



Porn goes to college: introduction

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FORUM

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In January 2014 I moderated a seminar at the annual Adult Entertainment Expo in Las Vegas entitled ‘Porn Goes to College’. The panel, which included industry veterans Jessica Drake and Tasha Reign, and porn scholar Constance Penley, among others, was an occasion to talk about the various ways in which pornography intersects with college life, as an object of study, a way to pay tuition, and, all too often, a topic of controversy.

The discussion proved timely when, the following month, a media frenzy enveloped Duke University undergrad Belle Knox after she was publicly outed by a male student as a porn performer. Rather than hang her head in shame or retreat in disgrace, Knox, as I have written about elsewhere, took control of her story and used the media to start a dialogue about privacy, stigma, and the rising costs of college tuition (see Comella 2014).

There is nothing new about pornography’s relationship to, and presence on, college campuses. In the late 1980s, author and ‘sexpert’ Susie Bright presented her travelling road show ‘How to Read a Dirty Movie’ at colleges across the United States; and since the early 1990s, Constance Penley has taught a course on pornography at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in which students are encouraged to think about pornography as they would any other film genre and media industry. Anti-pornography slide shows and documentaries are regularly screened in college lecture halls, while porn performers and directors are frequently invited to speak on college campuses about their experiences working in the adult industry, sometimes drawing criticism in the process.

This special section of *Porn Studies* brings together a diverse set of perspectives from academics and industry insiders about the various ways in which pornography goes to college. In ‘Auto/Ethno/Pornography’, Zeb Tortorici discusses his experience navigating his status as a porn performer for a largely gay male audience while in graduate school. A historian of sexuality, Tortorici reflects on the ways that investments in the history of sexuality and in pornography can inform one another personally and professionally. Robert Reece’s essay examines the unspoken racial currents in the media coverage of the Duke University porn star, asking how a black Belle Knox would experience the adult film industry. Reece focuses on the nexus of race and webcam modelling, arguing that internet technology has expanded the adult industry in ways that are more compatible with participation by black college students looking to supplement their incomes.

In ‘They Came to See the [Queer] Porn Star Talk’, Jiz Lee recounts how a high-profile controversy surrounding a speaking appearance at Williams College reaffirmed their belief that pornography is a subject worthy of academic discussion and scholarly merit. In ‘Strengthening Porn Practice through Film Theory’, feminist pornographer Jennifer Lyon Bell discusses her decision to pursue a graduate degree in film studies as

a stepping-stone for writing and directing the kind of pornography that she, as a viewer, most wanted to see. Collaborators Danielle Hidalgo and Cinnamon Maxxine consider the value of academic partnerships between professors and porn performers, maintaining that such relationships can give voice to marginalized experiences and challenge students' preconceived notions about sex workers.

In 'Navigating Campus Controversy', I interview adult performer Conner Habib about one college's decision to cancel a speaking engagement after learning he was a current, rather than retired, porn star. Not willing to be censored, Habib flew out anyway and gave his talk at an off-campus location. In the final essay, 'Trigger Warnings and the Porn Studies Classroom', Diana Pozo proposes several ways in which porn studies scholars can reframe current debates about trigger warnings in the college classroom.

As these essays attest, college classrooms and lecture halls are, increasingly, important platforms for porn literacy. They present occasions for students to engage with an industry that has a great deal to say about the politics of race and labour, queer bodies and desires, subjugated knowledges and censorship, and the ever more complex world in which we live.

Reference

- Comella, Lynn. 2014. 'Balancing Sex Work and School: In the Wake of Duke Porn Star Revelations, Other Performers Speak Out.' *Vegas Seven*, March 7. Accessed February 19, 2015. <http://vegasseven.com/2014/03/07/balancing-sex-work-school-wake-duke-porn-star-revelation-performers-speak/>.

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