun.

³¹ An observation of Merleau-Ponty’s comes to mind in the case of Anna Lee. In his book the *Phenomenology of Perception*, he notes about a woman forcibly deprived of her boyfriend who loses the ability to speak: “To have lost one’s voice is to not keep silence; one keeps silence only when one can speak” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 161). Likewise, Anna Lee’s problem of physically acting upon her sexual thoughts and desires is not because she is “keeping silent when she can speak,” but instead it is due to her body’s refusal of those desires.

I find it problematic that in this film it is the female lead who is physically frigid despite a supposed sexual mind and it is the male lead who is sexually promiscuous and lacks an equally expansive heart to match his expansive sexual appetite. This binary attitude strays closely to the harmful narrative that “She {a woman} counts when the man, through sex, brings her to life” (Dworkin, 1987, p. 142). These arc-types are tired and represent stereotypes about women’s sexuality that feminist pornographers allege that they dispel. If feminist pornography is supposed to create the expansion of gender roles, then why use these tropes³²? In addition, this film features no PoC, no non-cisgender persons, no persons of disability, or any people who do not match up to the conventionally Western beauty ideals.

The fellatio scene begins at 1:44:30, with Emmett prone on his back handcuffed to a bed. He has underwear and a shirt on. His legs are free and it appears he is not bound very tightly since the handcuffs are loose around his wrists. Anna is topless but has blue bikini bottom style underwear on. She is on top of him and is resting on her hands and knees. He instructs Anna to “take these things off of me,” which Anna immediately does. Emmett’s penis is revealed to be circumcised and has trimmed pubic hair. Despite being handcuffed, Emmett is the one giving the orders in the sexual situations and has asked to be placed in the handcuffs in the first place. I posit that this text despite its somewhat positive representations of female sexuality, sex positive dialogue, and mutual respect centered ideas of sexual relationships still fails to attribute full agency and provide new sexual scripts and new pornographic plot possibilities to Anna. Regardless of her physically dominant positioning and actions in the selected fellatio scene, Anna is still ordered around by a dominant male and thus does not hold the fully liberated

³² While Anna and Emmett’s actions in the scene do represent valid forms of existence, they also happen to belong to the one of most common form of sexual narratives that exist and thus it seems strange that with all of the infinite narratives that feminist pornography has to pick from, Jacky St. James still decided to use the rhetorical strategy of the frigid woman and the emotionally unavailable man and then the narrative of a confident woman who wants to be bossed around in bed.

agency in the scene she is positioned visually as having. Despite the director's attempts to show Anna as sexually dominant and confident in her final sex scene, the actual scripting and action reveals a slightly different, more problematic story.

The handcuffs on Emmett reflect a narrative inversion and an inversion of traditional gender roles because prior to the selected scene Emmett was unable to have sex without the woman bound up, waiting for him. Emmett was solely the enactor; he could afford women no agency in order to keep his sense of self intact. When Anna consensually places handcuffs on him, it represents a diversified way of sex for him and a consensual surrender of control. This narrative is one made more compelling by the fact that it is a male character during sex who desires this sort of (non)control. The fact Anna is able to have sex with her love interest is a culmination of her journey to accept her sexuality throughout this pornography text and in addition the handcuffs on Emmett visually indicate that Anna is able to take lead during sexual activities and not just merely be participant in sexual intercourse.

This scene of a prone Emmett and dominant Anna pans out to show a side perspective of the couple, with the camera at eye level to the bed. This angle shows a wider shot of Emmett's expansive apartment, with the center focus being these two white cisgender conventionally attractive people. The room is very clean, and decorated in a light blue-grey color scheme. The lighting is cool, and there are uncluttered shelves on the wall that hold only one or two statuettes. There is also a non-functional fireplace. I find that the tasteful, trendy, clean sparse space implies that Emmett is upper middle class or wealthy which demarcates the boundaries between which economic audiences would find resonance with in this film. This film is implicitly meant for those who can afford it and thus again it limits those who can identify and derive erotic fantasy

from it to those who can see themselves in that apartment without consciously thinking about it as a radical removal of their social position and space.

At 1:46:39, Anna is crouched over the lower half of Emmett and takes his penis and puts it in her mouth, all while maintaining eye contact. It is up to her to be the enactor of any sexual proceedings. Anna is watching him watch her be sexual and derives sexual pleasure from this. Emmett in turn is watching her watch him as he is pleased, a sort of self-conscious spectacle and show for Anna and the viewer. Emmett for this moment is the object and voyeur to his own sexual moment, serving as a metonymic stand in for the viewer. Emmett may have directed her to take off his clothes, but for now this is the start and end of his power as Anna is determining the sexual script of the scene. At 1:46:48, the camera zooms to show only Anna's face, shoulders, and Emmett's penis. This close up affords better visibility into the new signs and signifiers of styling of Anna as a sexual character. As opposed to her dewy, "natural" makeup and prim ponytails throughout the film, Anna now has smoky dark eyeshadow and tousled long hair. Anna's make up change represents a larger shift in the viewer's schema of the character. The erotic narrative of the film is no longer about repression; it's about a celebration of female sexuality. Anna maintains steady eye contact with Emmett as a simple silver ball necklace swings about her neck; a marker of femininity. The shot of Anna so close over the disembodied penis of Emmett's creates instances of subversive gender performance. For example it is the clearly feminine and smaller Anna who is in control of Emmett and is manipulating his penis, thus creating the only physical sexual pleasure in the scene. Emmett exists in the scene at this point as only a sex object for Anna to explore, but that exploring necessitates that she is the partner who must deal with the onus of sexual labor. However, it is unclear if Anna's sexual or emotional pleasure in this sex scene derives from Emmett or from her own transformation and so

it is unclear if Anna has sole agency over her pleasure or if her pleasure exists in a realm that is implicitly controlled by her male partner.

After this close up is established, Anna kisses the shaft of the penis as she gazes into Emmett's eyes, clearly gauging and engaging his reaction (1:46:53). Anna leisurely sucks on Emmett's penis in long, languid motions, and then breaks eye contact with Emmett to look at his penis. Anna blows on the penis head while gazing at it for a second, and then continues to blow air while she lifts her gaze to Emmett's eyes. She then places the penis in her mouth again, leaning forward her body weight to encompass the first third of the penis into her mouth. At 1:47:15, the frame suddenly switches to Emmett gazing at Anna. Emmett's face is relatively composed except for his active, roving eyes. He is raptly attentive to scene going on below him and of him, and seems aroused by Anna controlling the proceedings. He raises his head while still lying down to get a better look, and becomes even more intrigued by the proceedings. The looking continues until 1:47:21, in which the camera switches to Anna again. Emmett's legs stir beneath Anna, showing movement and engagement unlike many male participants in mainstream fellatio. Emmett in this scene is affectively connected to both Anna and his body. Emmett is not just a witness to the phenomena of his body under a camera's gaze; he is also experiencing it directly within the context of romantic ties. The fellatio *means* something to his character.

Suddenly, Anna stops licking Emmett's penis and crawls on top of his chest, clearly having decided she was done fellating him despite Emmett's obvious interest. The two make out with Emmett still restrained, and then at 1:48:30 Anna stimulates his testicles and runs her lips up and down the base of his penis. At 1:50:02, Emmett says while Anna is fellating him: "Oh, the things *I'm* going to *do to you* when I get out of these cuffs." Emmett is attempting to re-establish control. His dialogue implies that *he* is the one doing things in the future, and that there

will be a time where Anna will no longer be in control. It also suggests that the film's ideology views sex as a performative act, one where things are done *to* and not with. This message continues as he (1:50:13) directs Anna to "put that {his penis} as far down as you can, I want to see it." This is referring to Emmett's desiring to see Anna deep throat him but also his desire to see himself as both site of sexual pleasure, receptacle of pleasure, and Anna giving him pleasure³³. Anna immediately obeys. This silent agreement to her partner does not de facto does not indicate an unequal power balances, but could serve as a warning sign to the possibility. In this moment, Anna's decisions over the sexual narrative of the scene shift, and it is the handcuffed Emmett who is in control. She deep throats Emmett as he watches her, with the camera angle then switching to solely watch Emmett's watching while Anna's gags are heard in the background. Anna is visibly disheveled as opposed to the composed Emmett. This continues until 1:51:16, in which the camera angle switches to allow for a "standing above and behind" the couple perspective, which reveals that Anna is wearing white "stripper heels." These heels can be viewed as rebellious empowered mimicry, sex work wear due to their signification of such in Western cultural narratives, shackles of misogyny, or perhaps a mixture of all those things. Fashion is a complex form of code shifts, code breaking, and cultural signifiers showing incredibly intricate in-group knowledge of ideology and high heels are no different. I find it highly fascinating that in this scene, Anna is totally naked... down to her white, patent leather high heel shoes. Everything has symbolic resonance in this character's outfit, from white meaning virginal or sacred to "stripper" high heels meaning low class or stigmatized as solely for

³³ By contrast, Anna never asks for any sort of specific sexual act in this scene.

sex workers.³⁴ The white high heels help show the plot finale's fusing of these two aspects of Anna's character: the chaste Anna and the sexually liberated Anna.

Anna begins to suck faster and more intensely, all while watching Emmett. He (1:51: 26) instructs her to "keep sucking it." Suddenly, Emmett wraps his leg around Anna's neck as she is sucking on his penis, causing her to make gagging noises (1:51:37). He asks in a slightly aggressive tone of voice: "Are you going to let me go?" This potentially very dangerous position disturbs me, and concerns me that it is the culmination of the fellatio scene. Emmett's casual enacting of it along with his nonchalance at the danger or discomfort Anna could be in brings into questions the goal of this feminist pornography. Despite Emmett being handcuffed, he is able to instantly reassert his physical strength over Anna. His ability to do this and nonchalance in suddenly doing so this seems to be a clear example of him degrading Anna. Anna nods in response to the above stated question while she still is gagging with his penis in her mouth. He then releases her. The two passionately make out, and the fellatio scene ends. The clear ease in which the narrative of the fellatio scene changes to show that Anna has no true control over the situation seriously undermines the above stated goals of feminist pornography. Degradation is "both a state and a process- the condition/ position of that which deemed loathsome and the process by which that appraisal was made" (Hui Kyong Chun, 2011, p. 51) This concept of degradation of both a wave and a particle, a point in process and the process itself, was elucidated by abjection and race scholar Karen Shimakawa and posits that degradation is crucial to talk about and factor in because it is one of the ways how we make meanings out of ourselves and others--- even if we are making meaning standing at the outskirts of being. Anna and Emmett make their meaning out of the relationship through a negotiation over who owns the

³⁴ Not to suggest it's acceptable to stigmatize sex workers.

power and who is submissive in the relationship; degradation is a facet in their relationship's state of being.

Following closely on that question of sexual degradation and meaning making is the pornographic film *Lovehard*. *Lovehard* (2014) does not contain fellatio on camera, but I find it would be remiss not to analyze it since it is entirely about degradation and humiliation and if these acts can be included in a healthy and feminist relationship. The scene analyzed in this project is an interview of Nio (a self-identified feminist woman who is interested in Erotic Humiliation) and a demonstration of what that entails.

Erotic humiliation is the (consensual) sexual practice of creating a state of abjection in a sexual partner, in order to create arousal in one or both partners. This humiliation can be verbal, physical, or psychological, and can be part of a larger Bondage/Dominance/Sadomasochism activity or a sexual role-play. Erotic humiliation does not necessarily mean the humiliation is sexual- it can be wiping someone's boots or getting one's head flushed in a toilet. Erotic humiliation can also be constructed as humiliation in front of an audience, both physical and digital. It is important to note that erotic humiliation cannot de facto be classified as partner abuse because it is humiliation that has been negotiated and elaborated on between two people engaging in the activity prior to the event, and that victim of the humiliation has a safe word that will immediately end the erotic humiliation. The goal of this sexual practice is two-fold: "sub space" for the person being humiliated, and "dom space" for the dominator. (Sub & Dom space refers to an orgasmic/trance like state that is the goal of BDSM. It can be conceptualized as a transcendence of self, or an epiphany regarding one's self-definition.) It is also said that erotic humiliation is used as a cathartic tool, or a sort of negotiation of one's past trauma in a sexual contextualized format. Tristan Taormino, in her famous Village Voice article about erotic

humiliation, describes a public practitioner of erotic humiliation as “she has a huge ego, and she wanted to see what it would be like to strip that ego away, to chip away at the layers and uncover what was underneath. She needed to let her beast out the being inside her that is driven only by instinct and desire, with no manners, pretensions, or facades. The only way for her to tap into that part of her was to be treated as if she were less than a human being useless, worthless” (Taormino, *Tomatos Can Be Torture* , 2006). This idea echoes many concepts found in *Lovehard*- namely the linkage of degradation to the divine or the transcendental³⁵.

Nio’s section in this erotic documentary first begins with a quote imposed on a neutral scene of goldfish in a tank: “Do what terrifies you.” This quote, familiar to many millennials due to its conceptual prominence in Western cultural texts like *Fight Club* or self-help memoirs in the style of *Wild or Eat, Pray, Love*, signifies the dichotomy at the heart of Nio’s fetish: she feels equal hate and desire for the testing of her limits through erotic humiliation. Nio is a white female who appears to be able bodied, and shares with her cast mates of *Lovehard* one important thing: they are all white. There is not a single PoC or disabled person in this film about queering sexual practices and re-thinking sexualities. This overwhelming whiteness of feminist porn I have sampled contributes to my notion that feminist porn texts like *Lovehard* claims to be for all, but semiotically positions itself as only for some: white feminists³⁶.

³⁵ Paging early Christian ascetics and medieval nuns.

³⁶ White feminism is feminism without inclusion of PoC or issues that predominantly play into race. As feminist media scholar Cate Young explains: “White feminism’ does not mean every white woman, everywhere, who happens to identify as feminist. It also doesn’t mean that every ‘white feminist’ identifies as white. I see ‘white feminism’ as a specific set of single-issue, non-intersectional, superficial feminist practices. It is the feminism we understand as mainstream; the feminism obsessed with body hair, and high heels and makeup, and changing your married name. It is the feminism you probably first learned. ‘White feminism’ is the feminism that doesn’t understand western privilege, or cultural context. It is the feminism that doesn’t consider race as a factor in the struggle for equality” (Young, 2014).

At 5:29, Nio appears. She has purple, curly hair and glasses and introduces herself with a seemingly in situ observation: “I’m actually really aroused by the idea of misogyny because it really upsets me... I’m a hardcore feminist.” She then embarrassedly smiles as the scene shifts to a demonstration of Nio’s fetish. Nio has her hair blown out and in many ways styled like Anna in the final sex scene of *Anna Lee*. Nio’s face is totally covered in a fantastical face paint of many colors and sparkles, with exaggerated makeup around her eyes and eyebrows. An unseen man is holding her by the hair, and Nio is openly crying. Nio is undergoing something incredibly intimate in front of the camera. The anonymous man’s behaviors are not as disturbing to me as Emmett’s in *The Sexual Liberation of Anna Lee* because the premise and narrative of Nio’s “sex scene” was that the dominator figure was always in charge, unlike the final scene of *Anna Lee* being allegedly about Anna Lee’s newfound sexual dominance and confidence. Her anonymous male partner’s engagement seems at consistent with mainstream pornography because he seems to barely if at all have any physical pleasure at his actions and operates as a sort of monolith of intention. It is also important to note that Nio isn’t a character or an actress that is projecting an alter ego or different character. She’s an authentic self on screen performing her form of sexual play and negotiations of sexual meaning for viewers and by doing so she is creating a pornographic text. She is explaining her sexual life, but she is only explaining *her* sexual life and not what she thinks is erotic to others. This makes *Lovehard* have a narrative and approach to audience that is unlike other pornography movies in this project. *Lovehard* is a testimony first, and a media text second. I also was fortunate enough to interview Nio for this Honors Project, and am thankful I am able to include her own thoughts about her performance.

At 5:40, Nio laughs in pleasure as the anonymous man roughly kisses her. He grabs her neck and nipples and she screams in pain. The man whispers “Shut up and sit still..... Stand up

straight” and Nio looks angrily on away from the camera, a clear portrait of someone who feels disdain and embarrassment at her surroundings and immediate experiences. However, this disdain and discomfort is experienced by Nio as pleasure. As Nio explained to me: “I am aroused by the idea of being objectified, perhaps of someone being so overwhelmed by lust for me that they no longer perceive my humanity and only see something to consume. I believe there is an animalistic aspect to this and that the thin, tenuous veneer of civilization is only relatively recent.” (Ngaio, 2015).

Nio’s erotic pleasure is focused on her and her alone. The man dominating her could be any person; he serves a cipher for Nio’s own desires for domination. This establishes Nio has the ultimate agency over her body since she alone has the agency to give her agency (temporarily) away. The viewer is also engaged in this pornographic text, as the unnamed man at 6:18 softly cajoles Nio to “show those nice people your tits, c’mon baby put your shoulders back.” Nio complies. Despite the highly sexual nature of the scene Nio’s completely naked breasts are never seen. During this forced showing, Nio is humiliated and perhaps the public nature of this humiliation is what makes this scene seem so violent, despite its consensual nature. As the man plays with Nio’s breasts (6:35) she gazes the whole time directly into the camera, making it an affective experience for the viewer and an interesting unpacking of agency. Nio watches us watch her be degraded, and she could easily look away or negate the experience but instead chooses to face the moment head on. Nio explained to me that agency is implicit in the way she “does” sex. “I believe it is common for people to eroticize that which they are afraid of, hurt or oppressed by and that sex is a force that is powerful enough to subvert power structures. To decide to ‘do’ sex in your own way, to own your body, to decide what you will do with it and how, is often an incredibly revolutionary act for people who are so often policed into behaving in

specific, acceptable ways” (Ngaio, 2015). One level Nio appears to be miserable and powerless but on a deeper level Nio is in control. In her agency-less she is the one who is the most powerful because she is not described or circumscribed by identities or positionalities. She is the one who is looking at the camera instead of the man who humiliates her, and thus she is the one who can be known.

At 7:00, the film fades into another similar scene: Nio is crouched, facing the viewers with the camera zooming close to her. She is wildly weeping. She croaks and rocks back and forth. This quick image fades out and Nio is in her warmly lit kitchen, looking composed with her hair once again curly and her face free of makeup. She gazes at the camera seriously as audio of her laughing play. The audio clip of Nio then details to the audience how she once played Phillip Glass as she waited with her head in a toilet for her BDSM partner to come to her house. At 8:10 the physical Nio then picks up the story from her audio self. She goes on to explain that “something compelled” her to stay there and go with whatever happened next and clarifies that she is still working to figure out why the position of humiliation is so “good” for her. In the documentary, she states that “ultimately what was so good was how much I hated it.” She goes on to explain to the audience that “The thing that really gets me off is being hurt, and that’s a really hard thing to articulate, because how do you tell someone that the thing you want is the thing you don’t want?” As she says this, various snippets of her emotional humiliation play. Then, images of her sexual artwork are shown as an audio of Nio says: “What I get out of it? I get sexual pleasure out of it! It often goes beyond sexual pleasure.... a kind of relief. When you’ve been beaten and yelled at, and gotten to a point – my favorite point or place to get to is when I’m crying. My body’s shaking so much I’m no longer in control, and it’s something incredibly liberating..... I think I’m a junkie for fear.” Then camera then transitions back to

Nio's "sex" scene. She is now being held up from behind by her naked breasts and screaming. The scene has now taken on a different quality to the viewer, since they are aware that Nio completely desires this and is compelled to seek this sort of sexual pain/pleasure. It is not a window into Nio's descent into degradation; it is a window into the ascent of her sexual feelings. Nio does nothing to free herself, she is instead enraptured and tormented by the man holding her up. She has no direct interaction with him or acknowledgment of his existence as a person. It is almost as if the man is the object in this scene, and not Nio.

After one or two segments about other people, the documentary film returns back to Nio at 12:26. Nio is now seated in a different room and has no glasses on. Her curly purple hair appears to be slightly damp, and she has a floral blouse on. She fidgets with her necklace (a silver charm necklace of hearts) and states that she loves "being destroyed, having someone rip apart everything that I am and humiliate me and you know.... just break apart all these things I built about myself- my morals, my beliefs about what I should be. To have someone come along and just tear that to shreds, it makes you realize that you don't need those things. For a moment, you're just free of those things and you're just body... just this sweaty, spit covered trembling creature." The camera quickly shows a hysterically crying Nio, and then fades to black. Nio shows up only once more in *Lovehard*, at 19:45 and explains to the reader about Susan Sontag's views on pornography. As Nio explains that Sontag thinks that "role of the artist is to visit the periphery of what is socially acceptable, and that we give the artist a sort of license to do so.... to sort of flirt with danger-psychological danger. To do the things that compel us or intrigue us but which we as 'good, solid' citizens don't do." As she says this, she is painting her face in a

rainbow of colors and shades of grey metal tones³⁷. Nio feels her interviews in *Lovehard* accomplished her goal of using art as a lens to tell people about the borderlands of identity. “The scene in Love Hard was about pain, catharsis, identity and also the establishment of a new relationship with someone who was capable of treating me with the kind of cruelty I wanted, while also loving and caring for me deeply” (Ngaio, 2015).

Lovehard argues that through degradation can be liberation, but I also posit that this degradation must be willingly chosen and negotiated, which is something that many disadvantaged minorities groups do not have the positional power to fully do in sexual relations. Without acknowledgment of these social limitations to sexuality, *Lovehard* presents a compelling peek inside positive degradation in pornography but still circumnavigates being inclusive of PoC or LGBTQ or disabled people. Nio shows a way to liberate oneself, to create something out of ego nothing but ultimately stops short at real world implications. (Not that she was obligated to: this pornographic text was presented as being personal narratives and a not prescriptive social analyses.) I feel that erotic humiliation is not the detrimental sort degradation and so in this scene Nio was not degraded in the conventional sense and could arguably even called liberated. I justify this assertion due to the fact that Nio was not degraded into an object because she was in control of her objectification and in fact used it to plumb the depths of her psyche in a way she viewed as liberational and sexually appealing. *Lovehard*, and my approach to textually analyzing *Lovehard*, could point to new ways of studying pornography that are audience based and performer based since this approach seems to offer larger theoretical insight from the people who are performing the pornography itself.

³⁷ Nio explained that when she decided on the makeup for the film, she “was thinking about my identity as an artist/painter and about my arousal at the idea of having my identity destroyed, a sort of ego death, as the paint became increasingly smeared by spit, tears and sweat” (Ngaio, 2015).

The final feminist film I analyzed was French film *Pulsion* (2014). This scene selected is a fellatio scene between a cisgender woman and a cisgender man, and like the other feminist films analyzed features liberation through sex as its main message. *Pulsion* markets itself as an arthouse pornography movie, and this is evidently clear in the angles shot of this scene. The camera shots are zoomed in and softly lit, with emphasis on the foreground with everything in the background typically blurred. *Pulsion* also focuses on capturing a more “authentic” feeling for the details included in each shot. Small details like the causal laying of Eva’s hand on Chris’s stomach, and the way she brushes the front of his pants clearly figuring out how to open the zipper are the main focal points of this fellatio scene. Despite its implausible plot line of a rowdy sexual therapy orgy centered rehab house, with the above mentioned details *Pulsion* creates a convincing simulacra of reality that viewers would want to live in.

This scene takes place in a bedroom that is located inside the sexual rehabilitation center where the characters have met in order to receive treatment for sexual dysfunction. The room is very elegant and clean, and represents a definite upper class clientele. After all, it is a certain economic class that can afford to take so much time out of their lives and careers for sexual therapy. There is a red velvet upholstered headboard, and purple sheets on the bed. Slow, dramatic string music is playing. Eva, the protagonist, is wearing a white bow in her hair, which is very visually striking in contrast to her long, red curly hair. She is also wearing a silver threaded belt around her hips and white shorts, and no shirt. In addition, Eva has false eyelashes and hyper feminine heavy makeup on. Chris, her love interest, is wearing blue jeans with navy blue boxer briefs underneath. His chest is hairless, and he also has a nipple piercing on his left nipple. Eva and Chris are both white, thin, able bodied individuals, and there are no people of color, physically disabled people, or in fact any bodies that deviate from the norm of young,

Western conventionally attractive individuals in this film. (There is an older gigolo in this movie but he does not have a sex scene in the film and instead is repulsed by the idea of sex.).

Before the scene progressed to fellatio there was long foreplay to the event, consisting of kissing and Eva rubbing Chris's nipples with her nails. At 59:02, the fellatio scene begins with Eva's hand slowly inches down to the crotch of Chris's blue jeans. She is crouched on her arms and knees over Chris, who is laying on his back on the bed. Eva searches without looking for Chris' belt buckle; her manicured nails a strong contrast to the "manly" blue jeans of Chris. The camera shows more of Chris's hairless chest and abdomen in the frame, revealing that he has tribal stomach tattoos. At 59:22, Eva kisses Chris's stomach, trailing down to his crotch. Chris gazes up enthralled at Eva (59: 53) and the screen is hazy, softly lit, without any camera focus on Chris. The scene is semiotically all about Eva. At 59:56, the frame fills to be solely Eva's hands undoing Chris's jeans- a powerful metonymy of their sexual actions as stand-ins for their selves. Eva's decisive and slow hands are the only things in focus during this undressing, besides a small amount of Chris's jean fabric nearest to her hands. The slowness of this scene is also what makes it stick out so clearly in contrasts to the other texts; it can be equated in tone to a scene underwater. I would make a case that *Pulsion* uses clothes as a metaphor for intimacy or unveiling of the self. Eva undresses Chris so tenderly because she is trying to restore to them the ability to feel intimacy and sexual feelings within themselves. The two are half-dressed in this scene, showing that the characters are attempting to be fully intimate and vulnerable but have not yet reached the point where they can become "naked" emotionally with one another.

At 1:00:21, Eva rubs her hands on the underwear clad penis of Chris. Eva kisses Chris's underwear (1:00:40) and one becomes very aware of the fact that Chris is not very involved in this scene at all. He lifts up his body for his pants to be taken off a few moments prior, and then

returns to be a body partially out of frame. At 1:00:56, he appears with his eyes closed, lost in the moment but clearly not engaged with Eva as an entity; only Eva as a giver of pleasure. Eva kisses his penis very lightly through the fabric, and continues to run her nails along it. The revelation of Chris's penis is surprisingly intimate (1:01:06). Eva slowly peels back and takes off the crotch of his underwear, and then places the penis positioned back out of the underwear on the newly naked skin. His testicles are not shown, and the camera records the penis's likeness in incredible detail. It is limp but dominates the whole frame causing Eva's mouth and face to recede back into the blurry background. Her cautious and tender treatment of the penis creates the impression that the penis is not "apart" from Chris as it is in many other pornographies analyzed and is instead a part of Chris. Thus, its handling is not only about sexual pleasure; it is part of intimacy and necessary to the integration to the character's bodies and emotionally wholes. At 1:01:07, Eva runs her lips along Chris's penis, and blows on it very gently. It is revealed that Chris does have what appears to be untrimmed pubic hair. She pets (1:01:32) the penis with her index finger, stroking it as it lays limp against Chris's belly. Chris's penis is the star of the frame and is integral as tool for Eva to explore her desire in a non-traumatic way, much like the way Anna used Emmett's penis in *The Sexual Liberation of Anna Lee*. Chris's penis is non-threatening, moldable and a form for Eva to tentatively step out as her sexual self with. In return, Chris is given the gift of being *there*, present in a moment that could possible restore his lost feelings. The act of fellatio in this scene is really the act of Eva exploring sexuality. She licks her fingers, licks Chris's penis, and strokes the penis slowly. These acts cause arousal but are not focused on the journey or progression of arousal; they are forays of the characters into accepting human touch. Chris is prone throughout the entire encounter and is

clearly interested in the fellatio, but is still silent and immobile³⁸. He is the seduced; Eva is the seducer.

This sort of caress and minimal fellatio (only on the head) continues throughout the scene, with Chris prone and non-vocal and eyes closed. At 1:02:53, the perspective shifts to be slightly behind Eva's left shoulder, and Chris becomes a blurred abstract entity once more. On the right vertical third of the frame there is only one thing in focus- Eva licking Chris's penis. No one is speaking in this scene. Eva begins to rub Chris's penis faster with a firmer grip (1:03:07) and then (1:03:14) the shot changes again to show a clear picture: Eva fellating Chris as seen from the angle of someone standing right behind them. Chris's face is composed and he seems to not mind what is occurring. What is remarkable is that as of yet, she has not really gazed at Chris. The penis is in this film an acceptable counterpart for the whole of the person and a distilled version or a shorthand of self for Eva to understand sexual desire. The tenderness Eva shows towards Chris's penis is not penis worship like that seen in *Let Me Suck You 6*, but instead an acknowledgement of the Chris's humanity and sexual feelings. Chris's face begins to be shown by the camera with more frequency by 1:03:59 and it appears he has an expression of pleasure. It also appears that the filmography of the scene is designed as such to give each character screen time in more or less equal ways since Eva and Chris have separately and together been focal points of the fellatio scene.

At 1:05:12, Chris takes a sharp breath of pleasure and appears to be sweating. The penis is now fully erect. After several seconds of this erection, Chris begins to ejaculate at 1:05:44. The fact that Chris doesn't ejaculate on anything or anyone other than himself is very different

³⁸ If a person acted like this in the real world, I would be seriously disturbed and question if this was a consensual sexual encounter. I am slightly disturbed as to the lack of participation of Chris, but also it is "in line" with the plot that Chris feels nothing inside.

than the other films and indicates a lack of emphasis on traditional heterosexual narratives of intercourse. In addition, the short time between full arousal and ejaculation is notable in this film. Chris's pleasure is directed towards himself in this film and not "shown" to or witnessed as show by other people or things. The ejaculation is a non-event. Eva begins to slightly smile (1:05:53) and goes into his arms. They kiss. Chris then asks (1:06:33) "You didn't come?" and Eva, smiling, gently says: "That's okay, that wasn't the point." The point (that Eva refers to) was capturing intimacy through sexual acts, and so the two reached their goal. The act of fellatio removed Eva's physical and emotional disability and Chris's emotional deadness. It was a mutually beneficial act, and they used the negotiations of power in sex and sex in power to heal themselves. For *Pulsion*, orgasm isn't the point. It's the connection that sex and thus orgasms can bring. There was no degradation in this scene, only the emotional healing of two characters.

IV. Conclusion

Genre is defined as a series of textual regularities, such as shared traits of broadly similar content and form and even ideologies (Freedman & Medway, 1995, p. 2). Genre also means a "painting that depicts scenes or events from everyday life usually realistically." Pornography has a dizzying amount of genres and can be depending on the person, place, and culture a sort of genre painting that magnifies or distorts everyday life. The fellatio scenes I analyzed contained feminist and mainstream ideologies at different times, making them a strange and exciting reproduction of a director's cultural beliefs and attitudes about the self and sexual relations. I conclude that since pornography occupies liminal space and fails to stay in one ideological position very long it would be beneficial for pornography researchers to study pornography in ways that did not restrict or view pornography to their genres but instead dealt with them as textual and intertextual mediums. For example, the fellatio scenes in the feminist pornography

analyzed in this project contained degrading acts, attitudes, or visual privileging alongside of its “liberational” messages. They also had similar plotlines and character developments mainstream films like *Second Chances* and *Aftermath*. (In fact, *Second Chances* was a mainstream film that was congruous to feminist pornography ideals!) This is not to suggest that feminist films and mainstream films are the same—the feminist films had some radical ideological differences than the mainstream pornography *Let Me Suck You 6* or *Bikini Babes are Shark Bait*. In addition, there are actresses in *Bikini Babes are Shark Bait* and other mainstream texts that are engaged in feminist pornography while also being participants in a mainstream pornography movie. There is a personnel blend between the two “disparate” genres, which causes much interaction in between the categories of mainstream and feminist pornography. These ideological genres of pornography in this project are not monolithic identifiers like those found in non-pornographic film genre categories³⁹ and instead are narrative “things” that detail at their core a story: arousal, and then release and use a continuum of visual, aural, and psychological cues to tell that story. These narrative things can often share the same content (i.e. race problems and emphasis on conventional ways to perform fellatio) and when one is overly focused on the label assigned to them it’s unproductive because an ideological bias can hamper full open reading of a text.

I also acknowledge that the films in my project are also able to be read reverse ways than I have interpreted. For example, *Let Me Suck You 6* is a film where only two things really happen and are repeated again and again almost like Andy Warhol’s 1963 movie *Kiss* or his 1964 film *Blowjob*, which is a nine minute close shot of only a man’s face as he is fellatiated. This seriality becomes open to alternative or resistive meanings depending on the ideological

³⁹ I.E. A romantic comedy film will not venture into horror, or a thriller will not have a song and dance number like a musical.

frame of the reader investigating it. *Let Me Suck You 6* depending on the ideological framework of its viewer could seem to be a productive engagement with the male gaze and power, a degradation of female bodies, or complicated free choice made by a woman in a sexual agency to partner with a person and studio that treats fellatio a degrading way. The *way* of looking or the theory behind the looking at pornography texts effects the text's meanings in significant ways. Thus I argue that trying to create genre pornography or pornography that positions itself as "better" than mainstream pornography is not productive because it doesn't deal with the fluidity of viewer thoughts, the fluidity of analysis, and the fluidity of sexual experience. In addition, searching for something "better" or even "worse" than mainstream pornography or believing there can holistically be such a thing is unproductive for scholarship because it ends in results that will mimic early pornography studies debates over the merits of pornography as a whole. Turning to feminist binaries of "degrading/not degrading" leaves so much of the crucial conversation out, and ignores larger levels of discourse like stories told about sex in pornography, who is there and who is left out, and where is space in pornography for alternative sexualities. It's a misstatement to say mainstream pornography or feminist pornography have a lot to learn from each other because they *are* each other; they are built out of the same cultural landscape.

I entered this project expecting to find a new species of pornography, one that was more kind and reflected a world I work to build in my activist work and one that reflected my morals. Instead, I found that they two genres were the same species. At first I was disappointed, but then I realized I had found the way to a future much more exciting project for myself- a quest to find new names and methods to describe the way pornography positions itself. There are encouraging and exciting starts in academia to a new way of pornography studies. A turn to

affect, and a turn towards the audience's negotiation of the innards of the text seems to be gaining prominence. Porn scholar Ingrid Ryberg posits that one can come to see pornography and importantly feminist pornography as “ an understanding of porn spectatorship as an embodied and psychic engagement shaped, but importantly also continuously reshaped, by personal histories and social contexts.....I contend that this embodied and psychic engagement is not limited to certain characters or roles, or necessarily consistent with the viewing subject's political views or sexual identity. It is neither a matter of predetermined effects, nor controlled by the viewing subject's willpower. However, different subjects' engagements in various porn scenarios are neither unrestricted by social identities or personal experiences and practices. Queer, feminist and lesbian porn, I argue, touches and shapes embodied subjectivities and therefore can potentially form part of the processes of sexual empowerment, where new worlds may become imaginable and come into reach” (Ryberg, 2015). I believe a more audience based textual analysis structural analysis that is not searching along genre definitions could accomplish a more full reading, as demonstrated by certain aspects of my project like my interviews with Nio or the way my approach noted structural components of the text's production like the appearance of feminist actresses in mainstream texts. The style of analyzing pornography as a text is very new to the field of pornography studies and thus it is lacking in ways to adequately negotiate the unique ways pornography as a text is influenced and influences its performers, its viewers, and the larger culture. An approach of performing analyses of pornography as texts would be enriched and enhanced by academics' attempts enter pornography viewers' and producers' worlds in order to understand viewer negotiations of pornography and how performer ideologies effect pornography performances thus effecting the viewer. This conclusion also importantly means that pornography studies will need to start including ethnographies and

interviews with the pornography performers of films being textually analyzed in order so they can give their own input into the pornography they appear in and the genres they experience. This is a realm that has traditionally been left out of the field of pornography studies and the bulk of media studies scholarship. I think instead of thinking along genre boundary lines, it could be more productive to have pornography performer perspectives of the meaning making in pornographic texts in textual analyses because textual analysis on its own tends to follow lines of paranoid inquiry or creates situations where it is too easy to fall into traps of judging one pornography text or even genre against the other in terms of merit. As demonstrated above, paranoid inquiry or explorations of ideological genres in pornography are not productive because they do not reflect the real affective work of pleasure nor the way that ideological content and interpretations can change scene to scene and depending on the person who is conducting the textual analysis of them. Textual analysis in pornography needs to blossom up and become a part of a larger method that is more variegated; something that includes other strands of conversation as it and after it analyzes the text itself. A fusion of audience, structural and textual analysis and affective study is one of the ways this project points to for how media scholars could find a new way to analyze pornography texts.

While I was working on this project, I found myself in Tulum, Mexico. I was completely isolated from any contact to the United States and lived in a tent on the beach at a hostel campsite with my partner and a few other friends. I felt like it would be impossible to get any work done because my project felt so foreign and alien to the way of being in Tulum, and felt so removed from anyone's life in the poverty stricken parts of Mexico. Then I read a book at the hostel library. *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo is a 2013 novel about coming of age in a new country that doesn't acknowledge you as a person with a valid "real" culture. The

novel's crucial point was immigrants need new ways and new names to explain their experiences. In this discourse about names and language, I realized what made my project so valuable to me. My project is about generations finding themselves in new intersections of physical and digital locations, and how these generations in new media hemispheres need new names to talk back to the power in their lives. I first needed to see how things *aren't* defined in pornography to see where things *could* be defined and only then could I understand the way pornography replicates and creates sexual ideology that runs at an undercurrent to people's lives. We need new ways to synthesize how sex is at the boundary lines of being and how problematic material gets into all of that liminal space, in addition to seeing how pornography can make "new worlds become imaginable" (Ryberg, 2015).

To finish my project, I reveal something of myself, a strip-tease or show of my own being. I am an avid reader, and I find it often easiest to express my beliefs through parroting others works. I've been reading Salman Rushdie since I was very young (perhaps a few years after I found those Playboys) and his beliefs on identity and community affect me very deeply. Whenever I move or set on a new chapter of my life, I read his 1999 retelling of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. The novel uses rock music as the tool Rushdie's Orpheus uses in his attempts to save his Eurydice. One song "sung" in the novel stuck in my mind in particular while working on this project. "At the frontier of the skin, no dogs patrol. At the frontier of the skin, where I end and you begin... where you must not slip your skin, or change your role. You can't pass out, I can't pass in. You must end as you begin. Or lose your soul. At the frontier of the skin armed guards patrol" (Rushdie, 1999, p. 55). I must disagree with my good friend Rushdie. At the boundaries of skin is not where we begin. We "begin" instead in the multitude of ways media affects our being. The very outermost parts of ourselves

begin in interaction with the media products around us and our creations of and with communications. This is why it is important to delve into the way we perform meaning making of all media-- including pornography.

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