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The Politics of Describing Pleasure:  
The Discursive Limits of Categorizing  
Feminist and Queer Pornography

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Library and Information Science  
in Information Studies

by

Cooper Thorson Moll

2017

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Politics of Describing Pleasure:

The Discursive Limits of Categorizing Feminist and Queer Pornography

by

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Master of Library and Information Science

University of California Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Michelle L. Caswell, Chair

This master's thesis explores the stability and ramifications of two emergent categories of pornography: namely, *feminist pornography* and *queer pornography*. Though these terms—feminist and queer—have histories that connote resistance and disruption, they have been controlled and institutionalized in pornography to create a broader visibility and a deeper impact. These terms are analyzed in relation to two institutions that seek to control their meanings—the Feminist Porn Awards (FPAs) and PinkLabel.tv—and fourteen pornography studios that identify with either or both labels. I collected data from preexisting documents by implementing a content analysis. Two crucial findings suggest that 1) despite the foundational tenets of feminist and queer porn, as outlined by the FPAs and PinkLabel.tv, the studios did not always abide by them, and 2) strategic essentialism is a mode of temporarily fixing these categories to wield power in resistance to the naturalized mainstream power. Since this thesis is about categories and queering, two seemingly opposed ideologies, it is concerned with how categories are queered,

and how the queer can be temporarily stabilized to render itself visible and potent, ultimately leaving a trace that can be analyzed and contextualized historically, leaving room for catalogers to amend and alter content to fit categories prone to transformation.

The thesis of Cooper Thorson Moll is approved.

Gregory Leazer

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University of California, Los Angeles

2017

## INTRODUCTION:

This master's thesis explores the stability and ramifications of two emergent categories of pornography: namely, *feminist pornography* and *queer pornography*. Though these terms—feminist and queer—have histories that connote resistance and disruption, they have been controlled and institutionalized in pornography to create a broader visibility and a deeper impact. The emergence of these genres has complicated the possibilities for disparate sexual agencies, thus a new set of descriptions and qualifiers have arisen in an attempt to stabilize the categories and render them useful. Categories and naming are fundamental information problems because categories and realities are often mismatched. This master's thesis will explore the scope and the limits of *feminist pornography* and *queer pornography*, what they mean, and who has the agency to call them such. It will begin with a broad definition of the term feminist pornography by Tristan Taormino, Constance Penley, Celine Shimizu, and Mireille Miller-Young:

As both an established and emerging genre of pornography, feminist porn uses sexually explicit imagery to contest and complicate dominant representations of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, ability, age, body type, and other identity markers. It explores concepts of desire, agency, power, beauty, and pleasure within and across inequality, in the face of injustice, and against the limits of gender hierarchy and both heteronormativity and homonormativity. It seeks to unsettle conventional definitions of sex, and expand the language of sex as an erotic activity, an expression of identity, a power exchange, a cultural commodity, and even a new politics. Feminist porn creates alternative images and develops its own aesthetics and iconography to expand established sexual norms and discourses.<sup>1</sup>

And Shira Tarrant's definition of queer pornography:

[Queer] porn includes a mix of gender identities in a given film or episode. Any number of expressions can be present including transwomen, transmen, cisgender women, cisgender men, dyke couples, gay couples, bisexuals, femmes, butches, genderqueer people, and many more.

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<sup>1</sup> Tristan Taormino, Constance Penley, Celine Shimizu, Mireille Miller-Young, "Introduction: The Politics of Producing Pleasure" in *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure* (New York, NY: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013) 9-10.

The emphasis in queer porn is authentic desire and sexual representation; thus there tends to be diversity in body size, abilities, sex acts, kink, people of color, as well as the level of performers' experience—meaning there is professional and amateur crossover.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis will look at how the categories are used and described in a variety of sources and contexts. The documents I will be consulting are: the Feminist Porn Awards website, video on demand website, PinkLabel.tv, and fourteen film studios that produce pornography described as either queer or feminist.

The “power to name” has important sociopolitical consequences, whether it begins at birth with the naming of a child or the use of particular words to categorize information. Similarly, Judith Butler is focused on the initial utterance “it’s a girl” as the moment of formatting and mapping gender onto the body.<sup>3</sup> Those who hold the power to name stand in relation to the objects being named as subjects. Drawing on Butler’s example, the process takes the neutral and ambiguous subject “it” as object and genderizes it. Butler explains:

To the extent that the naming of the “girl” is transitive, that is, initiates the process by which a certain ‘girling’ is compelled, the term or, rather, its symbolic power, governs the formation of the corporeally enacted femininity that never fully approximates the norm. This is a ‘girl,’ however, who is to ‘cite’ the norm in order to qualify and remain a viable subject. Femininity is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment. Indeed, there is no ‘one’ who takes on a gender norm. On the contrary, this citation of the gender norm is necessary in order to qualify as a ‘one,’ to become viable as a “one,” where subject-formation is dependent on the prior operation of legitimating gender norms.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Shira Tarrant, *The Pornography Industry: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 171.

<sup>3</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 232.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



In the context of the current thesis, we must consider a similar *queering* and *feministing* that forges a new matrix in the context of describing pornography. The apparatuses of power garnered from discipline create a superstructure of power on the one hand, but on the other hand, subcultural superstructures provide parallel codes in relation to the dominant culture. Content analysis can then be used to decode, understand, critique, and compare the ethical codes and conduct from one subcultural category to another, and to also compare codes to the dominant culture.

My work assumes that feminist theory and queer theory are inextricably linked by their “othered” relation from heteronormative masculinity, and both theoretical foundations will be consulted to answer the questions that this thesis sets out to answer. Participation in these two discourses provides a space for alternative subjectivity and the creation of new identities such as gender, orientation, and so on. I believe categories such as feminist porn are inherently queer because they are not easily categorized and are fundamentally transgressive. Such transgressions lead to problems of stability in categorizing representations of identity.

#### **METHOD & DESIGN:**

This research situates itself in the interpretivist paradigm. The ontological stance of the interpretivist paradigm is relativist, context dependent, and reliant on the belief that realities are socially constructed. Its epistemological stance is subjectivist because all the results will be dependent on the interactions between myself (as researcher) and my research subjects (descriptive text located on the websites of feminist and queer porn hosting sites and production studios). Methodologically, the interpretivist paradigm relies on empathic interaction, qualitative

methods for data collection, and case-by-case analysis. The goal of research conducted within the interpretivist paradigm is to understand the transferability of its outcomes.

I will analyze data collected from preexisting documents using content analysis (also known as documentary analysis). In content analysis, the researcher examines documents in order to gather insight into a specific subject or institution. Library and Information Studies research that principally uses documents is diverse in nature. Alison Pickard speaks to this diversity in *Research Methods in Information*:

At the “open” end of the spectrum, the individual may treat documents in the same way that a qualitative researcher would work with the transcripts of one-to-one interviews or focus groups, allowing concepts to emerge from the material itself and remaining vigilant to revealing quotations that can be included in the report. Conversely, the individual may have noted the phenomena of interest from the outset and be more concerned with undertaking frequency counts in terms of the number of occasions a particular term appears or a certain issue is raised. It is, of course, entirely possible for a single project using documentary analysis to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative elements, although the researcher’s position on the acceptability of such stance is likely to be determined by their wider philosophical beliefs with regard to the nature of inquiry.<sup>5</sup>

For the purpose of my research content analysis is understood as the methodical analysis of message characteristics from a body of documents. In this master’s thesis I will be analyzing the websites of popular queer and feminist pornography studios as my primary documents of inquiry. The content in this study is considered “latent” since the analysis is conceptual and depends on interpretation, further indicating that the analysis will be qualitative. Using content analysis, I will perform the following steps:

1. Determine the sample of documents to be analyzed
2. Develop a coding scheme to identify the variables in which my research is interested in
3. Defining indicators of said variables
4. Engage multiple coders and codes
5. Analyze coded data

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<sup>5</sup> Alison Pickard, *Research Methods in Information* (Neil Schuman: American Library Association, 2013), 253.

## 6. Report my findings<sup>6</sup>

The shortcoming of content analysis is that the method is highly dependent on the positionality of the researcher: I would argue that positionality is never neutral. This shortcoming will be taken into consideration and addressed as adamantly as possible throughout my research.<sup>7</sup>

### **RESEARCH QUESTION:**

Through implementing content analysis, my research aims to answer the following questions: are feminist pornography and queer pornography stable categories? If not, is stabilization possible? What are the implications for knowledge organization and information studies?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

#### *Critiques and Metacritiques of Categorization*

In *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star investigate the role categories play in shaping our understandings of the modern world; theorizing that classification infrastructure is part of our “built in information environment.” Their work emphasizes the notion that when a particular category is chosen to represent a subject, it subsequently silences, obfuscates, and erases others. They contend that

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<sup>6</sup>Michelle Caswell, “Methods Session 9: Content Analysis, Discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis” (Lecture, Social Science Research Methodology for Information Studies, University of California Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA, November 19, 2015).

<sup>7</sup>“It has been accepted for some time now that all researchers enter... study steepened in their own social and cultural biases but are now explained and presented rather than being ignored and assumed to be irrelevant.” Alison Pickard, *Research Methods in Information* (Neil Schuman: American Library Association, 2013), 136.

categories are part of information's "hermeneutic circle" and that "there is no simple unraveling of the built information landscape."<sup>8</sup> Bowker and Star support their idea stating:

[P]eople and (the information systems they build) routinely conflate formal and informal, prototypical and Aristotelian aspects of classification. There is no such thing as an unambiguous, uniform classification system.... This in turn means that there is no room in the constitution of any classification system with organizational and political consequences—and few schemes if any are with such dimensions—for technical decisions about the scheme to systematically reflect given organizational and political positions. Since we are dealing, then, with an agnostic field, there will be no pure reflection of a single position, but rather dynamic tensions among multiple positions. And finally, since the classification system is not a pure reflection of such positions (an impossible aim in its own right—no classification system can reflect either social or the natural world fully accurately) but also integrally a tool for exploring the real world, there is no simple prediction from how a given set of alliances or tensions leads invariably to a given classification used in a given way.<sup>9</sup>

All classification systems have competing ideologies for the proper way to classify information. Because the systems are not perfect and they are contested internally, any small shift deep in the classification scheme can have major epistemological consequences: Copernican consequences.

D. Grant Campbell's "Queer Theory and the Creation of Contextual Subject Access Tools for Gay and Lesbian Communities" establishes the basic antinomy between the desire for a rigid universal classification system and a constantly evolving subjectivity. While queer theory has done much to alter and *queer* classifications, Campbell also acknowledges the importance of categories. Since all knowledge and organization is socially constructed, then Campbell believes that community based classification systems play a significant role in contributing the overall knowledge without aspiring to an essentialism. Another significant antimony is the desire for communities to be viewed as permanent fixtures, while at the same time allowing them to

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<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 320.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

progress and evolve as ontological subjects. “Community members want both to see themselves as permanent and unchanging, and to see themselves as socially constructed; they want to belong and remain apart.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, the simultaneous desire to be part of the dominant culture and yet, to remain autonomous and unique. Campbell suggests that the acknowledgement and sensitivity toward the ambiguities and complexities will lead to better subject access tools and retrieval.

“Transcending Library Catalogs: A Comparative Study of Controlled Terms in Library of Congress Subject Headings and User-Generated Tags in LibraryThing for Transgender Books” by Melissa Adler highlights the uncomfortable discrepancy between the taxonomies used by the Library of Congress for twenty transgender-themed books and the terms that transgender users use to describe subjects. The discrepancy renders the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and WorldCat’s modes of classification relatively useless for transgender subjects. Adler cites one important problem with the classification of trans materials: namely, the abundance of trans subjectivities have not been fully explored, including the ironing out of redundancies in terminology.

A common and valid argument in defense of the LCSHs is that it would be a logistical nightmare to try to keep up with changes in terminologies, as demonstrated by the evolution of the category ‘transgender.’ To update all library records with new headings would be costly and time consuming, and if it is likely that terms will change again, it becomes a daunting and limitless task. The Library of Congress does need to expand its reference lists, though to include more minority voices so that people will be directed to approve headings.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> D Grant Campbell, “Queer Theory and the Creation of Contextual Subject Access Tools for Gay and Lesbian Communities” in *Feminist and Queer Information Studies Reader* (Sacramento: Litwin Books, 2013): 306.

<sup>11</sup> Melissa Adler, “Transcending Library Catalogs: A Comparative Study of Controlled Terms in Library of Congress Subject Headings and User-Generated Tags in LibraryThing for Transgender Books” in *Journal of Web Librarianship* 3(4) (2009): 327.

To capture every evolving trans subjectivity may require the same amount of effort of categorizing an individual subjectivity, nevertheless catalogers must be sensitive to the accuracy of these evolving categories.

In “Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction” by Emily Drabinski, she believes that the queer theory approach to cataloging and classification enables us to view the access of knowledge not as a means of representation, from the author to the reader, but as a mode of producing knowledge through its source. Since queer theory is concerned with the study of the analysis of othering, and the multiplicity of ontological categories that exist and emerge outside of mainstream culture, it is uniquely suitable for the examination of categorization. Drabinski claims that “[n]o matter which name is fixed, for example Homosexuality or Gay Men or Lesbian—other identities will emerge at the boundaries of what can be contained by this language.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, the three categories provided as examples—Homosexuality, Gay Men, Lesbian—cannot adequately describe the varied and evolving subjectivities, and that many subjectivities lie in between categories, queer the lines of adjacent categories, or actively move across categories. The politics inherent in classification—for Drabinski as queer theorist—may render certain subjectivities as hidden, concealed, or invisible. Such a category may either be difficult or impossible to access.

Queer theoretical perspectives on classification and cataloging challenge the idea that a stable, universal, objective knowledge organization system could even exist—there is no such thing if categories and names are always contingent and in motion.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Emily Drabinski, “Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction” in *Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 83(2) (2013): 102.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

Ultimately, for Drabinski, she hopes that queer theory will help serve to regulate the delusions of universalism implied by official modes of categorization, and to promote and acknowledge the criticism of the catalogers' biases and ideologies.

Melissa Adler's "Disciplining Knowledge at the Library of Congress" explores discipline creation and maintenance that produces specific discourses at the Library of Congress. Adler argues that the Library of Congress disciplines knowledge by two specific practices: naming and classification. Central to her critique are the modes of which "sexual deviances" are *chosen* to be classified using subject headings that correlate to vocabulary used in medical and psychiatric discourse, rather than subject headings that are intelligible to the non-heteronormative subjectivities they seek to describe. Adler explains:

At the heart of this choice is the assumption that sexuality is a medical concern and certain sexual acts and identities are in fact medical or psychiatric problems. The normalizing effects of these professions are at play in the LC collection and catalog, as these areas seem to have great influence on subject authorization and knowledge organization.<sup>14</sup>

Here she draws on *Discipline and Punish*, in which Foucault resolves that three techniques of control—hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and examination along with institutions of power—"have converged to create the modern system of disciplinary power."<sup>15</sup> Adler uses Foucault's work to highlight how these modern disciplinary systems function with the ultimate goal of normalizing behavior where "normal" is described by the standards of society. These standards are implemented through the disciplining of knowledge of what "norms" are and the disciplining is enforced by institutions of power—in this case, the Library of Congress and its disciplining of sexuality.

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<sup>14</sup> Melissa Adler, "Disciplining Knowledge at the Library of Congress," *Knowledge Organization*, 39(5): 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

[S]exuality is disciplined by being classified, labeled, and categorized according to normal and abnormal sexual behaviors and identities. Library materials are placed in sections of the library according to the discipline in which catalogers determine the books intend to participate.<sup>16</sup>

This process gives the Library of Congress the totalitarian “power to name;” this power becomes problematic because it does not permit individuals outside of that realm of power to participate in *subjectification*, a process that is distinctive to every individual. Adler prescribes “social tagging” (also known as “collaborative tagging”) and the use of “folksonomies” as having “potential to serve interdisciplinary fields as they permit voices from various positions to name resources in a common place.”<sup>17</sup> However, this prescription raises its own set of subjectification problems and leaves gaps to address in Adler’s work. Ultimately her utopian vision through the democratic process of tagging can have dire consequences.

Collaborative tagging has implications toward the disciplining of social organization and cultural structures as well. In Patrick Keilty’s “Sexual Boundaries and Subcultural Discipline” he fills in some of the “gaps” in Adler’s work describing how tagging has developed a “queer sexual nomenclature” on the pornographic video hosting site, Xtube, and what it reveals about queer subculture.

First, tagging within Xtube reveals highly developed and varied queer social organization and nomenclature; and second, the tags develop under the weight of social discipline among members of the subculture themselves, always in relation to a dominant culture. Tagging practices within Xtube (and similar sites) serve as a benchmark in studying the development of sexual nomenclature because they reveal how members of the subculture view themselves, how they view others, and how members of the larger community view them.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>17</sup> Melissa Adler, “Disciplining Knowledge at the Library of Congress,” in *Knowledge Organization* 39(5): 5.

<sup>18</sup> Patrick Keilty “Sexual Boundaries and Subcultural Discipline” in *Knowledge Organization*, 39(6) (2012): 425.



The folksonomies implemented and used by Xtube users illustrate how tags provide multiple vocabularies and diverse social organization. However, Keilty adds: “this nomenclature is not purely particularistic and idiosyncratic. It is regulated by the social conventions of language and ideology. As such, members develop these folk taxonomies in fundamentally communal ways.”<sup>19</sup> Using particularistic and idiosyncratic nomenclature may result in the user’s exclusion from the media socialization and knowledge production: if a user knows the kind of material they wish to access, but are unfamiliar with the common tags and terminology (obscure acronyms, for example), the user may have a difficult time retrieving the desired materials. This phenomenon is a potentially problematic aspect of collaborative tagging because users who wish to engage in social relations must configure their tags in a specific way that may not authentically describe their identity.

In Keilty’s “Tabulating Queer: Space, Perversion and Belonging,” he seeks to problematize the paradoxical positionality of queer phenomenon as the goals of queer seek to continually obfuscate, transgress, and problematize categorization while simultaneously seeking to temporarily stabilize itself in a category. This stabilization process is called “strategic essentialism” it entails the temporary essentialization and stabilization of a category to declare and understand itself in a strategic way to gain institutional access while recognizing that its stability is only temporary. Using the example of Xtube—as he further elaborates in “Sexual Boundaries and Subcultural Discipline”—Keilty explains how the standardization of pornographic categories seeks to stabilize, regulate, and reinscribe institutional norms within Xtube. These institutional norms on one hand guide Xtube users exploration of their subjective

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 426.

and unique desires and on the other hand, exposes users to discovering networks of institutionalized desire.

## FEMINIST/QUEER ALLIANCE

Feminism and queer identity have at their nexus *otherness*. The otherness is in relation not only to man-ness as masculinity, but specifically—as third-wave feminism would have it—*white man-ness*, since third-wave feminism specifically brings the issues of race and ethnicity to the fore. Judith Butler pinpoints this issue as ‘phallogocentrism,’ implying not only the importance of the word and its categorical meaning—signifier and signified—but pointing specifically toward the man as authority: authority from the phallus. In the 1990 preface to *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler writes:

The task of this inquiry is to center on—and decenter—such defining institutions: phallogocentrism and compulsory heterosexuality.

Precisely because “female” no longer appears to be a stable notion, its meaning is as troubled and unfixed as “woman,” and because both terms gain their troubled significations only as relational terms, this inquiry takes at its focus gender and the relational analysis it suggests.<sup>20</sup>

In a similar vein, Annamarie Jagose, in the afterword of her seminal, *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, writes:

Queer, then, is an identity category that has no interest in consolidating or even stabilizing itself. It maintains its critique of identity-focused movements by understanding that even the formation of its own coalition and negotiated constituencies may well result in exclusionary and reifying effects far in excess of those intended.

[Q]ueer is less an identity than a *critique* of identity.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), xxix.

<sup>21</sup> Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: NYU Press, 1996), 131.

For Butler and Jagose instability is the key feature of both feminism and queer identity. Both speak to the otherness of queer and women's identity in relation to a naturalized masculinity; both see as the strength of their positionality a mode of critique. And yet, the fact that a positionality is even possible carries with it its own sense of ambiguity. How can one speak politically and act politically from a decentralized, destabilized position? The answer must be from a position of resistance.

In Patrick Keilty's "Tabulating Queer: Space, Perversion, and Belonging," he postulates a transient mode of political action by reifying destabilized political subjectivities: *others*. He borrows and expands an idea from Gayatri Spivak,<sup>22</sup> to explain the transient positionality called "strategic essentialism:"

'[S]trategic essentialism' [is] a strategy in which nationalities, ethnic groups or minorities temporarily 'essentialize' or 'stabilize' themselves to achieve certain goals. Its power, therefore, lies in its temporality, instability, and the idea that things change over time, on the one hand, while simultaneously providing the stability and discernibility necessary for institutional access, on the other. It continually recognizes that essentializing is only strategic and does not reflect the reality of the phenomenon.<sup>23</sup>

While Jagose warned against the move to reify "queer," basking in the term's ambiguity and destabilization, Keilty shows how "queer" can occupy two paradoxical spaces: the first retains its instability while the second temporarily stabilizes itself through strategic essentialism, not only to critique dominant modes of power, but to attempt to destabilize the semblance of the 'natural' concerning those dominant modes of power.

Michelle Caswell warns of the perils of strategic essentialism in relation to identity-based communities with the hope to build a robust defense toward critics who claim that the reifying

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<sup>22</sup> Spivak herself never gave a full definition of the term "strategic essentialism." Nevertheless, Keilty, Marinucci, and other scholars found the the term useful, developing and expanding its usage.

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Keilty, "Tabulating Queer: Space, Perversion, and Belonging" in *Knowledge Organization* 36(4) 2009: 243-244.

effects of strategic essentialism can further alienate individuals from their communities through their artifacts and documents. Thus, in the context of the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), “South Asian American” stands for a broad coalition of peoples who may not readily identify as South Asian, but by a more specific and appropriate term. Caswell calls for a critical use of strategic essentialism that keeps in mind that although all categories are already “fluid, contingent, and ultimately fictitious...”, we can still put these constructed categories to use, deploying them as points of solidarity based on common experiences on which to center political action.”<sup>24</sup> Artificial stabilization can be used as a political pillar that makes materials and knowledge more visible. In the context of feminist and queer identity, there are countless ways to be a feminist and to be queer; there may even be ways to find information in these categories by those who do not identify with either category. The category must be functional and flexible.

Since feminism and queer have both been shown to be destabilized identities and modes of destabilization in relation to dominant culture, some scholars have conflated the two ideologies in an alliance to combat a similar foe: the unnaturalness of their secondary status.<sup>25</sup> In her book, *Feminism is Queer: The Intimate Connection Between Queer Theory and Feminist Theory*, Mimi Marinucci explains the nexus between feminist theory and queer theory:

Although, the word “queer” is commonly associated with sex and sexuality, queer theory is a way of understanding, not just sex and sexuality, but also gender. Specifically, queer theory avoids the binary and hierarchical reasoning usually associated with these concepts. Precisely what it is that constitutes the subject matter of feminism varies from one form of feminism to the next. Despite this diversity, however, most every form of feminism addresses at least gender and sex, and sometimes sexuality as well. There is thus an implicit connection

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<sup>24</sup> Michelle Caswell, “Inventing New Archival Imaginaries: Theoretical Foundations for Identity-Based Community Archives” in *Identity Palimpsests: Ethnic Archiving in the U.S. and Canada* (Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2014), 40.

<sup>25</sup> By “secondary status” I mean to imply genders and sexualities other than cis-masculinity and heteronormativity.

between queer theory and feminist theory, and queer feminism makes this connection more explicit.<sup>26</sup>

Marinucci finds common ground between feminism and queer identity where sex and gender meet. Negotiating sex and gender has historically been synonymous with the negotiation of power. Theorizing as a feminist and theorizing as queer are modes of political maneuvering. Feminism and queer maneuver from a similar position.

## **FEMINIST & QUEER PORNOGRAPHY SUPERSTRUCTURES**

### *The Feminist Porn Awards*

The early 2000s marked a significant shift in the pornography industry. The affordability of recording and editing technology and the advent of web 2.0 allowed filmmakers to release films without relying on major distributors. Pornography filmmakers entered a new era, where they could market and sell their work directly to independent businesses and directly to the internet.<sup>27</sup>

The Feminist Porn Awards (FPAs) is the brainchild of the Toronto-based sex shop, Good For Her, which endeavors to make available the highest quality products for women and trans women. Founded in 1997, Good For Her's philosophy states:

Women and marginalized communities need access to information and products that are not always easy to find or easy to talk about. Both online and within our store in Toronto, we try to make it easy for you to learn and engage with our knowledgeable staff, or explore on your own.

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<sup>26</sup> Mimi Marinucci, *Feminism is Queer: The Intimate Connection Between Queer and Feminist Theory* (London: Zed Books, 2010), 139.

Marinucci describes "queer feminism" as "the application of queer notions of gender, sex, and sexuality to the subject matter of feminist theory, and the simultaneous application of feminist notions of gender, sex, and sexuality to the subject matter of queer theory." (139).

<sup>27</sup> Shira Tarrant, *The Pornography Industry: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 24-25.

We believe that there is nothing shameful about an open, honest dialogue about sex and sexuality. Everyone deserves to explore their own sexuality in a safe and comfortable environment, and we hope that Good For Her can help facilitate that in your own life.

We hope to meet the needs of a variety of women, regardless of sexual orientation or age or partner status (i.e. single, celibate, in love, committed, married, monogamous, polyamorous, looking, all of the above...). We are committed to creating a safe space for women to learn about the sensitive topic of sexuality and to buy products that meet their sexual needs and/or desires.

We recognize the fluidity of gender, and respect the gender with which people identify themselves.<sup>28</sup>

In 2006 Good For Her's store manager, Chanelle Gallant, conceptualized the Feminist Porn Awards in response to the changes in the products they were offering their customers. Such changes were marked by the increasing visibility of diverse subjectivities producing, directing, and starring in pornographic film. The subjectivities include people of color, trans identities, lesbians, and queers. Not only were these groups engaging in the production and dissemination of a new pornography, but their work reflected the plurality of sexual acts they were engaging in and wanted to see in film, devoid of the fetishization and disrespect they found the mainstream pornography industry to be fraught with.

Gallant perceived the FPAs as a means to render this new-found pornographic format visible, stating: "We should really celebrate the ones who get it right. Lift them up and make their work more visible. Like an awards ceremony or something."<sup>29</sup> Despite her rigorous research efforts, she found that no such awards ceremony existed. Inspired by the lack of

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<sup>28</sup> Author Unknown, "About Us," Good For Her, accessed February 11, 2017, <http://www.goodforher.com/about-us/>.

<sup>29</sup> Chanelle Gallant, "Why I Started the Feminist Porn Awards 10 Years Ago," The Huffington Post, January 10, 2017, accessed February 11, 2017, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-i-started-the-feminist-porn-awards-ten-years-ago\\_us\\_587559afe4b0f8a725448343](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-i-started-the-feminist-porn-awards-ten-years-ago_us_587559afe4b0f8a725448343).

institutional attention directed toward the rapid shift in pornography, Gallant, Good For Her owner Carlyle Jensen, and their staff began developing the criteria for films that qualify as “feminist porn” and the judging criteria for nominees. Over the past ten years the criteria have been altered to reflect the changes, intersectionality, and expansiveness of the genre. Today the FPAs define “feminist porn” by the following elements:

- Actors are treated with respect, paid fairly, given choice and ethical working conditions, empowered in their work
- Directors collaborate with and incorporate the actor’s own sexual desires and fantasies (makes for better scenes too!)
- It expands the boundaries of sexual representation on film and challenges stereotypes especially of women and marginalized communities
- Realistic pleasure is depicted<sup>30</sup>

These elements invoke further inquiry: What does feminism mean to the FPAs? On their website, an entire page is devoted to their definition of feminism titled “What does feminism mean to us?” stating:

To us, feminism is beyond gender. It is about recognizing the multi-facetedness of every individual and the complex struggles that they may face. As feminists we strive for and believe in equal access to opportunities, representation and resources and we acknowledge that this is an especially urgent, fundamental and necessary fight for historically disadvantaged groups. We support individual choice for everyone in all aspects of life, including their sexuality, profession, self-expression and pleasure.

Our feminism is not anti-male. We value freedom for everyone and believe that men also have a valuable contribution and part to play in being allies to the feminist movement. As feminism has evolved, so too have our practices and beliefs, always striving for diversity, equity and to listen to all voices. We value respect and openness as well as privacy. We honour growth and learning and prefer open dialogue rather than shame as a vehicle of change or education. We recognize that we have all made mistakes on our journeys to self-awareness of our privilege and we have all unwittingly and unfortunately disrespected others

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<sup>30</sup> Author Unknown, “What is feminist porn?,” The Feminist Porn Awards, accessed February 11, 2017, <http://www.feministpornawards.com/what-is-feminist-porn-2/>.

despite our best intentions.... We hope that our work makes a difference for everyone's benefit.<sup>31</sup>

Additionally, on the same webpage they set forth their goals as feminists in the producing the FPAs:

- conversation and evolution of ideas
- respectful dynamic creative community
- exposing viewers to porn they may not normally have the opportunity to see or know where to find
- providing a platform for film makers to reach new audiences
- celebrating the hard work of film makers and performers whose creativity goes beyond the mainstream
- we especially hope to showcase the authentic, first person sexuality of historically disadvantaged groups<sup>32</sup>

What sets the FPAs apart from more mainstream pornography awards, such as the Adult Video News (AVN) Awards is the transparency of their judging criteria that are explicitly outlined on their website. The FPAs are judged by: quality, inclusiveness, the “it” factor and hotness. These criteria are elaborated by the FPAs as follows:

1. Quality – We love to award films that look great. We believe it is possible to make a great-looking film even with a limited amount of resources. We consider such factors as editing, framing, lighting, sound and overall production value when making selections. Attention to detail is appreciated! Story-crafting, acting, music, and direction are all factors that reveal how much care was put into the production of a movie. (Earnest feminism is not enough.)

2. Inclusiveness – We recognize in a niche-based industry like porn not all films are for all audiences and aren't able to include everyone. But we also love it when films make an effort to explore sexualities that are often marginalized or ignored by mainstream porn.

2.1 We like to include films that contain kink, BDSM, and consensual non-consent in a fictional context. We believe that these can be valid feminist fantasies. We do not view consensual BDSM as violence or abuse.

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<sup>31</sup> Author Unknown, “What does feminism mean to us?” The Feminist Porn Awards, accessed February 11, 2017, <http://www.feministpornawards.com/what-does-feminism-mean-to-us/>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



2.2 We don't include or support films that rely upon sexual stereotypes. There are way more fantasy options out there and we love it when people are creative.

2.3 It's our goal to highlight and celebrate films that appeal to a diversity of audiences.

3. The "it" factor: Movies that showcase a unique perspective are especially appealing, whether this is about the story being told, the interactions between characters or technical aspects like framing and editing. We are always most impressed when we encounter something novel, innovative and exciting that causes us to think about sexuality in a fresh way.

4. Hotness: Bodies are well-lit, framed and shot to perfection, desire radiates off the screen, and all parties involved appear enthusiastic. Plenty of orgasms don't hurt either!<sup>33</sup>

These judging guidelines are given to each "jury member" to evaluate each film submitted to the FPAs. The predetermined set of criteria and elements set out by the FPAs is an important part of the institutional superstructure as they create a common set of norms. These norms are documented by a list of definitions, goals, recognizable subjectivities, and judging criteria. Filmmakers and actors who transgress the norms may not be considered for nomination.

In *The Feminist Porn Book*, Taormino et. al, address the FPA's criteria and categories imploring:

These criteria simultaneously assumed and announced viewership, an authorship, an industry, and a collective consciousness. Embedded in the description is a female viewer and what she likely wants to see—active desire, consent, real orgasms, power, and agency—and what she doesn't want to see: passivity, stereotypes, coercion, or fake orgasms. The language is broad enough so as not to be prescriptive, yet it places value on agency and authenticity, with a parenthetical nod to the possibility that not every woman's fantasy is to be "in control." While the guidelines notably focus on a woman's involvement in production, honored filmmakers run the gamut from self-identified feminist pornographers to independent female directors to mainstream porn producers; the broad criteria

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<sup>33</sup> Author Unknown, "Judging Criteria for FPAs," The Feminist Porn Awards, accessed February 11, 2017, <http://www.feministpornawards.com/judging-criteria-for-fpas/>.

achieve a certain level of inclusiveness and acknowledge that a range of work can be read by audiences, critics, and academics as feminists.<sup>34</sup>

From the FPAs proposed guidelines one might glean that feminist porn is a methodology rather than its own genre; it is a method for making porn, an algorithm for how to make porn that differs from the modes of making mainstream porn. I argue that these criteria, guidelines, and categories *are* prescriptive since they are essentially a *call to action*. If feminist pornography seeks to unsettle conventional definitions of sex, pleasure, identity expression, cultural commodity, and a new politics, how can these tenets not be prescriptive?

Beyond the context and history of the awards, the FPAs website includes a dropdown menu for site visitors to “find porn” the FPAs have nominated, endorsed, or have crowned as winners. Visitors can find porn with ease, *if* it fits the categories set in place by the website:

- Anal
- Big Budget
- Bondage & Kink
- Educational
- For Couples
- Independent
- Queer
- Romantic
- Storyline
- Straight
- Group Sex
- Trans

Alternatively, users of the site can also search by genre, though the genre section seldom deviates from the categories listed above. The categories include:

- Bisexual
- Butch
- Female Director
- Femme

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34 Tristan Taormino, Constance Penley, Celine Shimizu, Mireille Miller-Young, “Introduction: The Politics of Producing Pleasure” in *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure* (New York, NY: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013) 12.

- Independent
- Nominee

The FPAs organize content by an official list of genres and categories that outline the sanctioned lists versus a *total* list, rendered less visible. This finding is discoverable when one chooses to use the “search” option. For example, while “cunnilingus” is not a sanctioned category, a search for “cunnilingus” proffers ten findings.<sup>35</sup> This search example shows not only that there are unsanctioned user taxonomies that lead to the relevant content, but also that “cunnilingus” has more search results than some of the sanctioned terms like “Bisexual” which proffers nine results and “Big Budget” which proffers seven results. The FPA administrators create these categories and genres from common interests that develop a common language for viewers and members of the feminist pornography community further creating a common set of norms. For those who do not learn the common language, they may not gain access to a film that suits their needs. The website serves as infrastructure to the feminist porn community; however, the feminist porn community is an umbrella term for the plurality of communities. While the FPAs offer space for the exchange of a specific subcultural common language, the language itself must be learned or previously known by the user. The FPAs and their website provide the virtual space for people to learn about the activities, subjectivities, and genres they may or may not be familiar with, genres and categories they are already interested in or are just discovering, and to participate in the discourse surrounding the genres and categories. Participation in the discourse provides subjectivity and creates identity and affirms categories and genres. However, every genre and category is regulated by the FPAs who regulate and moderate the site with their own

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<sup>35</sup> Author Unknown, “10 search results for 'cunnilingus',” The Feminist Porn Awards, accessed February 11, 2017, <http://www.feministpornawards.com/?s=cunnilingus>.

ideologies concerning what counts as viable content and what does not. Therefore, some consumers and filmmakers may feel alienated by these constraints.

My findings indicate that there are decisions being made by the site administrators, jurors, and creators of the FPAs concerning the validity and stability of specific genres and categories. What is understood is that the process for naming by the FPAs does not seem to be democratic, based on the limits of the sanctioned genres and categories; exclusionary decisions are being made and the nature of those decisions is not fully understood.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can aid in locating power in the context of the naming of categories. Such an analysis requires an acknowledgment of internet infrastructures and capital. These infrastructures prescribe modes of searching and retrieval. According to Safiya Noble in the context of her study of the visibility and portrayal of Black girls on the Internet:

Understanding the power relations embedded in texts includes examining the actors involved. In the case of looking at Internet search, I concede that there are a number of actors and artifacts: the producers of websites, the words or text chosen for the URL, sentence descriptions and advertisements, search engine algorithms and optimizers, media conglomerates, advertisers, and search engine users who come across search results—all of which are involved in the production of meaning. Published text and images on the web can have a plethora of meanings, so attention must be paid to the implicit and explicit messages about Black women as girls in both the texts of Internet search results or hits and the paid ads that accompany them on the web page.<sup>36</sup>

Noble reveals to us that there are more actors involved than the hosting institutions: the influence of search engine optimizers (SEOs) and other advertising agencies have a strong impact on how these hosting institutions employ keywords and popular categories. This must be the reason why certain categories are included while other categories are excluded; the categories included must garner more capital even if other terms proffer more content.

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<sup>36</sup> Safiya Noble, “Google Search: Hyper-visibility as a Means of Rendering Black Women and Girls Invisible” *InVisible Culture*: Issue 19 (2013).

This analysis highlights an interesting power dynamic between the FPAs and the consumers of the product: the feminist porn community.<sup>37</sup> The administrators of the FPAs authorize and authenticate what constitutes feminist and queer pornography: in other words, they have the power to name feminist pornography. The conservatism of these authorities ensures that they retain control of the moniker “feminist porn” and “queer porn.” This level of control may be read as invasive and overreaching, however, by retaining control, the FPA authorities ensure that their vision continues unadulterated by a reimagining of feminist and queer pornography that comports more closely to mainstream pornography. What is at stake is the definition of feminist porn and queer porn: pornography from a woman’s and queer perspective.

#### *PinkLabel.tv*

Founded in 2013 by queer filmmaker Shine Louise Houston, PinkLabel.tv serves as a “Video on Demand” hosting website for videos by independent and emergent pornography filmmakers. Their homepage touts: “PinkLabel TV provides Queer, Feminist Porn On Demand from Award-Winning, Fair-Trade Studios.”<sup>38</sup> Houston proclaims her goals and justifications for PinkLabel.tv in the About section...

...to support new producers by offering resources that help their films find a global audience, enable studios access to sexual health resources and ethical production practices, and further their filmmaking craft and career....

Emerging and independent pornographers face several obstacles in online distribution. Many may not know requirements of producing porn or consider how to create a comfortable environment for their cast and crew.... Once a film is produced, it can be next to impossible to make a website and cover credit card processor fees. Even hosting videos on clip stores and VOD sites can prove difficult as many will not accept experimental films, or require stifling exclusivity, or censor sexual activities outside what’s traditionally seen in straight

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<sup>37</sup> For the purposes of this paper the feminist porn community is defined as: directors, performers, distributors, and consumers.

<sup>38</sup> Author Unknown, “PinkLabel.tv,” PinkLabel.tv, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.pinklabel.tv/on-demand/>.

porn. Even then, porn sites often rely on insensitive language in categories and context that are offensive to people of color and trans folk, and assume a narrowly straight, cisgender white male audience. PinkLabel.tv exists because we want a site that is a better fit for our films and those of other filmmakers, as well as our audiences.

Our communities comprise queer, trans, and people of color, as well as older folks and people with disabilities, so we understand first-hand that porn is broader than the stereotypical audience market.

The filmmakers on PinkLabel.tv have come to create films through their own artistic and entrepreneurial journeys. Each offer a unique perspective within an expanding landscape of erotic cinema, through films personally viewed and approved by Houston herself. Sales directly support the filmmaker, encouraging a sustainable #payforyourporn model where artists can continue creating work.<sup>39</sup>

Like other video on demand sites like Netflix, PinkLabel.tv is equipped with a “Browse” section where subscribers can select videos pertaining to certain genre categories. PinkLabel.tv is organized by the following categories:

- Free with PinkLabel
- BDSM: some like it rough
- Best of Cinekink NYC
- Boygasms: masculine sex appeal
- Ceci N'est Pas Une Porn: experimental and alternative
- Edu-porn: sexy adult education
- Feminist Porn Award Winners
- The Feminist Porn Gaze
- Filmmaker Spotlight: Shine Louise Houston
- Groundbreakers: Trans and Non-Binary Porn
- PinkLabel and Chill: adult feature films with a plot
- POC Porn: People of Color in Adult Films
- Porn Noir: adult films in black and white
- Porno Verite: adult documentaries
- Queer Porn Vanguard
- Recently Added
- Short Porn Films
- Silver and Golden Age Porn Classics
- Softcore: non-explicit erotic films
- Splash Zone: Wet Ejaculation

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<sup>39</sup> Author Unknown, “About,” PinkLabel.tv, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.pinklabel.tv/on-demand/about/>.

- STRAPPED: Hot for Strap-on and Pegging
- Trans Built: FTM Porn by Trans Male Directors
- Transfeminine Films: Trans Women Directed Porn<sup>40</sup>

Just as the FPAs organize content by an official list of genres and categories that outline the sanctioned lists versus a *total* list, rendered less visible, so does PinkLabel.tv. PinkLabel.tv is also equipped with a “search” option that allows for subscribers to refine their browsing experience while using words that are not visible in the sanctioned list of categories by genre. Using the same search inquiry experiment in my analysis of the FPAs, I searched “cunnilingus” on PinkLabel.tv. I found that that while “cunnilingus” is not a sanctioned genre category on PinkLabel.tv, a search for “cunnilingus” proffers fourteen findings.<sup>41</sup> Of these fourteen findings, the content made visible are films that contain the term “cunnilingus” in their synopsis. Again, this search example shows that there are unsanctioned taxonomies that lead to the relevant content. Since collaborative tagging is not an available option for PinkLabel.tv, we can glean that the less visible taxonomies are implemented by a descriptive authority using controlled vocabulary by PinkLabel.tv. While PinkLabel.tv subscribers have the power to search the films they want to access, they do not possess the power to name the official genre categories as they see fit. Thus, subscribers do not have the power to destabilize and queer the categories. This finding begs the question: if queer and feminist pornography touts and implements a for-us-by-us model, then why are subscribers excluded from the naming process?

In contrast to the FPAs site—where the decisions being made by the site administrators, jurors, and creators of the FPAs concerning the validity and stability of specific genres and

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<sup>40</sup> Author Unknown, “Browse,” PinkLabel.tv, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.pinklabel.tv/on-demand/browse/>.

<sup>41</sup> Author Unknown, “14 Search Results for 'cunnilingus',” PinkLabel.tv, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.pinklabel.tv/on-demand/?s=cunnilingus>.

categories is not understood or made explicit—PinkLabel.tv makes their process explicit in their “About” section: Shine Louise Houston personally views and approves the featured films herself. Therefore, we can surmise that PinkLabel.tv’s selection and genre category naming process is also undemocratic: Houston decides what counts as viable feminist and queer porn, personally selecting studios and films to feature that fit within her framework of what feminist and queer porn is and what it should be.

### **FEMINIST PORN AND QUEER PORN CONNECTION**

Now that the connection between feminism and queer subjectivity has been established at the nexus of otherness, this thesis seeks to explore the connection between the tenets of queer pornography and feminist pornography. A quick Google search on ‘queer pornography’ yields as its seventh result, the Feminist Porn Awards.<sup>42</sup> This section will explore connections and complications between feminist and queer pornography. First it will explore evidence that corroborates and complicates the thesis that there is a link between feminist pornography and queer pornography through the critical and theoretical writings of scholars. Secondly it will analyze the FPA’s genre categories to learn about the sanctioned categories, their salience, and to further understand the ideology of the FPAs as institution and its relation to queer subjectivity. Finally, this section will draw conclusions based on the evidence presented.

#### *Corroboration*

Many of the advocates of feminist pornography describe their work as queer: many of these advocates also describe *themselves* as queer. Queer feminist pornographer Shine Louise

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<sup>42</sup> Google search, “Queer Pornography,” February 16, 2017.



Houston’s multi-award winning website CrashPadSeries.com advertises her video on demand website, PinkLabel.tv, at the beginning of the front page:

QUEER, FEMINIST PORN ON  
DEMAND FROM YOUR FAVORITE  
FAIR-TRADE, INDIE STUDIOS  
ENTER PINKLABEL.TV NOW!<sup>43</sup>

While the advertisement separates the terms queer and feminist by a comma—“queer, feminist porn”—the phrasing reads and rolls off the tongue as if the terms are hyphenated as *queer-feminist porn*. Furthermore, this advertisement suggests that queer and feminist porn are relational and coexist within the same liminal space: PinkLabel.tv.

In *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*, queer identity and subjectivity is a common trope. Several authors have alluded to feminism and queer in the same breath, illustrating the importance and sensitivity toward queer subjectivities. Nine of the twenty-six titles explicitly or implicitly invoke queer subjects and issues:

- “Queer Feminist Pigs: A Spectator’s Manifesta” – Jane Ward
- “‘Every time we fuck we win’: The Public Sphere of Queer, Feminist, and Lesbian Porn as a (Safe) Space for Sexual Empowerment” – Ingrid Ryberg
- “Where the Trans Women Aren’t: The Slow Inclusion of Trans Women in Feminist and Queer Porn” – Tobi-Hill Meyer
- “Imag(in)ing Possibilities: The Psychotherapeutic Potential of Queer Pornography” – Keiko Lang
- “Calling the Shots: Feminist Porn in Theory and Practice” – Tristan Taormino
- “Uncategorized: Genderqueer Identity and Performance in Independent and Mainstream Porn” – Jiz Lee
- “The Power of My Vagina” – Buck Angel
- “Knowing Dick: Penetration and the Pleasures of Feminist Porn’s Trans Men” – Bobby Noble
- “Out of Line: The Sexy Femmegimp Politics of Flaunting It!” – Loree Erickson

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<sup>43</sup> Author Unknown, “The Crash Pad Series,” The Crash Pad Series, accessed February 20, 2017, <https://crashpadseries.com/>.

If the *Feminist Porn Book* serves as an authoritative text on the issues of feminist pornography from a variety of viewpoints, the inclusion of queer voices indicates that the queer is a fundamental aspect of feminist pornography—at least in scholarship and theoretical discourse.

Trans activist and FPA winner Tobi Hill-Meyer makes clear the connection between feminist and queer porn and imagines its further expansion through the inclusion of trans subjectivities: “Feminist and queer porn creates a space for authentic sexual representations. It’s done a good job of representing cis women’s sexuality, and I wanted to see porn that did the same for trans women.”<sup>44</sup> For Ingrid Ryberg queer and feminist porn serves as a site to contest mainstream configurations of gender and sexuality: “I contend that queer, feminist, and lesbian porn film culture can be understood as a counter public sphere where dominant notions of sexuality and gender are challenged.”<sup>45</sup> Tristan Taormino sets to disrupt the common trope that vaginal penetration is heteronormative: “Feminist porn... challenges what constitutes sex itself and the heteronormative depictions of penis-in-vagina intercourse as the ultimate, climactic act and everything else as some sort of inconsequential window dressing.”<sup>46</sup> Bobby Noble seeks to disrupt the viewer from beyond the screen by calling into question the female construction—the *femaleness*, as opposed to the feminine or womanness—in feminist pornography through the representation of trans bodies: “while trans bodies are not a stock feature of every instance of feminist porn, this culture is marked by its insistence that one neither can nor should make

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<sup>44</sup> Tobi Hill-Meyer, “Where the Trans Women Aren’t: The Slow Inclusion of Trans Women in Feminist and Queer Porn” in *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure* (New York, NY: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013) 157.

<sup>45</sup> Ingrid Ryberg, “‘Every time we fuck we win’: The Public Sphere of Queer, Feminist, and Lesbian Porn as a (Safe) Space for Sexual Empowerment” in *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure* (New York, NY: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013) 157.

<sup>46</sup> Tristan Taormino, “Calling the Shots: Feminist Porn in Theory and Practice” in *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure* (New York, NY: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013) 157.

assumptions that the bodies both in front of and behind the cameras are *not* trans bodies either.”<sup>47</sup>

Buck Angel makes explicit the disruptive practices of queer and feminist pornography and its implications through the authority of naming. Angel posits his masculinized vagina as his own idiosyncratic feminism:

That’s my kind of feminism: taking control of our bodies, naming them on our terms, and being unafraid of using our power, especially sexually. Taking back the term “vagina,” using it as a symbol of power, and showing it on film has changed my life.<sup>48</sup>

These testimonies and many more speak to the multifaceted subjectivities of twenty-first century feminism and queer agency in the context of the production and consumption of queer and feminist pornography.

### *Complications*

Though there is plenty of evidence to support the thesis that there is a link between feminist pornography and queer pornography through the critical and theoretical writings of scholars, some advocates seek to complicate and trouble their relationship.

Queer performer, producer, and studio owner Courtney Trouble distinguishes queer and feminism when describing her work:

A majority of us identify as feminists, but my work specifically doesn’t coherently speak to feminist issues. My work is ethically made, queer—and yes, I am a feminist—but I don’t think my goal with making porn is to address feminist issues.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Bobby Noble, “Knowing Dick: Penetration and the Pleasures of Feminist Porn’s Trans Men” in *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure* (New York, NY: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013) 317.

<sup>48</sup> Buck Angel, “The Power of My Vagina” in *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure* (New York, NY: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013) 157.

<sup>49</sup> Tina Vasquez, “Ethical Pornography,” *Herizons*, Spring 2012: 33.

Though Trouble claims that her work does not address issues of feminism, nevertheless she has accepted numerous Feminist Porn Awards and is often cited as a pioneer of feminist pornography. In the lengthy “mission statement” of her site nofauxxx.com that claims to be “the longest-running indie queer porn site on the internet,”<sup>50</sup> Trouble says, “The site is run by a woman, and most of our guest photographers are also female. We believe feminists can make pornography, perform in pornography, view pornography, and enjoy pornography as artists, workers, participants, and consumers.”<sup>51</sup> Though she claims that feminism that does not inform her work, she at least believes that “feminists can make pornography.”

A second complication is the issue of authenticity. Though the notion of authenticity is questionable, some advocates of queer and feminist pornography find the term useful for describing the core principles of their work and ideologies. While Taormino et al. explain the criteria for the FPAs that the “language is broad enough so as not to be prescriptive, yet it places value on agency and *authenticity*...,”<sup>52</sup> and Shira Tarrant claims that the “emphasis in queer porn is *authentic* desire and sexual representation,”<sup>53</sup> Shine Louise Houston, the filmmaker and founder of PinkLabel.tv and Pink and White Productions calls into question the issue of authenticity in queer porn. She argues that,

claims of “authenticity” go against the understandings of sexuality, queerness, and radicalism that lie beneath our work. The same is true for related words that I think we do manage to avoid, like “realistic,” “natural,” and “true.”

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<sup>50</sup> Courtney Trouble, “Mission,” Courtney Trouble’s NoFauxxx.com, accessed February 20, 2017, <http://indiepornrevolution.com/indie-porn/mission/>.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Tristan Taormino, Constance Penley, Celine Shimizu, Mireille Miller-Young, “Introduction: The Politics of Producing Pleasure” in *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure* (New York, NY: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013) 12. (emphasis mine).

<sup>53</sup> Shira Tarrant, *The Pornography Industry: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 171. (emphasis mine).

While Taormino et al. value authenticity, Houston seeks to queer the notion of authenticity altogether. Houston further explains:

The “authenticity” we do not truck in is the idea that there is a truth of every person’s sexuality and gender that we can all find if we search hard enough. We are not taking part in a race to realness, as if queers needed to occupy the land of the real that heteros have possessed for so long. Part of our joy in the work we do is the chaos we hope we’re throwing in the face of the idea that sexuality and gender are a fixed or predetermined inner essence.... Even if we did believe that we were witnessing something “authentic,” it would be incredibly naïve of us to try to “capture” this realness on *film*, a form that so clearly offers manipulated representations, not the “actual thing.”<sup>54</sup>

What we learn from Houston’s quote is that the notion of authenticity is not a suitable category for the retrieval and description of pornography. In other words, the realm of the authentic is a contested category: *authenticity is always queered*. If authenticity is found in feminist and queer pornography it is linked with *agency*. Houston closes her article with the following goal: “The intention of Pink and White Productions it to help people transform their authentic selves and how they experience authentic sexuality and gender.”<sup>55</sup> While Taormino et al. are interested in creating authentic feminist and queer pornography, Houston is interested in creating a space for authentic feminist and queer viewership: *feminist and queer agency*.

Professor Jane Ward’s “Queer Feminist Pigs: A Spectator’s Manifesta,” distinguishes feminist approaches to sexual desire from queer approaches to sexual desire:

[F]eminist approaches to sexuality privilege women’s genuine desires and experiences, but it does so without much critical reflection on who we think women are, and how they come to desire what they do.

In contrast, queer approaches to sexuality—at least those informed by queer theory—are not likely to take the gender binary or the pursuit of genuineness so seriously.... The beauty of queer desire is precisely that it is unpredictable,

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<sup>54</sup> Shine Louise Houston, “Might Real” in *Porn After Porn: Contemporary Alternative Pornographies* (Mimesis International, 2014) 118.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

potentially unhinged from biological sex or even gender, and as such, difficult to commodify. A given viewer may have a vagina, but while watching porn, who knows what subjectivities may emerge... or what kind of imagery this viewer might enjoy[?]. Sure, market research may indicate that women do, in fact, have group preferences (for deeper plot narratives, close-ups of female orgasms, and so on), but even these “feminist” preferences have been marketed to us, and arguably mirror simplistic cultural constructions of femininity....<sup>56</sup>

For Ward, feminist approaches are uncritical, unreflexive, and assume heteronormative gender binarisms, while queer approaches are constantly negotiating gender space and anatomical space concerning sexuality. Thus, in her contribution to the *Feminist Porn Book*, Ward prioritizes queer maneuverability and essentializes feminism. We should take Ward to task for essentializing feminism, nevertheless her critique of “imagery already stamped with the queer seal of approval”<sup>57</sup> – or what I have referred to as sanctioned modes of queer pornographic and feminist pornographic expression – is an important critique of the institutional boundaries of queer and feminist pornography. Ward, in fact, finds merit in arousal in mainstream pornography. She asks a series of important questions:

How, precisely, do we watch mainstream porn *queerly* (other than simply being queer ourselves, or having queer sex during or after our viewing)? Can we watch sexist porn and still have feminist orgasms? In sum, does it matter how we relate to our less-than-praise-worthy desires, or does the “anything that gets you off” principle ultimately trump everything else?<sup>58</sup>

Ward calls for a “*queer pornographic spectatorship*”<sup>59</sup> that relies on the agency of queer viewing rather than institutionally sanctioned queer (feminist) pornography. These issues are relevant to

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<sup>56</sup> Jane Ward, “Queer Feminist Pigs: A Spectator’s Manifesta” in *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure* (New York, NY: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013) 135.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

understanding and complicating categorization and information retrieval. This claim will be further corroborated in the conclusion of this thesis.

### *FPA's Regulation of Queer Subjectivity*

In this section I will be subdividing the FPA's categorical genres into three lists. Firstly LGBTQ, categories that pertain to the sexual interests of those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. Secondly, heteronormative, categories that pertain to the sexual interests of heterosexual people. Lastly, intersectional categories that can be understood as pertaining to the interests of LGBTQ and heterosexual persons. Analyzing genre categories sanctioned by the FPAs will further the understanding of their ideology as an institution and its relation to queer subjectivity.

#### *—Categories that pertain to LGBTQ sexual interest*

- Bisexual
- Butch
- Femme
- Lesbian
- Queer
- Trans

#### *—Categories that pertain to heteronormative sexual interest*

- Straight

#### *—Intersectional categories*

- Anal
- Big Budget
- Bondage and Kink
- Educational
- Female Director
- For Couples
- Group Sex
- Independent

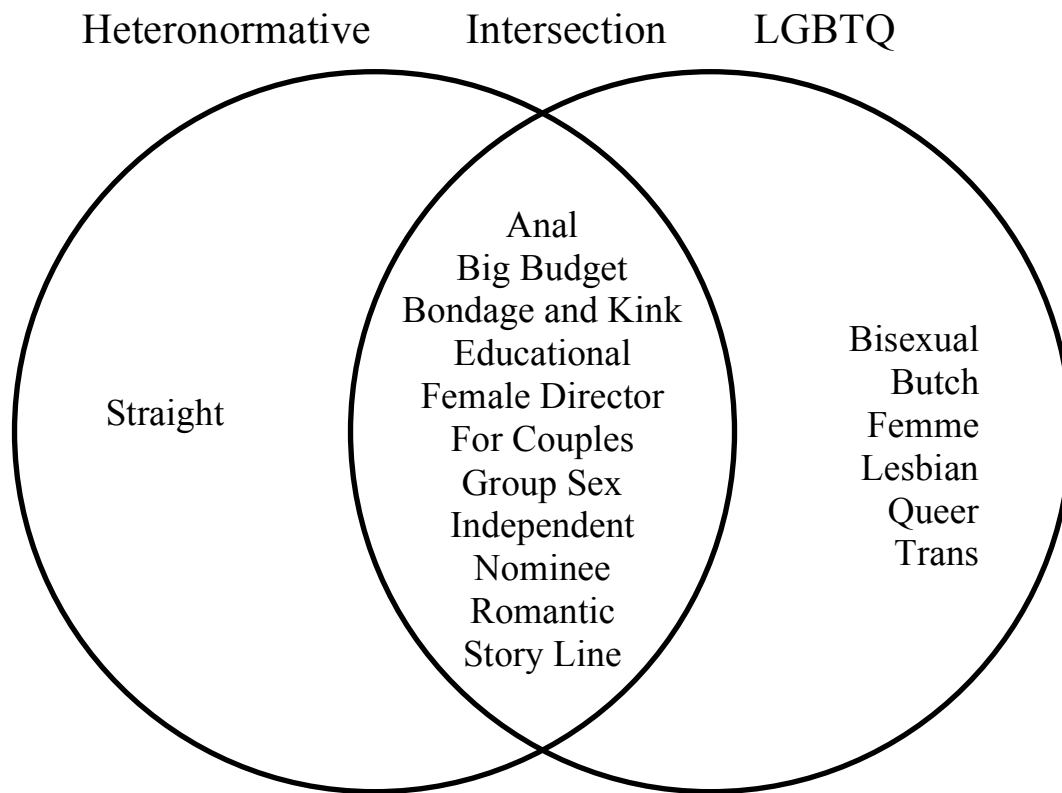
- Nominee
- Romantic
- Story Line

The LGBTQ categories are notable because the “G” (gay) is excluded.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the categories butch and femme are included. Butch generally refers to a particular form of gendered lesbianism, while femme can either refer to a particular expression of gendered lesbianism or a form of queer male subjectivity. The second category, heteronormative, is represented explicitly by only one genre: straight. Finally, there is a group of categories that can pertain to LGBTQ and heteronormative subjectivities. Ironically, this liminal intersectional overlap *is a queer space*: it queers the boundaries between heteronormative and LGBTQ desire. Thus, the Feminist Porn Awards has invested in it an embedded queer space within the confines of its institution.

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<sup>60</sup> Perhaps the “G” is left out due to the mainstreaming and normalization of *homonormativity* in pornography.





*Figure 1: Feminist Porn Awards*

## *Comparing Notes*

### *Feminist Pornography Defined*

As both an established and emerging genre of pornography, feminist porn uses sexually explicit imagery to contest and complicate dominant representations of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, ability, age, body type, and other identity markers. It explores concepts of desire, agency, power, beauty, and pleasure within and across inequality, in the face of injustice, and against the limits of gender hierarchy and both heteronormativity and homonormativity. It seeks to unsettle conventional definitions of sex, and expand the language of sex as an erotic activity, an expression of identity, a power exchange, a cultural commodity, and even a new politics. Feminist porn creates alternative images and develops its own aesthetics and iconography to expand established sexual norms and discourses.

### *Queer Pornography Defined*

[Queer] porn includes a mix of gender identities in a given film or episode. Any number of expressions can be present including transwomen, transmen, cisgender women, cisgender men, dyke couples, gay couples, bisexuals, femmes, butches, genderqueer people, and many more. The emphasis in queer porn is authentic desire and sexual representation; thus there tends to be diversity in body size, abilities, sex acts, kink, people of color, as well as the level of performers' experience—meaning there is professional and amateur crossover.

What these two definitions explicitly have in common is their goal to represent a multiplicity of genders, sexualities, racial identities, ethnicities, abilities, and body types; however, this specific definition of queer pornography spells out specific gender identities and feminist pornography includes an explicit aim to complicate the portrayal of age in mainstream porn. While the definition of feminist pornography plainly speaks to contesting agency and power, we can infer that the same contestation is implied in the definition of queer pornography through the professional and amateur performer crossover. Though the tenets of feminist pornography and queer pornography as stated here are similar, the values and ideologies of feminism and queer subjectivity are not identical. These two categories are in fact nearly synonymous. If there is a difference, the difference is rooted in two disparate ideological

positionalities: how feminists and queer people think in isolation from one another. Nevertheless, they do have a certain congruency. Despite these complications, they are remarkably analogous in their descriptions. Advocates of queer pornography and feminist pornography are fellow travelers with similar goals but from different positionalities; or as Jane Ward believes, there is a “gulf between feminist and queer approaches to sexuality.”<sup>61</sup> Although there are differences, a “gulf” seems overstated to me. I glean from the source theorists and foundational texts that the main goal of feminist pornography and queer pornography is not simply to offer an alternative to mainstream pornography, but to alter mainstream pornography toward a more ethical and more inclusive institution, opening consumers of pornography worldwide to a greater variety of sexual identities and practices, and ultimately normalizing them.

### **CONTENT ANALYSIS: FEMINIST AND QUEER PORNOGRAPHY STUDIOS**

The following section will present the data collected from the websites of feminist and queer pornography production studios. Each studio is featured on either the FPA site or PinkLabel.tv. In addition to their inclusion on the FPAs and PinkLabel.tv, each studio has their own independent website that allows for them to elaborate their aboutness beyond the confines of their institutional hosts. Each studio represents a collective where sanctioned authorities, directors, and performers produce pornographic films. The “About” page of each studio’s website tells us how the studio operates, the purpose it serves, and the audience it aims to target. Whoever has control over the studio yields at least some power over the greater landscape of feminist and queer pornography and therefore makes decisions about how the content is presented and described. The content is held up against the tenets outlined in the definitions of

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 134.

feminist and queer pornography—in other words, I will interrogate whether or not the studio explicitly or implicitly denotes the following on their website.<sup>62</sup>

- Ethical Work Practices
- “Sex Positivity”<sup>63</sup>
- Complicates dominant representations of gender
- Complicates dominant representations of race and ethnicity
- Complicates dominant representations of beauty and body type
- Complicates dominant representations of sexuality
- Assumes a plurality of female (and other) viewers with many different preferences
- Depicts realistic pleasure
- Directors and performers collaborate
- Invokes resistance, intervention, and change

This analysis will demonstrate to what degree each studio represents the ethos of feminist and queer pornography.

### *Bright Desire*

Female-operated studio Bright Desire hosts films that aspire “to move beyond the old clichés, boundaries and negativity of standard, old-style pornography and to offer something,

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<sup>62</sup> See Appendix 1: Analysis of Studios.

<sup>63</sup> This thesis assumes the definition of “sex positive” by two definitions by sexologist Carol Queen. First definition: “*Sex-positive*, a term that’s coming into cultural awareness, isn’t a dippy love-child celebration of orgone – it’s a simple yet radical affirmation that we each grow our own passions on a different medium, that instead of having two or three or even half a dozen sexual orientations, we should be thinking in terms of millions. ‘Sex-positive’ respects each of our unique sexual profiles, even as we acknowledge that some of us have been damaged by a culture that tries to eradicate sexual difference and possibility.” Carol Queen, *Real Live Nude Girl: Chronicles of Sex-Positive Culture* (Pittsburgh: Cleis Press Inc., 1997), xvii. Second definition: “It’s the cultural philosophy that understands sexuality as a *potentially* positive force in one’s life, and it can, of course, be contrasted with sex-negativity, which sees sex as problematic, disruptive, dangerous. Sex-positivity allows for and in fact celebrates sexual diversity, differing desires and relationships structures, and individual choices based on consent.” Carol Queen and Lynn Comella, “The Necessary Revolution: Sex-Positive Feminism in the Post-Barnard Era,” *The Communication Review* 11, no. 3 (2008): 274-91.

fresh, inclusive, and intelligent.”<sup>64</sup> While Bright Desire’s content moves beyond some boundaries intended to be breached by feminist and queer porn, it falls short in other areas of criteria. The films predominantly feature real-life heterosexual couples, citing its difference from mainstream pornography:

[Bright Desire] doesn’t conform to the usual traditions of mainstream porn. The videos celebrate the good stuff about sex: connection, intimacy, fantasy, laughter, and real pleasure.<sup>65</sup>

Bright Desire’s creator, Ms. Naughty, a self-described feminist works in collaboration with the performers, thus highlighting a subscription to one of the main tenets of what makes viable feminist and queer pornography. While the studio’s main focus is on heterosexual couples, Bright Desire includes some content featuring same-sex couples and trans identifying performers. The About section does not explicitly state a mission to include diversity in race and ethnicity or alternative representations of beauty and body type. It is inconsistent with the tenets set out by the definitions of feminist and queer pornography highlighted by the observation that the majority of the performers depicted are white (only two of the twenty-five films feature performers of color), able-bodied, and adhere to conventional beauty standards (the female performers are thin and shaven, while the male performers appear muscular and well-groomed). While Bright Desire does not explicitly speak to every tenant of what makes their films “feminist” or “queer,” the studio is a recipient of a FPA (“Honored Website”), thus we may glean that despite their omission of *all* criteria in their “About” page that Bright Desire upholds the institutional standards set out by the FPAs.

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<sup>64</sup> Author Unknown, “Bright Desire,” The Feminist Porn Awards, accessed February 26, 2017, <http://www.feministpornawards.com/bright-desire/>.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

### *XConfessions*

Founded by self-described “sex-positive feminist” and filmmaker Ericka Lust, XConfessions produces films “displaying a huge variety of situations, characters, fetishes, and ways of having sex.”<sup>66</sup> Lust collaborates with primarily women based film crew and her performers creating films that depict “real sex” that assumes of plurality of viewers: “It’s adult cinema by and for them entirely!”<sup>67</sup> XConfessions provides a drop down menu that allows viewers to explore the plurality of identities depicted in Lust’s films. While the performers reflect a diversity in gender expression and sexual orientation, seven of the 109 of the profiled performers are people of color and with exception of two or three performers, conventional beauty standards are predominantly reflected.<sup>68</sup> XConfessions is a FPA’s “Honored Website” (2015) and their content is hosted on PinkLabel.tv, this finding asserts that the studio adheres to the content standards of both institutions.

### *Pink and White Productions*

Based in San Francisco, Pink and White Productions was established in 2005 by filmmaker Shine Louise Houston, founder of PinkLabel.tv. Described as “The Hot Bed of Queer Sexual Cinema,”<sup>69</sup> Pink and White Productions is best known for their film series *The Crash Pad*

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<sup>66</sup> Erika Lust, “About,” XConfessions, accessed February 26, 2017, <http://xconfessions.com/about-xconfessions/>.

<sup>67</sup> Author Unknown, “Erika Lust,” PinkLabel.tv, accessed February 26, 2017, <http://www.pinklabel.tv/on-demand/studio/erika-lust/>.

<sup>68</sup> Erika Lust, “Performers Archive,” XConfessions, accessed February 26, 2017, <http://xconfessions.com/performers/>.

<sup>69</sup> Author Unknown, “Pink and White Productions,” PinkLabel.tv, accessed February 26, 2017, <http://www.pinklabel.tv/on-demand/studio/pink-and-white-productions/>.

that purports to represent “authentic female and queer sexuality.”<sup>70</sup> On the Crash Pad Series website a quote from Houston strikes the center of the about page: “I believe there is a lot of room and need to create adult content that’s real, that’s respectful and powerful... I think it’s the perfect place to become political. It’s a place where money, sex, media, and ethics converge.”<sup>71</sup>

What distinguishes Pink and White Productions from other studios presented in this analysis is that they explicitly outline their values and methodology in what goes in to their products, painstakingly detailing exactly how they make their pornography. Their “About” page explicates what goes on behind the scenes: casting, performer agency and consent, sexual health, and equal pay. Their casting section reads:

we feature people of many genders and sexualities, as well as diverse ethnicities, body types and abilities, and experiences (such as amateur or professional). Browsing our Stars page, you'll find queer women (cis and trans) as well as trans men, cisgender men, genderqueer and other gender-variant people; performers who are femme, butch, or other gender expressions; people of color; people of differing abilities; people who are fat, thin, athletic, and/or otherwise; people aged 18 to over 50; people with and without tattoos or piercings; and more. Casting priority is placed upon Bay Area-based couples, play-partners, friends with benefits, and mutual crushes. If you don't see yourself represented... we encourage you to apply!<sup>72</sup>

Pink and White Productions defines performer and agency consent:

We collaborate with performers to shoot based on how they'd like to be presented. Performers come up with the episode plot (to ad-lib a script, or skip straight to the sex), and negotiate boundaries to decide on mutually consensual actions prior to filming, informing the crew of what they would like to do. If you see a sex act on the site, it's because the performers wanted to do it and the crew consented to film it.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Author Unknown, “The Crash Pad Series,” The Crash Pad Series, accessed February 20, 2017, <https://crashpadseries.com/>.

<sup>71</sup> Author Unknown, “About CrashPadSeries,” The Crash Pad Series, accessed February 26, 2017, <https://crashpadseries.com/queer-porn/crashpadseries/>.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

Their views on sexual health are described:

There are three key components of sexual health: Barriers, Testing, and Communication.

Safer sex is risk-aware, consensual sex. (See our Sexual Health and Resources page for more info.) We encourage industry standard STI testing within 14 days of the shoot, and the use of fluid barriers such as condoms, gloves, and dental dams. We also recognize that many of our performers are fluid-bonded partners and are people who are capable of assessing their own sexual health needs. As such, performers have the right to perform as feels safest to them, and performers are responsible for their own sexual health.<sup>74</sup>

Lastly, they explain their “Equal Pay” practices:

For CrashPadSeries.com, we pay an equal, flat model fee regardless of gender, porn experience, how naked you want to get, or what kind of sex you choose to do on set. Our current payment is \$600 for a full day (7 hours plus lunch) or \$400 for a half day (3 hours). (Full days involve scripted dialogue and are only cast with performers who have previously shot a half-day with us.) Sex scenes for either day are shot for approximately 30-45 minutes, depending on how long performers want to go at it.<sup>75</sup>

Pink and White Productions appears to cater toward an audience comprised of what they describe as “queers/women.” While Pink and White Productions does not explicitly describe their practices as “sex positive” viewers can infer that they partake in sex positive culture through their emphasis on mutual consent and establishing sexual boundaries. Unlike other studios in this analysis they emphasize sexual health for their performers and provide educational resources on their website for their viewers. Pink and White Productions also emphasizes the recruitment of consumers who wish to have pornography that represents their idiosyncratic sexual subjectivity: “If you don't see yourself represented... we encourage you to apply!”<sup>76</sup> They pride themselves in hitting every mark of their own tenets which happen to coincide with the tenets of feminist and queer pornography.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.



### *Handbasket Productions*

Handbasket Productions is one of many studios presented in this analysis with a platform on PinkLabel.tv. They view their work as a site to fill gaps in representations not commonly found in mainstream pornography. Handbasket Productions describes their mission:

With our porn we strive to create hot and authentic depictions of the diversity of queer and trans people's sexuality. We are committed to creating portrayals of sexuality that centralize trans, queer and polyamorous experience (rather than otherizing it). For us porn is a hot and fun way to explore a wide range of issues, broaden minds, and create an inclusive cultural space.... Throughout our work we strive to provide diverse representations of individuals and realistic characters....<sup>77</sup>

Handbasket Products places its core value in queer representation, while many of the tenets of queer and feminist pornography are not made explicit through their internet presence, tenets such as sex positivity and invocation of resistance, intervention, and change can be read between the lines of their description. Their site fails to address their work practices regarding ethics and collaboration with performers, however we can surmise that since Handbasket Productions hosts their videos on the self-proclaimed "fair trade" site PinkLabel.tv, that they partake in ethical work practices.

### *Spark Erotic*

Founded in 2015 by Urvashi, Kama, and Cortez, Colorado-based film studio Spark Erotic strives for "emphasizing cinematic quality and ethical sexuality."<sup>78</sup> Their logo embedded at the top of each page of their website depicts a white muscular man caressing a thin white woman. Spark Erotic caters to a heterosexual audience, featuring videos of couples of the opposite sex (they provide no indication on whether their performers are "real life" couples or not). The most

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<sup>77</sup> Author Unknown, "About Us," Handbasket Productions, accessed March 1, 2017, <http://handbasketproductions.com/about-us/>.

<sup>78</sup> Author Unknown, "Spark Erotic," PinkLabel.tv, accessed March 1, 2017, <http://www.pinklabel.tv/on-demand/studio/spark-erotic/>.

distinguishable trait of their studio is their implementation and emphasis of the term “erotica.”

Spark Erotic’s “Vision” explains their dedication to the use of erotica versus pornography:

The Greek root "porneia" is best translated as "sexual immorality" and is most accurately applied to things such as rape, incest, bestiality, etc.

Pornography, therefore, means truly obscene writings, drawings, photography and film about these topics. In other words - bad things with no artistic value.

Erotica, in contrast, is "Literature or art intended to arouse sexual desire." We're all for the power and passion of sexual desire between people enjoying themselves.

Based on the above definitions we do not intend to produce any immoral or obscene content without artistic value. We cannot, therefore, call our work pornography, but we are proud to call our art Erotica.<sup>79</sup>

What makes this finding particularly interesting is that on one hand they are unwilling to describe their work as pornography and on the other, they are willing to host their content on PinkLabel.tv which explicitly provides “Queer, Feminist Porn On Demand.” Furthermore, beyond PinkLabel.tv’s description of Spark Erotic’s “ethical sexuality,” Spark Erotic’s website does not infer implementing ethical work practices, invoke sex positivity, mention a goal toward expanding representations of gender or sexuality, whether or not their videos are made by or for women, only a single performer featured is a person of color (a black man), and each performer represents conventional beauty standards. These findings beg the question: what makes Spark Erotic feminist or queer?

### *Petra Joy*

Petra Joy is a self-described “sex-positive” artist who has been making films since 2004 through her self-titled studio petrajoy.com. She takes pride in her choice to feature and

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<sup>79</sup> Author Unknown, “Vision,” Spark Erotic, accessed March 1, 2017, <https://sparkerotic.com/vision/>.

collaborate with female performers of varying body types. Joy uses the terms erotic-films and pornography interchangeably when describing her work which places emphasis on *female pleasure*:

The focus of my erotic films is female pleasure. I would like to empower the women who appear [in] and the women who view my films to experience their own personal pleasures away from the stereotypes of female sexuality in mainstream porn.... I feel the need to create an alternative to the flood of images that distort female sexuality and reduce women to their genitals.<sup>80</sup>

Unlike other studios, Joy emphasizes sex rather than gender in describing her audiences and her work. By focusing on *female pleasure* rather than *women's pleasure* Joy excludes the subjectivities of trans women as subjects; not necessarily because she has an interest in excluding trans subjectivities, rather she has an invested interest in *female subjectivities*. Furthermore, she emphasizes casting men based on their capacity to pleasure women, rather than their physical features or the size of their genitals. In other words, the quality of masculine sexual performativity has priority over traditional form of objectivity (for example, penis size). On Joy's website she presents a five-fold mission statement:

1. I am a sex-positive artist
2. My porn centers on female pleasure
3. I make pleasurable, ethical porn
4. I believe in female-focused porn can make a difference
5. I will not make porn that goes beyond these limits

These five tenets represent Joy's ideologies. While most of them stand on their own and need no further elaboration, tenet two—porn that focuses on *female pleasure*—is further elaborated: "I also like to show men as objects of female sexual desire."<sup>81</sup> To imagine men as objects is a reversal of the history of sexual subjectivities; Joy places herself as female subject and places

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<sup>80</sup> Author Unknown, "Petra Joy," PinkLabel.tv, accessed March 3, 2017, <http://www.pinklabel.tv/on-demand/studio/petra-joy/>.

<sup>81</sup> Petra Joy, "About Petra," Petra Joy, accessed March 3, 2017, <http://www.pinklabel.tv/on-demand/studio/petra-joy/>.

men as her sexual objects of gratification. Furthermore, Joy shows alternative modes of heterosexuality that have not been historically experienced as heteronormative, thus the receptivity of anal play in a heterosexual context queers the possibilities between heterosexual sex and heteronormative sex. Finally, she seeks to normalize the bisexual male open to male and female receptivity. Joy further qualifies tenet five—"I will not make porn that goes beyond these limits"—with the following elaboration: "I choose not to portray any sexual actions that many women experience as degrading such as forced fellatio, extreme anal sex and cum shots into the woman's face."<sup>82</sup> These acts are seen as clichés of the heteronormative mainstream desires of men. They are humiliating to many women (but certainly not all, as Jane Ward posits) and therefore, would not be experienced as erotic and desirable to many women. Joy is interested specifically in female subjectivity at the heart of her portrayal of the erotic. Petrajoy.com offers a variety of heterosexual, bisexual, and lesbian films. She is the recipient of numerous FPAs and her work is featured on PinkLabel.tv.

### *Foxhouse Films*

Founded in 2014, Foxhouse Films promotes pornographic films that depict a multiplicity of genders and sexual orientations. On their About page they describe themselves and their mission:

Foxhouse presents a variety of sexual orientations, gender identities and erotic scenarios, unveiling each interaction with authenticity. Foxhouse is a female owned company that takes a feminist approach to capturing hot sex and real desires by showcasing scenes which are collaboratively created by our polysexual and multigendered performers. We aim to exhibit innovative and provocative content that is not commonly seen elsewhere.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Author Unknown, "About," Foxhouse Films, accessed March 5, 2017, <http://www.foxhousefilms.com/about-foxhouse-films/>.

Their mission is supported by their cast which features people of color, trans persons, and body type diversity. When Foxhouse claims to take a “feminist approach” they are not specific about what a feminist approach is or can be. Nevertheless, if garden variety feminism favors equality between the genders, then Foxhouse tends to abide by those principles. Furthermore, while their site omits an inference to ethical labor practices, their affiliation with PinkLabel.tv gives them the queer and feminist stamp of approval.

### *Lightsouthern*

Australian woman Michelle Flynn founded Lightsouthern in 2011 with a mission to celebrate sexuality. Flynn describes Lightsouthern’s work practices and aims:

We work with ethical and professional operators who want to create something exciting and meaningful that is also popular and cutting edge... We make an industry-leading, award winning product that will change your mind as to what is possible in the adult industry.

We have clear policies about our expectations and their roles. We have set a standard for ourselves of what a model should expect from the industry. We want them to feel safe, creative, valued, happy, comfortable and exhilarated. We want them to have an enjoyable experience and be part of something special which they can be proud of. Just what we would want if we were models. Because we have superior communication with our models we are able to produce quality product that goes on to ‘tell a story’ of women who feel good about themselves. So you end up with a product unlike any other.<sup>84</sup>

While Lightsouthern measures up to the queer and feminist pornography protocol for ethical labor practices and creator-performer collaboration, their performers miss the mark with regard to complicating dominant race and ethnic representations and complicating dominant representations of beauty and body type. While they feature same-sex couples in their videos,

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<sup>84</sup> Author Unknown, “Lightsouthern,” PinkLabel.tv, accessed March 5, 2017, <http://www.pinklabel.tv/on-demand/studio/lightsouthern/>.

every cast member featured on their website is youthful, white, and possesses a conventionally attractive body type. Despite these omissions, Lightsouthern is still sanctioned by PinkLabel.tv.

### *Permission 4 Pleasure*

Inspired by Petra Joy, Morgana Muses founded Permission 4 Pleasure in 2015 with a goal to bring authentic representations of sexuality and pleasure to the screen. Muses specifically aims to celebrate “age positivity,” citing that her personal journey toward sexual self-discovery began at the age of forty-seven. Much of her work is inspired by her own journey and she states in her website’s section “Morgana’s Message.”

I want my films to act as a reminder to myself and others that there is no expiration date on our sexual pleasure and journey.

I hope to provide a voice and encouragement, to give ourselves permission to pursue and explore pleasure, that we are all deserving and entitled to... without shame, guilt, ridicule and judgement attached.<sup>85</sup>

Permission 4 Pleasure remains the sole studio represented in this analysis that specifically addresses representations of age in pornography. Many of her films feature herself as subject, exploring same sex scenarios, bondage and kink, and other forms of sexual alterity. This is a distinguishable feature from other studios analyzed in this thesis since—while they depict a multitude of sexual subjectivities, genders, and expressions—few feature women of Muses’ age group. Thus her work explicitly complicates dominant representations of age in pornography. Additionally, her co-stars are diverse in age, sexual orientation, gender, and body type. Furthermore, Muses dedicates a page to her idiosyncratic definition of feminist pornography:

[I]f a woman with feminist ideological background (probably sex positive) wants to write, direct and produce a video of herself being subjected to extreme BDSM (as we have done here at p4p) then that work is feminist. You can debate it and

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<sup>85</sup> Morgana Muses, “Morgana’s Message,” Permission 4 Pleasure, accessed March 6, 2017, <https://permission4pleasure.com/my-message/>.

tell her she only made that video because- patriarchy but ultimately if we use artist intent as the bar for critique then certainly porn can be feminist.

Ultimately, porn and pornographic material as well as sex work are a healthy, normal part of life. We (and many others) just want to make sure there are standards applied for safe, consensual, non-exploitative work environments so that consumers and workers alike can choose content that matches just some basic ethical standards that we expect in most other facets of life.<sup>86</sup>

For Muses, feminism and feminist pornography gives idiosyncratic agency to women from a variety of artistic intentions; for her, viewing and creating pornography from the point of view of a feminist makes feminist pornography, whatever their sexual desires may be. Like the FPAs and PinkLabel.tv she places emphasis on sex positivity, ethical standards, and non-exploitative images as a benchmark of feminist pornography.

### *Lucie makes Porn*

Luciemakesporn.com is solely operated by the twenty-eight-year-old self-described feminist porn maker, Lucie Blush. Her films portray sex acts experienced by a variety of genders, races and ethnicities, sexual orientations, and body types. Many of her films also depict women pleasuring themselves without a partner. Blush aims to “make better porn, and make it more accessible to everybody, especially women, and men who are looking for good content they can actually relate to.”<sup>87</sup> Like Morgana Muses’ Permission 4 Pleasure, Blush also states her idiosyncratic definition of feminist porn:

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<sup>86</sup> Morgana Muses, “What is sex positive porn?,” Permission 4 Pleasure, accessed March 6, 2017, <https://permission4pleasure.com/sex-positive-porn-aka-ethical-porn-feminist-porn-alt-porn/>. (Grammatical errors in the original text.)

<sup>87</sup> Lucie Blush, “About,” Lucie Makes Porn, accessed March 7, 2017, <https://www.luciemakesporn.com/about>.

Feminist porn is a kind of porn that respects the actors, the characters, and the audience. It includes good work environment and a constant search for pleasure, for everybody, equal pay and a constant search for real pleasure, for everybody.<sup>88</sup>

While she does not explicitly invoke queerness in her descriptions, the queer is implicitly represented by the variety of subjectivities featured in her films. Blush is the recipient of an FPA and her videos are hosted on PinkLabel.tv.

### *AORTA Films*

Established in 2015 by Mahx Capacity, Parts Authority, and Ginny Woolf, AORTA films produces “queer/feminist” films. The underlying goal of the studio...

...seeks to create ethical, lusty, heartfelt content that disrupts boundaries and glitches desire. Working out of DIY and experimental performance contexts, they are interested in creating content that centers performers across a wide range of bodies, genders, races, and identities. They work collaboratively, prioritizing safe and enthusiastically consensual creative processes, and are obsessed with creating aesthetics and narratives that explode with destabilizing pleasure.<sup>89</sup>

Their mission is evident and upheld through the representation of a diverse array of performers and sexual practices depicted in their films. A unique component of AORTA films’ description is their use of the term “queer/feminist” to describe their content, this finding further bolsters a thesis posited in this thesis that queer and feminist pornography are synonymous. Their first feature film *The OH Files* is distributed on PinkLabel.tv.

### *QueerPorn.tv*

Owned and operated by the aforementioned queer performer and producer Courtney Trouble, QueerPorn.tv touts itself as an “inclusive space” hosting a wide variety of queer

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Author Unknown, “About,” AORTA films, accessed March 7, 2017, <http://www.aortafilms.com/about/>.



pornography exclusively made by Trouble. On a tab titled “Manifesto” Trouble and QueerPorn.tv co-founder Tina Horn outline their mission:

- QueerPorn.TV is hardcore sex positivity, public access to the sexual underground.
- QueerPorn.TV is queer porn made by and for queer people (and the porn fans who love us!)
- QueerPorn.TV facilitates spontaneous, nasty sexuality with a transparent sleaze that boldly proclaims we are not ashamed of our identities and desires
- QueerPorn.TV is a culture force in and of itself in addition to documenting expressions of the freedoms associated with queer sex
- QueerPorn.TV does not say what is and is not sex, what is and is not hot, and what is and is not queer.
- We intend to showcase sex that people want to perform as opposed to the sex that we expect audiences wants to see. This project is intended to be a documentation of exhibitionist queers having a great time.
- QueerPorn.TV brings porn off the screen and into the community, by hosting dance clubs, film screenings, photo booths, and play parties all over the world. Bringing queer people together to celebrate sexuality and talk about porn.<sup>90</sup>

Manifestos in their nature are politically charged records, thus we can infer that QueerPorn.tv views itself as a site for resistance, intervention, and change, challenging the tropes of mainstream pornography. Their manifesto fails to address representations of multiple subjectivities, but that gap is filled in their site’s “Queer Porn Stars” section which depicts a distinct emphasis on diversity in gender, sexuality, experience, race and ethnicity, and body type. As I have challenged in prior sections of my research, Trouble’s work muddles the synonymous nature of feminist and queer pornography. However, as I have previously mentioned, though Trouble claims that her work does not address issues of feminism, she has nevertheless accepted numerous Feminist Porn Awards and is often cited as a pioneer of feminist pornography.

*NoFauxxx.com (Indie Porn Revolution)*

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<sup>90</sup> Courtney Trouble and Tina Horn, “Manifesto,” Queer Porn TV, November, 2010, accessed March 7, 2017, <http://queerporn.tv/wp/manifesto>.

NoFauxxx.com (which redirects to IndiePornRevolution.com) is another brainchild of Courtney Trouble. The site asserts itself as the longest running “indie queer” porn site on the web, further stating that NoFauxxx.com: “began as a small personal project, and became a legend when friends, media, and the adult industry took notice... and to this date the only porn site to mix alt, gay, lesbian, straight, trans, kink, bbw<sup>91</sup> genres into one common site.”<sup>92</sup> Like her other studio, QueerPorn.tv, Trouble provides a mission statement on NoFauxxx.com:

This is what we stand for.

**Arousal.** Our first priority is turning ourselves, and you the viewer, on. This is the purpose of porn, and we will not sacrifice arousal despite our crafty attitudes, alternative lifestyles, or political ideas.

**An all-inclusive casting attitude.** We draw from many sources to create a community of varied identities. We do not take gender, size, race, or any other “consideration” into consideration when choosing our models. We do not have quotas or any ideals about what a porn star should look like. Additionally, we do not separate the girls from the boys on our site, as many of our models fall somewhere in between.

**High Art.** We believe that the arousal factor in porn goes up a big deal when the porn is artistic, and we strive to produce the highest quality photos and videos while maintaining our “D.I.Y” [*sic*] aesthetic.

**Accessibility.** We strive to keep our membership fees and products as low as possible to ensure that people from all classes can participate in our site. We also believe in the barter system in all aspects of our work.

**Safer sex and consent.** We use condoms, latex gloves, and other safer sex supplies for the majority of our work, in order to eroticize and normalise the use of safer sex supplies in our true sex lives. We believe all performers in the adult industry have the right to use safer sex supplies. In addition, we strongly believe in mutual consent between models, as well as producers and directors. Most of the shoots on the site are directed by the models themselves, and some are even self-shot.

**Breaking stereotypes.** Many of the visual themes and sub-contexts within our photo sets and videos represent a break from the “norm,” allowing type-cast individuals to redefine their roles in the adult industry as well as in life.

**A female-friendly perspective.** The site is run by a woman, and most of our

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<sup>91</sup> Big beautiful women.

<sup>92</sup> Courtney Trouble, “Mission,” Courtney Trouble’s NoFauxxx.com, accessed March 9, 2017, <http://indiepornrevolution.com/indie-porn/mission/>.

guest photographers are also female. We believe feminists can make pornography, perform in pornography, view pornography, and enjoy pornography as artists, workers, participants, and consumers.

A worker-friendly perspective. Many of our performers and fans work in the sex industry, and we support them.

**Trans-friendly.** We believe that, for many people, genitals have nothing to do with gender or gender expression. We do have many trans and genderqueer models, and we ask that you respect them by referring to them by their preferred pronouns (“he”, “she”, or “ze” are the most common, and it will be specified in the model’s bio) if you’re blessed with the chance to interact with them on our message boards or through other means. If there are ANY reports of abuse or disrespect to ANY model for ANY reason, action will be taken to remove you from the message boards, and if necessary, the site. If you need more information about gender issues and language use, please check out this link or this link.<sup>93</sup>

**Respectful.** We do what we can to support the activists who fight for awareness of cultural appropriation. This is why you will have a hard time finding mohawks, dreadlocks, or any fad-like cultural style which doesn’t come from a genuine participation or deep knowledge/respect for the culture it’s borrowed from. We aren’t perfect here, but we do try to put thought into our porn & who it might disrespect.<sup>94</sup>

Like Petra Joy, one of the glaring distinctions in NoFauxx’s mission is the inclusion of the tenet “A female-friendly perspective.” Here, Trouble is emphasizing sex rather than gender in describing her audiences, her work, and her definition of feminism. By highlighting a *female focus* Trouble obfuscates subjectivities of trans women as subjects; not necessarily because she has an interest in excluding trans subjectivities, rather she has an invested interest in *female subjectivities* as the subject of feminism. NoFauxxx.com is also equipped with a members area; due to the limitations of the research method implored in this study I was unable to interact with members, however Trouble explicates on her site what types of people and content available in NoFauxxx.com’s member section:

Soft core, pin up girls, black and white erotica, sensual shots.

Hard core, masturbation, role-playing, kink, and fetish.

Straight, lesbian, gay, queer, and bisexual couples and groups.

Girls, Boys, Transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, or gender-bending models.

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<sup>93</sup> Hyperlinks no longer available.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

Fat, thin, chubby, curvy, zaftig, short, tall, and athletic models.  
Models of all races, taken out of the stereotypical context models of color are usually assigned in the sex industry.  
Disabled and non-disabled folks.  
BDSM, bondage, SM, shown as a positive thing as opposed to scary, dangerous, or perverted. (And also maybe some really dark creepy stuff too...)  
Punks, goths, emo kids, hipsters, hippies, and other “alternative” models. We love tats and piercings here, but not all of our models have them and not all of our models adhere to any subculture.<sup>95</sup>

This list reflects NoFauxxx.com’s adherence to the tenets of feminist and queer pornography, explicating the variety of subjectivities depicted and interacting on the site. NoFauxxx.com was a 2014 FPA nominee.

*(See Appendix 1 on page 60)*

#### **CONTENT ANALYSIS: SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS**

My findings suggest that despite the strict tenets of feminist and queer pornography, the studios do not always adhere to every tenet as outlined by the FPAs and PinkLabel.tv. Nevertheless, there were two tenets that seemed remarkably underrepresented. Of the fourteen studios addressed I found, firstly, that only seven studios explicitly complicated dominant representations of race and ethnicity; and secondly, that only nine studios complicated dominant representations of beauty and body type. Of the fourteen studios, two of them (Lightsouthern and Spark Erotic) were the least compliant with the tenets of the FPAs. Nevertheless, the studios continue to be featured by the FPAs and their content hosted on PinkLabel.tv as models of their adherence to their descriptions of feminist and queer pornography. Thus, queer pornography and feminist pornography as institutionalized by the FPAs and PinkLabel.tv—though they serve as important pillars of sexual subjectivity in the twenty-first century—cannot be stable categories without also losing their ability to destabilize. Yet, the fact that the fourteen studios did not

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

always align themselves with institutionalized descriptions may represent transgression and fluidity of the categories themselves.

If stabilization were to occur then the term queer may become reified and lose its power to destabilize the very categories it is trying to complicate. In a footnote in Sharon Marcus' "Queer Theory for Everyone: A Review Essay" she explains:

It could be argued that by undermining gender as a stable category, queer theory undermines feminism, which depends on the concept of women. However, this fear is groundless, for two reasons. First, queer theory does not completely abandon the concept of gender.... Queer theory simply refuses the strict limits that heterosexism sets on the possible configurations of genders, bodies, and desires. Second, since feminism is by definition invested in changing women's social and political positions, the concept of woman on which feminism rests is mobile, not static, and thus not at risk from the kinds of plasticity that queer theory ascribes to gender.<sup>96</sup>

Marcus suggests strict limits are against queerness since queerness is invested in destabilizing the dominant culture; and since the concept of woman is being continually negotiated, the negotiation process itself *is* a queering, rendering the category unstable.

## **THE POLITICS OF DESCRIBING PLEASURE**

Now that I have analyzed the categories of feminist and queer pornography and their applied infrastructures (film studios and hosting sites), this section will serve to critique and expound on the implications of their boundaries, their influence on knowledge production, and the efficacy of the categories themselves for information studies and knowledge organization. I have learned that the sanctioned categories implemented by the Feminist Porn Awards and PinkLabel.tv are not necessarily the most popular, and that these sanctioned categories do not always comport with the desires of women and queer subjectivities. And still, these categories

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<sup>96</sup> Sharon Marcus, "Queer Theory for Everyone: A Review Essay" in *Signs* vol. 31, no. 1 (Autumn 2005): 200, note 9.

prescribe what people view and *how* they view and produce pornography. These limited prescriptive lists demonstrate a wielding of power from those in control of the vocabulary: the FPAs and Pinklabel.tv. Keilty provides an excellent example of the implications of Web 2.0 taxonomies in his study on Xtube.com:

[U]sers are not connected to their desires through categorization so much as their desires are already named, regulated, and stabilized in advance, along a coarse access of registers. Because the identity of their desires belongs within discernable boundaries, so too is the perception that desire is stable. Whether or not the desires transgress these boundaries, subjects are forced to choose from among the categories in order both to satisfy their desire and to name themselves to others as a desiring subject.

[C]ategories have come to constitute identities of desire—identities that allow one to belong to one group or another—but also the ways in which social relations—in this case, of conflict and power dynamics respectively—are wrapped up in eroticized categories. Thus, categories of desire allow access to one’s desires, regulate one’s desires, and reinscribe the very social organization that is necessary for both institutional access and belonging.<sup>97</sup>

Here Keilty speaks to a politics of prescribed nomenclature concerning the search for pornography. The prescribed categories are chosen by authorities and have an influence and impact on the subjectivity of the consumer. By limiting these categories, the FPAs and PinkLabel.tv (perhaps inadvertently) regulate the culture of queer and feminist pornography, favoring certain categories through their visibility while obfuscating other viable categories that seem to clearly fit within the realm of queer and feminist desire. (If not even ‘cunnilingus’ qualifies as a sanctioned category, what other categories are being ignored that pertain to the desires of viewers of queer and feminist porn?) These categories constitute a superstructural knowledge as the institutionalized pillars of feminist and queer pornography.

But how are these terms effective categories for users when other categories seem to be more efficacious? Can it be the case that the authorities are intentionally limiting the list so as to

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<sup>97</sup> Patrick Keilty, “Tabulating Queer: Space, Perversion, and Belonging” in *Knowledge Organization* 36(4) 2009: 247.

maintain control and therefore power over the terms and tenets of queer and feminist pornography? And why would authorities want to do that? I believe the impulse to maintain control over the terms ‘queer pornography’ and ‘feminist pornography’ is a result of a fear that these categories can be corrupted. In the following passage, genderqueer porn star Jiz Lee in their essay “Uncategorized” in the *Feminist Porn Book* explains the differences between categories in queer porn and mainstream porn:

Queer porn usually doesn’t tag like mainstream porn does, which is why that’s where I feel the most comfortable. A queer porn movie can have various porn scenes that include people who might be trans, femme, boi, fag, cisgender, queer, and more. The range of diverse representations is a lot greater than in mainstream productions; in queer works, you’ll find performers of all sizes, a higher percentage of people of color, and different displays of gender expression. There’s too much to categorize. Boxes fly out the window.<sup>98</sup>

On the one hand, Lee finds fascinating the multiplicity of folksonomies by users to tag videos and images, while on the other hand they acknowledge that the overabundance of terminology in queer pornography has the potential to obfuscate more than clarify. Or as Adler reminds us: “it would be a logistical nightmare to try to keep up with changes in terminologies, as demonstrated by the evolution of the category ‘transgender.’”<sup>99</sup> By extension the plurality of queer terminology can muddy the process of information retrieval and categorization.

We can imagine that by creating a record of queer and feminist subjectivity in pornography, that these categories will transform and that new categories will emerge and displace queer and feminist pornography as broad-brushed blanket categories during future transformations. In other words, the implications of cataloging and classifying feminist and queer

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<sup>98</sup> Jiz Lee, “Uncategorized” in *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure* (New York, NY: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2013) 135.

<sup>99</sup> Melissa Adler, “Transcending Library Catalogs: A Comparative Study of Controlled Terms in Library of Congress Subject Headings and User-Generated Tags in LibraryThing for Transgender Books” in *Journal of Web Librarianship* 3(4) (2009): 327.

pornographies are capturing a snapshot of sexual desire to be expanded upon and compared with future and past desires. What is queer today, may not be considered queer a decade from now; in a decade from now we may say: that *was* queer. Marcus claims that the solution to preventing queer erasure is “to produce gay history.”<sup>100</sup> Though in this instance, Marcus conflates queer with gay, the point still stands: if queer is an ephemeral category we can at least document the history of its usage. Similarly, Drabinski imagines:

Approaching the problem of library classification and cataloging from a queer perspective demands that we leave intact the traces of historicity and ideology that mar the classification and cataloging project. Such traces can reveal the limit of the universal knowledge organization project, inviting technical interventions that highlight the constructed nature of classification structures and controlled vocabularies.<sup>101</sup>

In other words, feminist and queer pornography are not stable, but are categories in flux and what is left is a trace that historicizes sexual desire.

### **CONCLUSION: STRATEGIC ESSENTIALISM, STABILITY, AND THE NATURALIZATION OF CATEGORIES**

The section on the queer/feminist alliance showed not only that feminism and queer subjectivity are linked in their otherness, but that they are unstable categorizes in relation to the naturalizing effects of dominant mainstream culture: patriarchy, whiteness, and heteronormativity. If queer and feminism are unstable categories, strategic essentialism is a way to temporarily reify these categories to wield power in resistance to the naturalized mainstream power. Therefore, when Jiz Lee laments the superfluousness of queer categorization, the authorities of queer and feminist porn (the FPAs and PinkLabel.tv) create a limited sense of

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<sup>100</sup> Marcus, 201. “Queer studies offers two responses to such erasures. The first is to produce gay history....”

<sup>101</sup> Emily Drabinski, “Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction” in *Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 83(2) (2013): 109.



stability through a shortlist of sanctioned genres and categories. This mode of wielding power seeks to reimagine mainstream pornography by destabilizing and re-naturalizing it. And yet, the naturalization of mainstream pornography is the result of its extensive history that has catered to the man's gaze: the process of naturalization is the constant repetition of mainstream pornographic performances. If mainstream pornography depends on the repetition of its performance for its naturalization, perhaps it has been an unstable category all along. In other words, mainstream and dominant culture have been using strategic essentialism before the resistance. In the context of drag as gender performance, Judith Butler writes "gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin."<sup>102</sup> By extension, mainstream pornography through the repetitive processes of its naturalization is also an imitation without an origin. Drabinski punctuates this idea in her article "Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction:"

Queer theoretical perspectives on classification and cataloging challenge the idea that a stable, universal, objective knowledge organization system could even exist—there is no such thing if categories and names are always contingent and in motion.<sup>103</sup>

If categories are always contingent and constantly evolving, then there are two processes that naturalize and stabilize them: 1) their initial strategic essentialism, and 2) their naturalization through repetition. Queer and feminist pornography have used both strategies to discipline and regulate their own genres. By categorizing and recategorizing feminist and queer pornography, catalogers can document a history of the evolution of these terms as they crystalize in one moment to create a temporary space for information retrieval and accessibility, and then pivot toward future revisions. We now have two divergent views: Adler believes that for catalogers,

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<sup>102</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 175.

<sup>103</sup> Drabinski, 102.

the maintenance of constantly updating the catalog with new subjectivities is a ‘logistical nightmare’ for information professionals, while Drabinski reminds us from a queer theoretical perspective that such categories “are always contingent and in motion.” To create the most robust forms of information retrieval, catalogers of queer and feminist pornographic materials must keep up-to-date with terminologies and transformations of the categories. The resulting implication for information professionals will be a ‘logistical nightmare’ for some, and a necessary endeavor for others.<sup>104</sup>

This thesis examined the categories of feminist pornography and queer pornography. The apparatuses of power garnered from discipline create a superstructure of power on the one hand, but on the other hand, feminist pornography and queer pornography provide parallel codes in relation to the mainstream. Such parallel codes provide their own sets of norms that maneuver beyond the dominant culture as seen in the examples of the Feminist Porn Awards and PinkLabel.tv, instigating a matrix of transgressions within themselves and disciplining their affiliates with certain punitive means toward transgressors. Queer pornography and feminist pornography are not only implicitly (if not explicitly) united as othered categories toward resisting some of the unethical and degrading practices of mainstream pornography, these genres are also concerned with promoting the desires and sexual subjectivities of queers and feminists. In their current form the sanctioned genre categories implemented by the FPAs and PinkLabel.tv are narrow and perhaps flawed since they do not speak holistically to the plurality of queer and feminist subjectivities and their desires. Nevertheless, they provide temporary categorical placeholders using strategic essentialism that can foment the future of queer and feminist

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<sup>104</sup> One can imagine enthusiastic scholars and catalogers who concern themselves with the shifting definitions of the term queer and feminism in relation to media such as pornography.

pornography and these placeholders document and create a historical trace that can be studied, analyzed, critiqued, and expounded on.

## Appendix 1 Analysis of Studios

	Ethical Work Practices	Sex positive	Complicates gender	Complicates race and ethnicity	Complicates beauty/body type	Complicates sexual orientation	Assumes a plurality of female/queer viewers	Realistic pleasure is depicted	Director-performer collaborate	Invokes resistance, intervention, and change
Bright Desire	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Queer Porn Tv		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
XConfessions	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓		
Pink and White Productions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Handbasket Productions	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Spark Erotic	✓							✓	✓	✓
Petra Joy	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Foxhouse Films	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Lightsouthern	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	
IndiePom Revolution	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
QueerPorn.tv	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Permission 4 Pleasure	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lucie Makes Pom	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Aorta Films	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓