# Dancing in the Shadows of the Outer Limits: An Exploration of the Experiences of Female Pornography Performers and Feminist Discourses on Their Experiences

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*By*

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**Declaration**

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work, that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

**Signed:**

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**Date: 13/01/2020**

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**Abstract**

*Dancing in the Shadows of the Outer Limits: An Exploration of Experiences of Female Pornography Performers and Feminist Discourse on Their Experiences*

By Caroline West

This research project will examine the subjective realities experienced by female pornography performers, working in the American mainstream pornography industry. The aim of this research is to situate these lived experiences within the international feminist debate on pornography. This research will use the narratives of the participants, as owners of their experiences, as a tool to assess the opposing feminist perspectives and theories addressing the presence and role of female performers in the work they do.

Feminism has long held a debate with pornography, from Andrea Dworkin (1981) to sex-positive third and fourth-wave feminism, featuring theorists such as Gayle Rubin (2011), Laura Kipnis (1999), and Nadine Strossen (2000). As we move further into the 21st century pornography has undergone significant metamorphosis. In conjunction, feminism has also undergone significant changes since the time of Dworkin's campaigns against pornography, and now, with the advent of social media, a greater number of perspectives are being heard. One perspective that is sorely lacking is a coherent collection of the voices of the actresses themselves; a gap that has implications for ethical discourse and research on pornography.

Interviews with female performers will be analysed utilising a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis framework. Acknowledging a paucity of studies that focus on performer experiences, this research will build on established work such as James D. Griffin et al., (2012) to construct a more accurate analysis of the experiences of working in pornography. Many assumptions exist about pornography; such as claims that the women are coerced or abused (Levy, 2005).These claims need to be explored with the perspectives of the women included, and this research will explore these alongside experiences of stigma and violence. This research project also posits that violence may arise from feminist discourse, and investigates this through a nuanced reading of terminology, stigma and objectification.

**Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview**

This thesis is entitled '*Dancing in the Shadows of the Outer Limits: An Exploration of Experiences of Female Pornography Performers and Feminist Discourse on Their Experiences.* This research examines the experiences of female performers working in the American pornography industry and situates these experiences in the context of feminist discourses on pornography. This research was undertaken as a gap in knowledge on performer experiences was observable when researching pornography when I undertook a Master's Degree in sexuality studies. There is much discourse about the experiences of performers, but little evidence beyond anecdotes to support these speculations. This thesis explores some of these areas of speculation such as on-set experiences, and experiences of abuse. The relationship between violence and pornography will also be explored through three main aspects: violence through discourse, violence in the industry, and violence present in the research process.

**1.2. Aim, Purpose and Research Question**

The aim of the research is to explore the variety of experiences that female performers in the American pornography have and how these experiences compare with or challenge feminist discourses on pornography. This study utilises qualitative research to situate performer voices in discourses on their experiences, in order to produce an ethical discourse that recognises performer autonomy and subjectivity. The core research question is: how do performers experience their work, and how are these experiences represented in feminist discourses on pornography?

## 1.3. Overview of Study

There are seven chapters in this study. Chapter One continues below to provide an outline of how feminist discourse developed in the 1970s alongside the development of pornography as an American industry. Pornography as an anachronism has historically enjoyed rapid growth since its inception in the 16th Century alongside technological advances, and Appendix One details the development of pornography as an American industry and product.

Having outlined briefly how feminist discourses on pornography formed, Chapter Two explores the issues of violence and objectification within pornography discourse. Much of feminist discourse utilises research on the content of pornography, which is alleged to be violent, and this section outlines some of these studies alongside methodological concerns present in the corpus of pornography research. This chapter finishes by exploring feminist discourses on objectification theory. This has been a key feature of much writing on pornography discourse, and this chapter develops the concept of objectification by introducing the concept of epistemological violence.

Chapter Three details the methodology used in this research. This section provides a synopsis for the reasoning for choosing qualitative methods which use a framework of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis to investigate the data. Chapter Three also contains a section on the importance of ethics within pornography research and argues that this has not been given enough focus in existing research. The reflexivity of the researcher is also discussed in relation to the issues of bias and objectivity with research with human subjects.

Chapter Four explores the relationship between power and knowledge within feminist discourses on pornography. This section asks who is considered a legitimate contributor to

knowledge on experiences in pornography, and explores what forms of knowledge are considered acceptable and respectable. An examination of the terminology used in pornography discourse is also presented here. This section explores the power dynamics contained within language, and the legitimacy afforded to the language that performers create to describe themselves and their work.

Chapter Five explores the issues of stigma and how it has operated both in societal discourses and in feminist discourses. The impact of stigmatisation on performers' personal and family relationships is considered here, alongside an analysis of stigma management techniques used to navigate this issue. This chapter also outlines how stigma is blamed by performers for the proliferation of agents who take advantage of young newcomers to the industry, and the topic of infra-trade stigma is also considered here. Receptors of stigmatisation are not exclusively passive, and thus, this chapter also explores performer resistance and the power contained within this resistance.

Chapter Six documents on-set experiences of performers. This chapter explores how performers feel about sexual practices in which they engage in on-set, and the impact this has on their body. Interactions with fans are also discussed as well as the manner in which these experiences relate to violence and objectification. Finally, this chapter also discusses performer interactions with protestors and religious groups that offer to rescue the performer. These experiences will be discussed in the context of physical and mental labour as part of the job of being a performer. Chapter Seven offers the conclusion.

## 1.4. Choice of Topic and Proposed Contribution

Pornography is an excellent vehicle for interdisciplinary research on many areas such as feminism, power, knowledge, violence, sex, communication, and much more. It is also a

medium that shines a spotlight on fear and disgust around sex and power. Pornography is a topic that has resulted in binary thinking of 'pro-pornography' and 'anti-pornography' approaches within society, the media, and especially within feminism. My research dismantles this approach and finds the nuances than can be obscured by this binary approach. This research does not aim to posit whether pornography is 'good' or 'bad', but instead examines performer discourses and feminist discourses to find nuances of power contained within these discourses. My previous academic achievements have included explorations of feminism and sexuality, and my professional working experiences have been with women who have experienced violence, marginalisation, stigmatisation, and sex work. These experiences, combined with finding a progressive learning environment at Dublin City University allowed for this thesis to be created in a nuanced fashion that centers the voices of the performers. There is much speculation on performers' experiences despite a dearth of research in this area; thus, the gaps in knowledge in relationship to both pornography and performer experiences are vast and will be discussed throughout this thesis. This thesis uses Foucauldian Discourse analysis to examine the power dynamics in these gaps and speculations, and explores how ethics in contemporary pornography studies can be strengthened. Through these nuances, this study makes a contribution to the field of pornography studies.

### 1.5 Context- The Development of Feminist Discourse on Pornography

Pornography developed rapidly from its initial depiction through printed media, photographs, looped films, peep show booths and travelling salesmen, as documented by Kendrick (1987), Ford (1999), and O'Toole (1998). But it was not until the 1970s that pornography really became an above ground, accredited and organized industry due to the development of feature length films (Paasonen and Saarenmaa, 2007). This period functions as the cementing of pornography as an organised industry, starting from what has been dubbed 'the Golden Age',

when pornography was seen as glamorous and the subject of speculation of possible crossovers with Hollywood (Kendrick, 1987). But while the pornography industry grew, so did feminist opposition to it (Bronstein, 2011). Ziv documents how the anti-pornography feminist position was dominated by the twin figureheads of MacKinnon and Dworkin and their rhetoric became  dominant in feminist anti-pornography ideology (Ziv, 2015). However, opposition to this absolutist standpoint- which Ziv terms the 'anti-antipornography feminist' approach- did not adopt the same method of organising into politically aligned groups (2015, p.29). Instead, those opposed to this ideology favoured a multifaceted and multidirectional approach, rather than an insistence on conformity to a singular ideology and methodology (2015, p.29). Ziv also outlines that the anti-antipornography side often adopted a reactionary stance and states:

It is important to remember that the pornography debate is a nonsymmetrical one, in that the anti-antiporn position was formed in response to the challenge posed by the anti-porn movement and had no prior autonomous existence (2015, p.29).

Interestingly, Ziv also notes that a critical analysis of pornography challenges anti-pornography claims; however she posits that the anti-pornography approach is to ignore these critiques and focus instead on reaching out to the general public (2015, p.29). The effect of this, according to Ziv, is to position this stance as the singular feminist position on pornography- one that is unanimous and holds the 'truth' about pornography.

Ziv's choice of terminology here is also important. The use of 'anti-pornography feminists' is a singular term for this grouping of feminists opposed to pornography. However, as those supportive of pornography and/or critical of the anti-pornography feminist movement are more diverse in viewpoint, finding a catch--all term has proved more difficult. Some may refer to themselves as anti-censorship feminists (Assiter, 1993; Strossen, 1995), or pro-sex feminists

(Rubin, 1984; Kipnis, 1996), or as pro-pornography feminists (McElroy, 1995). Some also may employ a critical pornography analysis (Smith, 2013; Attwood, 2017), and some argue for an avoidance of the 'good'/'bad' moral binary and for pornography to be studied analogously to other forms of media (Williams, 1989). This absolutist versus nuanced stance is reflected throughout the corpus of feminist writing on pornography. Williams notes this lack of a uniform approach and its implications when giving the example of the differences between the terms *pornography*, *porn*, and *porno* (2014, p.32). Williams argues that the use of the full term *pornography* is seen as more critical than the use of the term *porn*, and expresses her concern that the use of the term *porn* can signify an alliance with the industry (2014, p.34).

While divisions in pornography discourse continued through the 1990s, anti-pornography discourse became energised again in the 2000s and 2010s through new approaches from writers such as Paul (2005), Dines (2010), Long (2012), and Tankard-Reist (2011). These new theorists and activists addressed internet pornography, a format that did not exist in Dworkin and MacKinnons' time in the 1980s. They also discussed the consumption of pornography, and examined pornography's effects on relationships and on women especially, while framing pornography as a public health issue.

New approaches were also present in the 2010s in pro- and critical feminist pornography discourse. These approaches addressed different aspects to pornography such as feminist pornography, queer pornography, gay pornography, consumption and production. Authors in this field include Comella and Tarrant (2015), Taormino, et al. (2013), Sullivan and McKee (2015), and Miller Young (2014). These writers looked beyond calls of banning or censoring pornography and advocated for the development of critical pornography studies, with the same academic rigour applied to its analysis as that to which other forms of media were held. New

areas here also included interactions of race, class and gender, and a focus on performer inclusivity.

## Chapter 2: History, Violence, and Objectification Discourse

### 2.1. Introduction

Feminist conversations on pornography have often focused on the ethics or the morality of the existence of the pornography industry. Feminist groups established in the late 1970's/early 1980's such as Women Against Violence Against Woman (WAVAW) and Women Against Pornography (WAP) aimed to ban pornography as they linked it to violence against women (Bronstein, 2011). Pornography was framed as something for feminists to battle against-something that affects all women everywhere, not just the women in pornography. The connection of pornography to violence was cemented by Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon. Together in 1983 they put forward a definition of pornography in their attempt to enact legislation that would ban pornography, known as the Minneapolis Ordinances (McElroy, 1995). While this is an in-depth definition, it appears to be more of an ideological statement rather than an attempt to develop an objective definition by positioning pornography solely as a tool of abuse against women. They define pornography as discrimination against women, with their penetration onscreen defined as subordination, with activities such as bondage also positioned as abusive:

> (1) Pornography is the sexually explicit subordination of women, graphically depicted, whether in pictures or in words, that also includes one or more of the following:
> (i) women are presented as dehumanised sexual objects, things or commodities; or
> (ii) women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy pain or humiliation; or
> (iii) women are presented as sexual objects who experience sexual pleasure in being raped; or
> (iv) women are presented as sexual objects tied up or cut up or mutilated or bruised or physically hurt; or
> (v) women are presented in postures of sexual submission;[or sexual servility, including by inviting penetration] or
> (vi) women's body parts- including but not limited to vaginas, breasts, and buttocks- are exhibited, such that women are reduced to those parts; or
> (vii) women are presented as whores by nature; or
> (viii) women are presented being penetrated by objects or animals; or

(ix) women are presented in scenarios of degradation, injury, abasement, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual (McElroy, 1995, pp.46-7).

Initially approved by the Mayor of Minneapolis, it was later struck down for being unconstitutional. However, their work did inform the Butler decision in Canada, where customs officials could seize work that they found to be obscene. Dworkin and MacKinnon argued that pornography was a civil rights issue and posited that for as long as pornography existed, women could never be equal with men due to pornography's alleged violence and objectification. MacKinnon framed pornography not as a free speech issue, but solely as an issue of violence against women. Ziv examines the language uses in MacKinnon's rhetoric in framing the women as victims when working in pornography:

> In MacKinnon's depictions of pornography, sex is always inflicted upon women, women are 'violated', 'possessed', 'exposed', 'used', 'done to'. And this negation of grammatical agency appears to reflect a sense that for women participation in pornography in fact cannot be seen to express agency, that it is intrinsically opposed to agency (2015, p.33).

Language is an important locus of power, and through these terms power is excluded from the performers by MacKinnon. Dworkin and MacKinnon's definition has been challenged by many who oppose the censorship of pornography (Strossen, 2000). McElroy argues that this is not a mere definition but a judgement on sexual activities by adults: 'the ordinance's definitions goes far beyond defining pornography, and well into mandating what is sexually correct to see, hear, and express (p.48). Other feminists such as Catherine Itzin also define pornography as violence against women, and she highlights how British groups such as National Council for Civil Liberties (Liberty), Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, and the Campaign Against Pornography and Censorship all adopt a harm based definition (1993, p.435).

The anti-pornography feminist movement also linked pornography with rape, utilising polemic texts from Dworkin alongside Brownmiller's 1975 book *'Against Our Will'*, in which she makes the claim that pornography dehumanises women and contributes to rape. Morgan dubbed pornography 'sexist propaganda' (1980, p.139), and this approach firmly linked pornography to men's violence towards women and placed an emphasis on women's victimhood.

Attempts to ban pornography in the 1970's were challenged by those who were opposed to censorship in differing feminist approaches, and reached an accumulation of sorts at the Barnard conference in New York in 1982. While anti-pornography feminists were prominent in the media, self-identified sex positive feminists such as Gayle Rubin who advocated against censorship and the anti-pornography feminist movement, had less of a mainstream platform for their views. This conference, coordinated by academic Carol S. Vance, was designed as an opportunity to explore challenges to finding authenticity in female sexual pleasure against a conservative political backdrop. The organizing committee wished to explore if access to sexual pleasure for women was possible under patriarchy, in pornography, or in other areas such as sadomasochism (straight and lesbian), and could be inclusive of the use of sex toys.

While the 1980's fostered a growing anti-pornography feminist movement, it also saw another approach to the issues within the industry with the creation of feminist pornography. In the US, female performers and filmmakers Annie Sprinkle, Veronica Vera, Veronica Hart, Candida Royalle and Gloria Leonard formed Club 90 in New York in 1983, with the aim of disrupting mainstream pornography tropes. Filmmaker Candida Royalle established Femme Productions in New York in 1984, and Fatale Video was founded in 1985 by Nan Kinney and Deborah Sundahl to produce and distribute lesbian porn. Sprinkle argued that challenging the production and content of pornography was a better approach than censoring it, infamously quipping: 'the answer to bad porn isn't no porn, it's to try to make better porn!' (Tarrant, 2016, p.170). These

companies aimed their films at couples, single women, and lesbians, and avoided the ubiquitous money shot as featured in mainstream straight orientated pornography. Directors such as Candida Royalle preferred to focus on the faces of performers as they orgasmed rather than on the genitals. This feminist approach to pornography resulted in the 1989 *Post-Porn Modernist Manifesto*, which was signed by Royalle, Sprinkle and others, outlining their commitment to incorporate art into pornography in a sex positive manner.

The genre has grown internationally since its inception through Club 90, with its proponents continuing to utilise it as a medium to challenge depictions of pleasure, gender, bodies, and tropes found more commonly in mainstream pornography. One of the most prominent books on the subject is *The Feminist Porn Book* (2013) which defines feminist pornography as exploring 'concepts of desire, agency, power, beauty, and pleasure at their most confounding and difficult, including pleasure within and across inequality, in the face of injustice, and against the limits of gender hierarchy and both heteronormativity and homonormativity' (Taormino, Shimizu, Penley, and Miller-Young, 2013, pp.9-10).

The authors frame feminist pornography as not just content, but also as a political standpoint. Director Shine Louise Houston of queer pornography company Pink and White Productions, which depicts a vast array of different body types, genders, ages, abilities and more, agrees. Houston states: 'there is power in creating images, and for a woman of colour and a queer to take that power... I don't find it exploitative, I think it's necessary' (2011). Houston thus views her work as a resistance to dominant episteme about pornography and its contents, and follows in Sprinkles' footsteps by producing the kind of content that she finds power in.

However, as with everything connected to pornography and feminism, a homogeneous approach does not allow for nuance; and indeed, may not be achievable or desirable. While

differences in production, consumption and content apply to mainstream, queer, and feminist pornography, differing standpoints on their relationships to feminist theories are also present. Queer performer Jiz Lee disagrees with the label of feminist pornography:

> While "feminist porn" is a powerful phrase, to simplify it as a genre or proclaim that only a select few produce it, does the industry a disservice in implying that all other porn is inherently misogynist, and I don't believe that at all (in Luu, 2015).

Indeed, other nuances have becoming pressing to consider when talking about pornography, such as the rapid rise of 'cam girls', female owned studios, amateur pornography that is produced both by amateurs and professional studios, social media platforms, and more. It is therefore critical when researching pornography that a nuanced and reflective approach is taken to the content, production methods, and type of feminist standpoints considered. As much as pornography is not monolithic, there is also not a singular form of feminism. Rather, recognising the existence of *feminisms* with similar or wildly different positions on pornography facilitates a wider body of knowledge that acknowledges differing perspectives rather than prioritising any particular strand. This allows for an examination of the relationship between power, pornography, and knowledge which this research project will explore.

## 2.2. Victimhood and celebrity

Narratives about women in pornography being considered victims dominated early anti-pornography feminist discourse. Performer Linda Lovelace, darling of the Golden Age, shocked the world with revelations in her book *Ordeal* (1980) that she was forced into pornography by her abusive husband Chuck Traynor, and was never a willing participant in the industry. Feminists such as Gloria Steinem and MacKinnon used Lovelace's revelations to campaign against pornography, and WAP organised protests and a news conference to coincide with the

launch of the book. At this conference Linda positioned herself as a victim, and equated women's experiences in pornography with filmed child sexual abuse, an equivalence Bronstein notes was becoming more of an prevalent argument in radical feminist anti-pornography movements (2011, pp.257-258).

MacKinnon equated Linda's experiences with the experience of the everyday woman who did not have sex consensually or in ways that included their pleasure. Linda's story was also important in the deviant/victim binary applied to women working in pornography, as Bronstein states: 'it relieved anti-pornography feminists of the burden of condemning women who claimed to freely choose, and allowed them to frame these women as vulnerable victims of gender oppression' (2011, p.262).

MacKinnon was absolutist in her approach to the experiences of women in pornography, stating:

> 'Empirically, all pornography is made under conditions of inequality based on sex, overwhelmingly by poor, desperate, homeless, pimped women who were sexually abused as children' (1993, p.14).

Mackinnon bases this claim on personal stories and the words of Linda Lovelace. However, she did not have a sound body of academic research on this, nor large scale personal testimony; rather she applied these experiences to *all* women in pornography and *all* forms of pornography.

This process of absolutist claims without extensive evidence has great impact on the ethics of pornography research and highlights a focus on ideology over methodology, which is discussed further in Chapter Three and Four. MacKinnon's approach to the women in pornography was

to equate them with children in that they needed protection from men's violence and could not always speak for themselves. This framing has continued today, and can be seen in a 2006 report from the Irish Observatory on Violence against Women. This report argued that 'it is not possible' to make a clear distinction between adult and child prostitution, and adult and child pornography, and thus again equated women and children and deemed both to be victims (West, 2018, p.2).

Traci Lords was another Golden Age performer who has experienced being labelled as a victim. As Lords become the most in demand starlet of this time, it was revealed that she was in fact fifteen years old when shooting most of her content. Going on to write an autobiography, Lords claims she was exploited and was battling substance abuse at the time. Similar to Linda Lovelace, Lords' case was also used by anti-pornography feminists to campaign against pornography. Lord's experiences were presented as ones of exploitation and violence, and Lords herself became an anti-pornography campaigner. However, just as Linda's narrative cannot be condensed into a simplistic story, neither can Lords'. Lords suggests her involvement in pornography was a way for her to reclaim power after sexual assault: '(d)oing porn was my way of saying, "No, I'm going to fuck you"' (Mitchelson, 2012). Thus, discussions of power must be cognisant of power being multidirectional, nuanced and resistant to simplistic definitions, similar to concepts of choice and agency.

More recently, ex-performers such as Shelley Lubben have been vocal about identifying as a victim of the industry. Lubben worked minimally in the industry in the early 1990s and identified her experiences as trafficking, going on to write an autobiography about her time in the industry and her personal life (2010). She went on to become staunchly religious, and set up an organisation to support other performers to exit the industry, The Pink Cross Foundation. With the group now defunct, Lubben has also passed away after a long battle with drugs. Lubben

utilised her celebrity and audience of religious followers to solicit money to conduct outreach, such as operating booths at the AEE/AVN expo.

In contemporary pornography, recent cases of victimhood have included the cases of Stoya and Mia Khalifa. Stoya is a successful performer who disclosed allegations of rape at the hands of fellow popular performer and ex-boyfriend James Deen. Stoya's story was used as proof of the continuing victimisation of women in the industry, despite Stoya outlining that her experiences were within the context of her relationship. Other performers came forward to disclose allegations of abuse on set at the hands of Deen, including performer Ashley Fires. Fires claimed that her disclosures resulted in feeling isolated while Deen continued to work (Snow, 2019). These experiences need space to be discussed without a blanket labelling of all women who work in pornography as victims as this can close off discourse. The exclusion of Stoya from mainstream discussions on #metoo speaks to the stigmatisation of performers and an unwillingness to take a nuanced look at violence and the pornography industry. Both Stoya and fellow performer Stormy Daniels have rejected societal or feminist attempts to label them as victims, and this will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Mia Khalifa is one of the more recent performers to come forward about her negative experiences in the industry (Stern, 2019). However, her experiences mainly focused on how she felt she did not earn as much as she should, creating a conversation about royalties and appropriate pay scales in the industry. She also disclosed that she felt pressure to wear a hijab in her scenes. This nuanced discourse on labour conditions, racism, and aspects of exploitation are important to consider. Khalifa has successfully built a career in sports commentating after her exit from the industry, while still being one of the most searched for names on Pornhub (ibid). Her transition to mainstream employment is important to consider in the context of the stigmatisation and discrimination that the participants in this thesis report experiencing.

Additionally, her navigation of celebrity status, both from pornography and mainstream work, should be considered when looking at the 'porn star-as-celebrity' trope.

Notions of celebrity and the identity of 'porn star' has changed since the Golden Age. While some performers such as Jessica Drake work as exclusive contract stars for companies such as Wicked, this model of work has diversified. While being a contract star will ensure a large audience, performers now must engage social media to increase follower numbers. Some regularly request fans to suggest other performers to work with, or ask fans to tag studios in tweets and request that the performer film scenes for that company. Director Greg Lanksy's 'Vixen Angel' model has been the most successful updating of the contract star model. Heavily utilising social media to promote a lifestyle of foreign trips and glamorous shoot locations such as yachts, penthouses and helicopters, Lansky has a following of almost two million fans on Instagram on the @vixenofficial account alone (Instagram, 2019). On this account, he announces a monthly Vixen Angel, teasing the announcement for days beforehand. Other performers join in and are present when the new performer is revealed. The performer is gifted a necklace with the letter 'V', designer shoes, and Vixen branded underwear. The image is one of glamour and wealth and challenges the idea of pornography as being cheap or shameful. Lanksy's work creates a new era of celebrity performers, and if the volume of awards that his multiple companies win at shows such as the AVNs are a measure, it appears to be working.

If discourse moves past simplistic 'performer-as-victim' framing, we could analyse aspects of pornography labour such as 'performer-as-hustler'. This could include exploring how performers establish and maintain their brand. This is especially current in the context of performers who work film, but who also work as strippers, escorts, cam girls, and utilise social media to expand their career. Performers such as Riley Reid utilise platforms such as Instagram to interact with fans, with Reid particularly using the 'stories' function to show trips

to the gym, at home cleaning, and generally going about her daily life. Other performers such as Arabella Raphael use the 'ask me anything' function on Instagram to interact with fans, and often posts her escort tour schedule in her 'stories' section.

Sites such as Reddit also have subreddit groups for performers such as Reid, with almost seven thousand subscribers at the time of writing. Performers also utilise platforms such as Snapchat Premium, where fans can pay for personalised content or to receive a message from the performer. This diversification of revenue streams is a new form of labour that performers undertake which can blur the distance between performer and fan. Chapter Six examines how performers navigate these relationships and interactions with fans, both in person and online. This aspect of the industry is important for considering nuanced forms of labour that performers may engage in.

## 2.3. Contemporary approaches

Modern anti-pornography feminist approaches have shifted in focus, and studies have turned from a sole focus on the effects of pornography, to an examination of violence on screen and an analysis of capitalist market forces. There has also been a shift in language and framing and pornography has often been referred to as a 'public health crisis' (Dines, 2016). Dines argues that 'the science is beyond dispute,' and that the pornography industry works to 'hijack the physical and emotional well-being of our culture' (*ibid*). This framing has encouraged several states in the US to enact legislation that also frames pornography as a 'public health crisis'. It is notable that some of these states, such as Utah, do not have a comprehensive sex education program, and certainly do not include pornography literacy in this education (Pregnancy Resource Center of Salt Lake City, 2017).

However, others note that congruence on pornography research is far from the case, with

Webber and Sullivan arguing that public health professionals do not accept this as a public health crisis. They note that this appears to be a continuation of old anti-pornography fear and moral approaches: claiming that 'employing the language of 'public health', ostensibly apolitical and objective, is a well-devised strategy to impose sexually conservative moral imperatives' (2018, p.192). Ley examines the research behind this framing and claims that issues such as variables, moral stigma and the use of 'argument by analogy' lead to what he deems 'pseudoscience' behind these claims (2018, pp.208-210).

In the midst of this continuing battle over the validity of research and for public hearts and minds, few studies exist that look at the experiences of performers. Previously, performers may have been difficult to contact; however, now a vast number of performers utilise social media and go to conventions to meet fans, as seen in Chapter Six. However, it must be noted that this will always skew any research as these are the performers that have stayed in the industry; contacting ex-performers may be more difficult given their use of pseudonyms and a potential desire for anonymity post industry involvement. Four studies that do look at performer experiences and are discussed throughout this research project are Abbott (2000); Griffith, et al., (2012); Griffith et al., (2013); and Miller Young (2014). Griffith's study looked at performers' experience of childhood sexual abuse and experiences of drug use; Abbott's work explores reasons for both entering and staying in the pornography industry, and Miller-Young discusses the experiences of African-American performers. My research will add to these studies and develop knowledge in this area which is clearly lacking in academic research, through looking at on set experiences, stigma, and working conditions.

What is notable about much of the history of feminist discourses on pornography is not only its often ugly divisiveness, but its lack of research to back up claims, and its lack of inclusion of women who actually work in the industry. This neglect of knowledge means that scholars in

pornography studies have a lack of information on aspects of life in the industry, such as on-set working conditions, how performers navigate their work, stigma, and power dynamics in the industry (especially post #metoo). It also excludes knowledge on how performers adapt to a rapidly changing work environment, how they manage the identity of 'porn star', especially through social media, and whether they protect each other. We are left with speculation, rather than data. There are anecdotes, in the form of performer autobiographies from stars like Jenna Jameson. Some of this work is international, or focuses on gay performers or performers in feminist pornography, which all showcase differing working conditions across the pornography industry.

Contemporary pornography studies have expanded beyond binary approaches of pornography's right to exist or not. Nuanced readings of various aspect of the industry- and of other genres such as queer/ LGBT+, feminist, independently produced content, and camming. Work has been produced in diverse areas such as: labour conditions (Berg, ref), celebrity (Shelton, 2002; Mercer, 2006; Smith and Taylor-Harman, 2017), deep fakes and celebrity (Popova, 2009), deep fakes and consent (Newton et al., 2019); and pornography content that is accessed through platforms such as Tumbler and its use by queer people (Engleberg and Needham, 2019). New forms of censorship via age verification measures have also been addressed (Blake, 2019; West, 2019). As the internet continues to change how pornography is produced and consumed, new areas of academic research should reflect these changes.

Breaking away from theoretical back and forth discourse about the industry, this thesis adopted a practical approach in order to understand aspects of the industry. Instead of a methodology that focus on texts or films, the research method chosen for this thesis was a 'porn studies-in-action' model, as advocated by Comella (2014, p.64). This approach is defined as 'a research approach that involves scholars spending time in those places where pornography is made,

distributed, and consumed in an effort to better understand how cultural discourses and practices are organized in specific institutional and organizational contexts' (ibid). Thus, going to an event such as the AEE/AVN expo allows researchers to be immersed in one of the biggest events in the mainstream American industry. It offers firsthand experience of how performers interact with fans, protesters, and allows for the researcher to witness this aspect of labour and working conditions.

Comella refers to events like this as 'data-rich field sites' which allow for 'engaged scholarship' (2014, p.64) and they offer more opportunity for expansion on new areas of research in pornography studies. Being based in Ireland, which has no established pornography industry, this approach offered the opportunity to experience the industry on a deeper leve than could have been achieved through textual analysis only. This approach is discussed further in the following methodology chapter.

## 2.4. Pornography research- Violence and Objectification

One major focus of feminist discourse on pornography is concerned with the issue of violent content. This includes objectification theory and this section will address how to modernise this aspect of pornography research.

## 2.4. Studies on Violence and Pornography

While studies on violence in pornographic content are not extensive, they are used to support claims in feminist discourse. However, these claims are not accepted by all as factual; indeed, Weitzer (2015) claims that some anti-pornography researchers such as Tyler (2010) have produced research that does not support their own hypotheses on the levels of violence they claim to be present in mainstream pornography. These studies are outlined within this chapter,

and are important to highlight as they often contradict each other, instead of building a solid, supported argument. The resulting heated debate often resembles 'a street fight more than it does a civil conversation' (Tarrant, 2016, p.89), and it is a debate that is not confined to academia. Social media and online platforms are often a battleground of polemic arguments each time an article on pornography is published.

Additionally, claims are made by activists that those outside of academia are unaware of the level of violence in mainstream pornography (Casey, 2016). We can see another example of this in Dines' argument that 'most people I know who claim that porn is empowering for women have never actually seen what mainstream Internet porn – called gonzo by the industry – looks like' (2009). Dines doubles down on this later on, arguing that

> Those who support porn don't know enough about it to support their claims- a lot of women- even a lot of feminists- really don't know what's in pornography, especially in the age of the internet, and that makes it too easy to conduct abstract intellectual arguments about the empowering possibilities of porn (2010, p.17).

While dismissing any 'empowerment' possibilities, this argument implies that women are not consumers of pornography, and that feminist women are not consumers of pornography, which creates another binary of 'good feminist'/ 'bad feminist'. These claims of absolute knowledge about the content of modern pornography have been challenged by many (Comella, 2015; McKee, 2005; Weitzer, 2015) and the following section will examine the research used to make these universalistic claims that violence in pornography is omnipresent.

## 2.4.1. Bridges' study

Anti-pornography feminists such as Dines have claimed that '(b)ehind the soft-focus façade of porn – a façade constructed by the media in large part – lies a world of cruelty, violence and degradation' (2009). The evidence used to support statements such as these is predominately

the research of Bridges (2010), who conducted a content analysis of scenes from mainstream pornography and determined that violence was present in 88% of scenes, thus leading her to claim that violence was rampant in pornography. This study is frequently quoted by academics (Dines 2015) and anti-pornography activists (Fight the New Drug, 2016) to support the claim that pornography is violent, thus lending this particular study an air of solitary authority on violence in pornography.

Bridges' research coded for the following acts that were defined as physical aggression:

> Pushing/shoving, pinching, hair pulling/biting, threatening with a weapon, slapping/spanking, choking, punching, kicking, confining/bondage, using a weapon, torturing/mutilating, attempting/ completing murder (2010, p.47).

They did not find any depiction of acts they defined as extreme such as kicking, murder, or mutilation, finding that the overwhelming majority of acts were 'mild and playful', such as 'spanking and hair pulling' *(ibid*). Despite this, they proclaimed that 88% of scenes featured aggression, with verbal aggression recorded in 48% of scenes (p.46). It is also useful to note the use of the word 'playful' here. Paasonen argues that sexual play is important to consider when researching sexual activity, given it can have impacts on identity, sexual norms, boundaries and subjective pleasure (2018, pp.3-5). Given that acts described by Bridges as playful are also designated as violent, this issue would benefit from further exploration in the context of nuances of language, power, knowledge, pleasure, and subjectivity.

However, these categories pique several concerns; especially because differences between consensual scenes and scenes portrayed as non-consensual do not appear to be taken into account. It is curious that two separate activities of hair pulling and biting are placed in the

same category, despite being quite different activities that may or may not be participated in simultaneously, or may be multi-directional between sexual partners. To muddy the waters further, a distinction was made between spanking, which was reported to feature in 36% of scenes, and open handed slapping, occurring in 15% of scenes (2010, p.46). The researchers do not explain which criteria were used to make this distinction, or on which area of the body they occurred- is a slap on the buttocks considered the same as a slap on the face, or is a slap on the buttocks considered the same as spanking? These nuances are important in this debate as one act may provoke very different reactions to another; thus their meanings and interpretations are subjective.

The research also looked at acts they state have been implicated in the 'degradation of women, such as penis worship and ass-to-mouth' (p.45), with the latter found in 41% of scenes. Penis worship is a particular form of fellatio that is more extensive than average fellatio, an act that some participants have stated that feel they receive great mental pleasure in doing to a partner (De Largie, 2016). The framing of this act as degrading denies any possibility that this act can be a mutual pleasure for both participants. Fellatio can take many forms, from gagging to gentle stimulation, but this research does not make clear if these scenes included these nuances, which is imperative when behaviours are labelled as aggressive and degrading. The researchers also found a greater number of nonconsensual scenes featuring men (16%) than women (4%), while simultaneously claiming that the majority of scenes featured aggression towards women from men (p.46).

While some claim that violence in pornography has been increasing over time (Dines, 2015), Bridges does note that many studies since the 1970s have found declining rates of violence.

However, Bridges appears to dismiss these by declaring that there are methodological issues with these studies, while affording authenticity to studies that support an anti-pornography ideology. Weitzer claims that Bridges has 'underplayed' her finding that 'the frequency of each of the serious acts of aggression was either identical to or had declined' to Barron and Kimmel's study (2015, p.261). However, when it comes to less extreme acts such as spanking, Bridges found 77% of scenes featured spanking or slapping, while the Barron and Kimmel study found only 9.3% of scenes portrayed this act. Additionally, the definitions used are subjective, alongside different content utilised, and thus a direct comparison is not methodologically sound.

Bridge's study functions as a cautionary tale for researchers. It is worth exploring how unquestioned some definitions are, how results are interpreted, and for how long a study holds its relevance in a fast paced industry where the means of production and content trends change over time. Similar concerns can be found in additional studies listed below.

### 2.4.2. Barron and Kimmel's study

Barron and Kimmel's (2000) study involved looking at 50 samples each of magazines and videos, purchased in five stores in New York, and erotic stories submitted by users to an online site (Usenet). They found the Usenet stories featured more violence than the commercial magazines and videos. Incidences of violence were also portrayed with consensual relationships. Of the 42% of scenes deemed violent, the majority were featuring confinement/bondage and use of a weapon. They do not define what they consider to be a weapon, which is problematic again if the items featured are items such as guns or items such as a flogger which can be purchased in sex shops and some adults participating in consensual BDSM are known to use for pleasure. They also found the majority of scenes in the commercial

videos were depicted as consensual (91.8%); whereas in the user generated content on Usenet 47.5 % of scenes were coded as non-consensual (2000, p.105).

This research, similar to Bridges (2010), also places hair pulling and biting in the same category, despite not being analogous in action or meaning. The researchers found much lower levels of violence and non-consensual scenes present in commercially produced pornographic magazines and videos than in user generated content. Additionally, they found that the male character/performer was more often portrayed as the dominant partner in Usenet scenes than in the commercial products.

However, an obvious issue with this study is that online sites of erotic stories are not a part of the pornography industry, and magazines have also become a fractional part of the industry compared to the internet. Additionally, content in different states, or indeed different countries, may not be the same and thus a comprehensive statement on pornography as a whole cannot be made. The researchers do acknowledge this, stating that their results do not give a 'definitive explanation' as to the overall rates of violence in pornography nor its interpretations or consumption (p.109).

### 2.4.3. McKee et al.*'s* study

One issue with researching violence in pornography is the definitions of violence and consent used. Studies such as Bridges' (2010) and Tyler's (2010) classify spanking as violence, but studies such as McKee, Albury and Lumby (2008) do not classify it as violence if it is portrayed as consensual, resulting in different rates of violence being recorded.

In this content analysis, the researchers defined violence in a way that they argued was objective and corresponded with a 'common-sense understanding of what concerns people' (2008, p.52). They support this approach by utilising a definition of violence by Baron: 'Any form of behaviour directed toward the goal of harm; or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment' (*ibid*). This approach differs from Tyler's (2010) who coded requested spanking as violence. McKee, Albury, and Lumby coded this as a consensual act and therefore not violent:

> Rape is violence. Spanking someone's bottom when they ask you to is not violent. That seemed like common sense, as well as good science, so we asked the coders viewing the videos to take that definition as their basis. If it was absolutely clear that everybody involved in a scene was consenting to what was happening, it shouldn't count as violence (2008, p.52).

If however the recipient looked uncomfortable or the act broke the skin, they counted this as violence.

Reviewing 838 scenes, they found that violence was rare. They stated that only 2% of scenes featured violence (7 scenes), with 8 scenes showing coercion (2008, pp.53-54). Almost all were directed at women, and the researchers pointed out that the majority of these scenes were present in videos marketed to women. They noted that they mainly featured Rocco Siffredi, a performer known for engaging in rough, BDSM style sexual acts who has a large female fan base, and posit that '(p)erhaps the issue of violence in pornography is no longer, as it was in the 1970's, about men's pleasure. Perhaps now it is about women's pleasure' (p.57).

This conclusion has drawn ire from those who claim that these acts are not about pleasure, but represent violence and abuse. Tyler has claimed that the study is 'severely flawed' because the 'fundamental problem here is that women in pornography are frequently shown enjoying their own abuse, humiliation and degradation' (2010, p.51). Tyler supports this by pointing to anti-pornography feminist Andrea Dworkin who claims that '(p)ornography says that women *want* to be hurt, forced and abused… that women say No but mean Yes- Yes to violence, Yes to pain'' (2010, p.52). Tyler claims that McKee, Albury and Lumby 'deny, or at least downplay' levels of violence in pornography in their report (*ibid*) arguing that the definition of violence they employed 'renders the violence in the vast majority of pornography invisible' (2010, p.51). She contends that acts classified as 'consensual' BDSM such as spanking are not exempt from the intent to harm (*ibid*). However, this equivalence removes agency from the participants, as does the use of Tyler's quotation marks around the word consensual here.

In addition to being critiqued by Tyler, McKee, Albury and Lumby's methodology has been scrutinised by Helen Pringle, an anti-pornography activist who claims that this study is not an 'intellectual inquiry but an ideological mission' (2011, p.122), neglecting to mention this same criticism has been levelled at anti-porn research. She claims this objective is 'to provide an apologia for the sex industry and, in particular, to shift the terms of public debate to a position consonant with that of the authors which supports the mainstream distribution and use of pornography' (2011, p.122), and presents McKee's previous admissions of personal pornography consumption as evidence for this bias (2011, p.124). This claim of membership of a 'pimp lobby' has also been levelled at those who support the decriminalisation of prostitution, such as sex workers and Amnesty International (Hawkins, 2016), who were labelled as such when they supported decriminalisation after conducting extensive research with those engaged in prostitution. Ziv has also earlier above noted how anti-pornography

feminist discourse tries to influence public discourse for their aim to ban the industry, so it could be argued that Pringle can be said to be following in these footsteps and doing the same work she accuses McKee of doing.

Despite looking at sorely under-researched areas such as the working practices involved in the production of pornography, Pringle labelled this study as 'tired and outdated' (2011, p.131). McKee argues that studies into pornography should be based on facts, not ideology, and states that is what their research does: 'We need to let the facts speak for themselves. This is what we did in *The Porn Report* - and what we will continue to do' (2011). Issues around objectivity will be discussed further in this chapter and in Chapter Three when examining methodology, and how it functions in pornography discourse.

### 2.4.4. Dines and Jensen's study

Another content analysis that uses a small sample size to generalise about the mainstream pornography industry was conducted by Dines and Jensen (1993). For this research, 20 novels and 14 videos of mainstream heterosexual pornography were purchased from sex shops in Boston and Austin, and subjected to a content analysis.

The following categories of acts were labelled as violent:

> men slapping a woman's buttocks during intercourse; slapping the woman's face or vagina with the penis; pulling on hair before and during sex; and deep thrusting in (the) woman's throat, even if it provoked a gag reflex (1998, p.82).

They also included expressions of pain on the women's faces (1998, p.75), noting that the

women asked for acts such as spanking to occur. The researchers found only one scene that

they argue shows coercion. In all other scenes the woman was portrayed as being willing and

ready for sex, a scenario that they argue is part of the ''pornographic world'' (1998, p.72) which

separates sex and intimacy. These images, they claim, featured 'a dulling sameness' (*ibid*),

and they explore the idea that men's desires are shaped by the mainstream pornography

industry. Dines and Jensen also discuss various acts such as the ''cum shot'' and while they

state it is not inherently dangerous or dehumanising, they note that 'in watching one of these

shots after another, we were struck by how degrading and violent the practice felt' (1998, p.80).

Using the words of Bill Margold, pornography director and actor, they outline how this act is

violence against women:

> I'd really like to show what I believe the men want to see: violence against women.
> I firmly believe that we serve a purpose by showing that. The most violent we can
> get is the cum shot in the face. Men get off behind that, because they get even with
> the women they can't have. We try to inundate the world with orgasms in the face
> (1998, p.80).

Dines and Jensen acknowledge the challenges faced in painting an accurate picture of

pornography due to issues such as sample sizes and in generalising research. They address

this by stating: 'In short, the goal is not to claim that ''all pornography looks like this'', but to say,

''when pornography looks like this (and lots of it does), this is what we think is going on'', rather

than offer a universal truth about all pornography' (1998, p71). However, the authors then go

on to use their results to make a blanket statement about the industry as a whole: 'We found

that, as the feminist critique of pornography asserts, at the core of contemporary pornography

is contempt for women'' (1998, p.99), a conclusion which critic Weitzer claims is a 'leap' (2015,

p.260). He points to issues with the sample size used by Dines and Jensen, who admit the

material they analysed 'cannot' be said to be representative, while simultaneously claiming they are 'typical' of mainstream pornography (2015, p.260). Similar to the previous studies' content, novels are not a part of the pornography industry and cannot be said to be representative of its content.

It appears some of the films watched included those by Max Hardcore, who has a reputation for producing extremely graphic and controversial pornography, pushing boundaries of acceptability even within the industry itself while also inspiring copycat work. However, Hardcore's content was judged so extreme that, in a rare occurrence, he was convicted of obscenity and served two years in prison in 2009. Maddison notes a 'cultural and political undecidability' (2013, p.171) about what to do about pornography meant that this conviction appeased conservative voters opposed to the industry. However, it simultaneously removed him as a reason to crack down on the pornography industry. Hardcore's work is controversial for many reasons, but also raises difficult to answer questions, as Maddison opines:

> Porn that isn't establishing a correlation of affective responses between performers and consumers, that doesn't demonstrate pleasure on screen in order to secure pleasure in watching, raises important questions about what pornography is for, but also about the role of pleasure in culture (2013, p.172).

Hardcore's work is both different and similar to much of mainstream pornography, thus simultaneously occupying both a pariah and messiah role, warranting a much more in-depth analysis than Dines and Jensen had space for in their study. Future content analysis can build on Hardcores' work, as it could be used to explore an archive of pornographic depictions of violence.

### 2.4.5. Whisnant's study

Taking a different approach, Whisnant (2010) examines comments left on websites such as adultdvdtalk.com and utilises these to make a statement on the content of pornographic films. Her findings lead her to proclaim that 'hostile and humiliating acts against women are commonplace' (2010, p.114) in mainstream pornography, where 'aggression against women is the rule rather than the exception' (2010, p.115). Whisnant argues that consumers use self-fragmentation in order to enjoy violent content and reconcile this with their beliefs about women in general (2010, p.129). However, these 'sweeping indictments' (Weitzer, 2015, p.260) are methodologically flawed as they are based on users' subjective interpretations of content instead of the actual content itself. This may lead to questions about accuracy, given that pornographic texts can be read subjectively in a variety of ways. These subjective readings are in turn analysed subjectively by researchers, and this needs to be borne in mind when critically analysing the validity of research. Weitzer also criticises Whisnant for her conclusion and points out she admits, 'that posters' comments may not be representative of anything, but nevertheless treats what they say as ''rich'' data' (*ibid*).

Additionally, it would be interesting to situate this research in the context of an analysis of consumer comments about different genres of pornography including queer and feminist pornography to discern if there are any commonalities or differences between the reactions of those watching each genre. Whisnant's work also speaks more of consumers' views on violence, not violent content *per se*, and thus further research on the demographics of users would be appropriate to explore this issue in more nuanced terms.

### 2.4.6. Tyler's study

Meagan Tyler conducted an interpretative content analysis of 98 AVN reviews of new film releases in 2005, with this approach taken to avoid the 'decontextualisation' of source material (2010, p.54). This choice of content was used to examine how producers of pornographic media view violence, as the author notes there is little research on this particular area. The categories used replicated those used in an earlier study by Yang and Linz (1990), ranging from 'mild' to 'murder'. Tyler reports 44 'clear descriptions of violent acts such as slapping, hitting, or choking' (2010, p.58), in 24 separate reviews. This leads her to claim that 'such a high figure suggests that, within the industry, violence in pornography is understood as systematic rather than isolated' (*ibid*). She posits that the more explicitly violent films were more highly pushed by AVN in order to create the greatest sales figures. Thus, Tyler suggests that degradation and physical damage to women are profitable for producers (2010, p.60).

Tyler concludes by stating that these results challenge the argument that pornography can be empowering for women:

> Indeed, the content of AVN suggests that commercial pornography is becoming more violent and more extreme and this seriously undermines many current academic approaches to pornography which have sought to show its potential for sexually liberating women (2010, pp.61-2).

She argues instead that this research cements the radical feminist approach to pornography, which positions mainstream pornography as 'violent, male-dominant and dehumanizing to women' (2010, p.62).

However, similar to the previous studies outlined above, there is a lack of serious violent acts present (such as murder, biting or torture). Out of 98 scenes reviewed by Tyler, 9 included slapping, 7 included bondage, 3 described verbal aggression, and there were zero incidents of biting. Five scenes were described as featuring sadomasochism, but there were 7 fetish titles included in the sample. Tyler does not clarify if these specialised scenes were mainly featured in this category or in the more mainstream films. One scene is categorised as *mutilation*, but Tyler does not expand on the details of this, which appears to be a serious failure of transparency- what did the scene consist of, and what did the mutilation consist of? This is important information to know in order to back up such a serious statement on violence. Weitzer claims the results do not in fact support Tyler's conclusion, and states: 'Tyler concludes from her data that ''extreme and violent pornography is permeating the industry'' while her own data point to the exact opposite conclusion' (2015, p.260).

Another issue with the methodology is that Tyler analyses reviews, not the content itself and thus the results may not be reflective of the actual frequency, description and intensity of violence present in the scenes. It is also important to note that many tube sites such as Pornhub often do not feature official reviews of content, although users can comment their own reviews.

### 2.4.8. Objectification studies

While some researchers have argued that the women in pornography are objectified, consistent findings have not been forthcoming. Following on from earlier research by Monk-Turner and Purcell (1999), who found intimacy depicted more often than objectification, Vannier, Currie and O'Sullivan (2014) examined the presence of objectification in pornography. They found gender equality in the portrayals of initiating sex, controlling the pace of the activity, and claim

that the women in the MILF ('Mother I would Like to Fuck') genre actually enjoyed higher rates of control and status than their male counterparts. They also found that the depiction of coercion was rare. However, while this examination of the nuances within pornographic genres is welcomed, it again suffers the same methodological concerns over small sample sizes and representation, as it was limited to 100 videos chosen from 10 popular websites.

Klaassen and Peter (2015) found similar results in their content analysis which compared different genres in pornography. Examining 400 videos of amateur and professionally made material, they coded for objectification using criteria such as faces being shown, power and violence. They found that while women were objectified more than men through 'instrumentality', 'men were more frequently objectified through dehumanization' due to their lack of having their faces shown' (2015, p.730). Additionally, they found that violence was rarely depicted, and what was featured could be placed in the category of spanking and gagging, and most scenes were portrayed as consensual. The researchers challenged the narrative that women in pornography are uniformly presented as passive, as they found women were frequently depicted as the initiator in sexual activity (2015, p.731). They did not find differences in social status between men and women, although men were mainly depicted as dominant and women as submissive. They conclude that 'amateur pornography contained more gender inequality at the expense of women than professional pornography did' (2015, p.730) and this nuance between genres is important to consider when making claims about the mainstream commercial industry.

## 2.5. Methodological concerns in content analyses of pornography studies

Various issues can be seen when scrutinising the methodologies used in studying the content of pornography, with some of these issues concerning sample size, representation, and definitions, each potentially affecting the outcome of a study and its potential for generalisation. Consistent, large scale content analysis studies have not occurred, and what we have instead are a list of smaller contradictory studies that can only function as breadcrumbs on the trail of analysing pornography.

### 2.5.1. Content

Methodological concerns arise in relation to content used by researchers.  Some studies used material purchased from local adult stores (Barron and Kimmel, 2000; Dines and Jensen, 1993) or in different countries with different laws (McKee, Albury, Lumby, 2008).  The material chosen in these studies can provide an insight into the material in local areas but as this varies from locality to locality, they may not be representative of mainstream pornography, or comparable with current trends. Additionally, some states are still considered 'taboo' states, where companies will not ship to for fear of running afoul of local community decency standards as declared in *Miller vs California* (1973) (Lazzaro, 2014). These factors can have an impact on a study's generalisability as not all the research is examining similar content. Content such as magazines, video and DVDs are now mostly outdated as internet pornography is far more accessible, modern and depicts a wider vary of genres.

The studies and the resulting contradictory claims about the pornography industry produce a quagmire of material to wade through and make sense of. Weitzer claims that 'what is particularly striking is the clash between these authors' evidence and their analysis' (2015,

p.260). Examples of this are outlined in the studies documented above, as the researchers did not detect any substantial extreme violence in the content chosen yet made claims about extreme violence being widespread in mainstream pornography. How the content is coded is also extremely important to examine. Some coders are given training; some are left to make their own judgement on what category an act fits into; and some coders work in teams and some work alone, which can make bias harder to spot. Bridges argues that these varying factors can affect the inter-rater reliability, which she refers to as an 'unfortunate limitation' when researchers do not provide information on this (2010, p.41).

### 2.5.2. Trends

Trends in the 1990s may have been for record breaking gangbangs, but trends in the 2010's have heavily featured girl-on-girl content, which may affect rates of gendered violence, or films featuring incest play. Susanna Paasson states: 'I am less sure as to what degree the popularity of a series of DVD titles from the early 2000's (..) can be generalised as characteristic of the genre and its recent development' (2010, p.71). New modes of consumption such as the internet, virtual reality pornography, tube sites and cam sites may all affect the content and means of production, making a generalisable content analysis difficult. The growth in amateur pornography may produces different results again, as Klassen and Peter (2014) found in relation to portrayals of gender inequality.

### 2.5.3. Consent

Consent is one feature that does not appear to be consistently coded for in studies that show higher levels of violence in pornography. This is crucial when looking at issues such as agency, coercion, and sexual acts that some may categorise as consensual BDSM. The politics of sex acts such as rough sex will be addressed through the research project, particularly in Chapter

Six. Maddison comments on this narrow definition of what constitutes pleasure in sexual acts and their depiction in pornography. He states: '[t]he questions of pleasure in pornography is problematic and rarely located in the context of subjectivity and capital (as opposed to being located in the context of gender inequality, psychoanalysis and so on)' (2013, p.172). This nuance is extremely important to bear in mind when creating categories of degradation, objectification, and violence in relation to the experiences of performers.

Sullivan and McKee insist it is critical to account for consent and agency, as

> If consent is excluded from the debate, then any depiction of extreme or heavily physical acts is wrong because it is violent. Really, any depiction of any sex act is violent, because the very act of representing it is an instance of objectification, and objectification constitutes psychological harm (2015, p.97).

This is a position taken by those who insist that all pornography is violence (Dworkin, 1981), or those such as Tyler who argues that all pornography is 'revenge porn' (Tyler, 2016), a framing that negates the consent of the participants.

Tyler has criticised McKee's study for their use of Baron and Richardson's 1994 definition of violence which includes motivation to avoid harm, which they believe 'exclude(s) requested actions from the category of violence' (2010, p51). She argues instead that harm is a part of BDSM and thus this definition is not appropriate in researching violence in pornography. Sullivan and McKee argue that definitions of violence that do not address consent lead 'both radical and neo-anti-pornography feminism [to] insist that there can be no consent to any act deemed violent' (2015, p.98). This denial of consent would seem to overtly affect the results gained in any research on violence in pornographic content. The issue of consent is also taken

further by those who debate whether women can consent to working in pornography at all, leading to greater conversations about the agency of adults.

### 2.5.4. Degradation

The definition of degradation is also problematic due to its subjectivity in interpretation but its nuances are important to explore. Some anti-pornography feminists have argued that pornography is inherently degrading (Dworkin 1987; Dines, Jensen and Russo 1998), and some argue that the way the women are depicted as always willing to have sex is degrading (Donnerstein, Linz, Penrod, 1987; Dworkin and Mackinnon, 1983). What is categorised as degradation in pornography varies, from specific acts such as ass-to-mouth, to more nuanced details such as reduced eye clarity or 'egalitarian or unidirectional' activities (Tyler, 2010). However, a narrow definition of unidirectional interactions may not include different types of mental and physical pleasure, and as with the term degradation, the term 'objectification' and interpretations of what constitutes pleasure are subjective in their definition and application. Acts such as anal sex or being ejaculated upon by a man are firmly positioned as degrading to women (Bridges, 2010; Dworkin and MacKinnon, 1988; Tyler, 2010). However, others such as Tarrant (2016, p.91) have challenged this standpoint. Pornography reviewer Violet Blue argues that 'degradation is in the eye of the beholder' (2006, p.xiv). This wealth of subjectivity leads Tyler to acknowledge that this term can be 'slippery' to define consistently across studies and theories (p.43). Situated in the intersection of power and knowledge, the language and definitions used in research carry important meaning. Language is a political choice, according to Judith Butler (2013) and how concepts such as consent and degradation are positioned affects analysis in research.

Coding penetration as violence has also featured in content analysis (Cowan and Dunn, 1994; Palys, 1986; Yang and Linz, 1990). The issue of heterosexual penetration as violence has featured in radical feminist discourse since Andrea Dworkin posed the question of its meaning for women:

> The political meaning of intercourse for women is the fundamental question of feminism and freedom: can an occupied people-physically occupied inside, internally invaded-be free; can those with a metaphysically compromised privacy have self-determination; can those without a biologically based physical integrity have self-respect? (1987, p.156)

Dworkin asks this while claiming that 'liberals' refuse to entertain this as a possibility (1987, p.157). Dworkin's' rhetoric has proved divisive in considering the meanings of penis-in-vagina heterosexual sex, but this viewpoint can impact on the coding of an act depicted in pornography as being degrading, or even *inherently* degrading. This influence can be seen in Bridges' work, who displays an existing bias when she states: 'mapping the pornographic text is critical to the understanding of how pornography stems from and propagates sexism and violence against women' (2010, p.34). This framing firmly places pornography in the inherently degrading category. Again, issues of bias and objectivity must be discussed in pornography research, and this will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

### 2.5.5. Cherry Picking

Methodological concerns are discussed by Goldacre (2008) who argues that selectively choosing studies to support an ideology or desired result, also known as cherry picking, is a feature of bad science, along with unsupported conclusions and small sample sizes that are generalised. Nylennae and Simonsen also address the suppression of data, and argue that it lies in-between scientific misconduct and fraud, along with publication bias (2006). Cherry picking data to make absolutist claims lends itself more to ideology rather than rigorous

methodologically sound discourse; nor does this approach allow for the possibility of a multitude of truths. Cherry picking may also be a feature of the selection of particular films to argue for a films' popularity and therefore its use as an example to support an argument. 'Popular' also does not distinguish if viewers are once off or repeat consumers of a particular scene. Nor does this descriptor distinguish between those who have sought the scene out specifically, or stumbled upon it accidentally; nor does it say if or how viewers enjoyed the clip sexually, or watched for other reasons, such as curiosity. These are all factors to consider when making statements about consumption of pornography in order to have a critical, contemporary analysis. The argument of cherry picking is also connected to the promotion of research that supports an ideology- such as Bridges' research being the only study cited in relation to content analysis of pornography (Dines, 2010; Fight The New Drug, 2016).


## 2.5.6. Establishing Meaning

The downplaying of nuance and the ascribing of one universal meaning to pornography and the acts depicted within pornography are an 'impossibility' according to Nadine Strossen (1995, p.152). Strossen also challenges the rhetoric of Dworkin and Mackinnon as 'hopelessly simplistic and surface-obsessed' (p.153). To ascribe one singular meaning to a sexual act is to dismiss subjectivity, agency and frames human sexuality as having fixed meanings that do not change over time. Strossen argues that disagreements on meaning simply 'mirrored the wonderfully infinite variety in the human mind, imagination, and emotions' (*ibid*).


Robert Jensen admits that finding a universal meaning is difficult, because meaning is so fluid. This is especially true when it comes to sexuality, as it is experienced subjectively by each person. He argues that perhaps content analysis is not the best technique for analysing pornography, as it strips the act of context and involves searching for understanding in the void

that results' (1998, p.70). He states this approach 'obscures as much as it illuminates' (*ibid*), and posits that the use of categorisation is an attempt to fix meaning in a place where meaning is unfixed. Jensen argues that pornography must be read in the context of the world in which it is produced- in a patriarchal society where violence against women by men is common.

Dines and Jensen opine that 'importing techniques from the natural sciences to try to understand language, mass media, and interpretation is a failed project' due to meanings' refusal to be subjected to a fixed point *(ibid)*. This is not simply a fatalistic surrender. Instead he argues that meaning can be navigated through rich description and the 'struggle for compelling interpretation' (ibid). This allows for the debate to become more nuanced and thus for more meaning to be explored, as dividing meaning into polar opposites misses rich data in between polemic positions. Dines and Jensen point to Hall, who argues that 'there is all the difference in the world between the assertion that there is no one, final, absolute meaning- no ultimate, signified, only the endlessly sliding chain of signification and, on the other hand, the assertion that meaning does not exist' (1986, cited in, Jensen, 1998, p.70). Dines and Jensen believe the debate needs nuance, as while a definitive answer may be impossible, precision may be improved; Jensen points to Geertz who proclaims that if this approach is adopted '[w]hat gets better is the precision with which we vex each other' (1973, cited in 1988, p.71). Furthermore, Dines and Jensen lament that: '[i]n the debate over pornography people too often have vexed each other without much precision' (1998, p71). It can be argued that this precision needs to be supported with rigorous research that centers the experiences of performers, and there can be space created for debates that do not contribute to symbolic or epistemological violence.

The above discussion highlights some of the methodological issues found in existing studies, ranging from issues with sample sizes, selection processes, and the assigning of meaning. These issues lead Kimmel to argue that studies have been 'suggestive at best', and 'beset by both substantive and methodological problems that make reliability questionable and comparability impossible' (p.99).

Content analyses of pornography have often been divorced from context. In order to ameliorate this concern Segal suggests pornography discourse must be recognised as 'only one of a multiplicity (the least esteemed, least convincing, often almost contradictory) of phallocentric and misogynistic discourse fashioning our images of gender and sexuality' (2004, p.63). Additionally, to regain a sense of context, rates of violence found in pornography should be compared to rates of violence found in other forms of media such Hollywood films and TV shows. Accusations of downplaying results of research are levelled at both sides in the debate, from Weitzer (2015) towards Bridges (2010), and Tyler towards a multiplicity of authors (2010, p.50). However, Segal challenges the claims of anti-pornography campaigners as those who are 'most eager to reiterate its unique offensiveness face the problem that surveys of what is packaged as pornography show that violent imagery is rare, rather than definitive' (2004 p.63). As seen in this discussion, the rates of violence found have not supported the conclusions drawn by some research such as Dines and Jensen (1998), Bridges (2010) and Tyler (2010). Weitzer argues the research discussed here is biased and lacks objectivity, stating '[s]ome of these individuals are unabashed in substituting their own ideology for research' (2015, p.271).

### 2.6. Pornography and Violence- Objectification through Discourse.

An essential nuance of the discourse on violence and pornography is the issue of objectification.

### 2.6.1. Introduction

Much attention has been paid to the issue of pornography causing violence, or consisting of violent content. However, despite much rhetoric about the experiences of performers, surprisingly few studies have been conducted to test these claims, or to find out the realities of their experiences on set. Anecdotes appear to be favoured over large scale/longitudinal studies- of which there are none. Given that so much is assumed about pornography performers, especially female performers, it is interesting to see such an almost total dearth of academic research.

One can speculate on the reasons for this, but it is important to consider the ethics of making statements (academic or non-academic) without speaking to the group affected, or making statements without evidence to support them. Research ethics in relation to power dynamics are especially important to consider if the speaker is benefiting financially or otherwise from said statements, when the person at the heart of the speech is not benefitting. Power dynamics and ethics within pornography research is an area that is in urgent need of development if we wish to build a modern, methodological and ethically sound body of discourse. This research project explores an aspect of this nuance through an examination of how the discourse itself can contribute to violence. Although it is important to ask how a person's voice is used in discourse, it is also critical to explore how a person's voice is missing, either accidentally or deliberately. While silence can often be looked at in exclusively negative terms, it can also be a site of resistance and power. Silence can be a rejection of participating in existing paradigms that the participant or their peers may have been previously harmed by, or have found to be

non-reflective of their way of living. Conversely *listening* and the issue of *who listens to who,* and whose testimony is granted legitimacy is also critical to include in a nuanced analysis of pornography discourse. Chapter Four will examine this topic in relation to the experiences of women working in pornography.

Beyond simplistic readings of pornography and its effects and experiences, power is critical to explore in feminist pornography discourse. Williams suggests that while some scholars argue that the history of pornography is a history of power, this is not examined in enough depth. Williams states that for historians such as Kendrick (1987) this power is an elitist power on the side of the censors, whereas for anti-pornography feminists it is, more simply, a misogynist power in which the text dominates its women victims (1989, p.14). While these positions tell us much about power, we also need to investigate how power operates through discourse itself, and how the relationship between power, sex and knowledge operates through violence in the pornography episteme. This can be done though examining power relations that can be present in research methodology, how studies are conducted, and how theory and terminology are formed in pornography discourse.

Williams argues that the focus on two separate sides follows Foucault's framing of singular truths about pornography, and the insistence on these truths also functions as a 'compulsion to talk about an essential, self-evident sexual ''truth'' as is pornography itself' (p.15). This research project does not adopt the position of finding out a singular truth, but rather aims to make a contribution to a multiplicity of truths and knowledge about performer experiences. Thus, this thesis aims to avoid an essentialist position that would serve to stifle discourse. The access performers have to participation in discourse is a key concern of this research project and Chapter Four looks at this issue through the lens of power and objectification.

### 2.6.2. Objectification

Much is theorized about the experience of objectification by women in pornography. This will be discussed throughout this research project. Attwood argues that the term "objectification" has been 'central to feminist critiques of sexual representation that examine how woman functions as a sign for patriarchy as its other, its spectacle and its subordinate *thing*'' (2004, p.7) Those opposed to pornography claim that pornography objectifies women both working in the industry and all women in general. Attwood goes on to argue that the claims made about pornography and objectification are a form of violence in itself, as they are often accompanied by graphic accounts of extreme violence. She further claims these claims are perceived as true through 'repetition rather than verification' (2004, p.8) and they place an emphasis on essentialism. With regards to objectification, Attwood claims that similar to the issues with defining pornography, anti-pornography feminists have also similarly failed to agree on a singular definition of objectification in this context (*ibid*).

Following Attwood, who calls for a contextualisation of objectification rather than blanket approaches, an exploration of how objectification may function in the treatment of performers has the potential to add new particularist knowledge to the episteme. This approach represents a move away from essentialism that was a large part of early feminist discourse on sexuality and pornography. This approach builds on the work of Weeks, who argues that there 'cannot be an all embracing history of sexuality. There can only be local histories, contextual meanings, specific analyses' (1991, p.154). Thus, in order to avoid 'tired and repetitive' approaches to sexuality, Weeks argues that researchers should take note of Sedgwick's theories on particularism and universalism, which move discourse away from essentialism versus constructionism (*ibid*). Sedgwicks' work is another example of queer theory that challenges existing research paradigms and allows other approaches to gain ground. This will be

discussed further in Chapter Three.

A particularist approach looks at intersections of issues such as race, gender, age, working conditions, consent, etc. Conversely, a universalistic approach will continue to make absolutist, blanket claims that do not allow for nuance to be explored. This thesis calls for a particularist approach to break away from objectification through homogeneity. Attwood outlines this homogeneity as resulting in 'the anti-porner position reduc[ing] women to a singular, essential, universal state', who is in need of others speaking on their behalf (2004, p.54). This objectification through the reduction of women to victim status and the elevation of the anti-pornography feminist as speaker and saviour will be discussed in Chapters Four and Six.

As a result, differing approaches to objectification have resulted in differing theories and statements; but what is missing from this entanglement of competing claims is an examination of how the debate itself objectifies the performers. Rather than trying to find definite answers from the chaos of conflicting approaches, the following chapters look at this missing knowledge in order to build on the existing discourses. Chaos can be a positive, it can allow for new opportunities for understanding to arise. Chapter Three will discuss this methodological approach in more detail.

### 2.6.3. Modernising Objectification Theory

Like many concepts in pornography, theories of pornography and objectification are also at risk of simplification or reductionism. Cahill (2012) argues that while objectification is frequently mentioned in feminist theories, especially in relation to sex and pornography, very few feminist scholars have focused on an in-depth analysis of objectification itself and how it operates on a nuanced level. Cahill argues that a sole focus on objectification is not enough to do justice to the experiences of women. Thus, she calls for a new approach as she argues that the current

conceptualisation of objectification is 'overly burdened by philosophical legacies that do not and cannot serve feminist ends' (2012, p.7). She argues that if objectification is framed solely as a negative experience, 'such experiences are either rejected as examples of false consciousness or framed as unfortunate vestiges of internalized misogyny' (2012, p.x). Cahill calls for a recognition of embodied intersubjectivity and proposes derivatization as a tool that may be suitable for this undertaking (*ibid*). Cahill outlines her concept of derivatization as a tool for ethical analysis, as she claims that:

> [D]erivatization problematizes not materiality, but a kind of ontological reductionism, by which one subject is reduced to the being of another (2012, p.x).

She posits that this reduction can result in objectification as it removes a persons' 'ontological distinctiveness', which in turn impacts on their ability to achieve intersubjectivity (*ibid*). Cahill argues that this approach offers new ways of looking at the body and its connection to the individual. This analysis also builds on objectification theory to incorporate this nuance of subjectivity, and Chapter Four outlines some examples of this objectification in practice. Cahill posits that being the recipient of the gaze is not inherently objectifying, and argues that subjects are also bodies and thus a focus on the body is not solely objectifying. Recognising that derivatization allows for the 'embodied, intersubjective self,' to be recognised in discourse in a way that a focus on objectification does not allow for, Cahill adds critical knowledge to this area (2012, p.xii).

Nussbaum has written extensively on objectification and expanded the concept by developing seven nuances to objectification theory. She describes these as:

1. *Instrumentality*: The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes
2. *Denial of autonomy:* The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination
3. *Inertness:* The objectifier treats the object as lacking agency and perhaps also in activity
4. *Fungibility:* The objectifier treats the object as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type and/or (b) with objects of other types
5. *Violability:* The objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary integrity, as something that is permissible to break up, smash, break into
6. *Ownership:* The objectifier treats the object as something that is owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc
7. *Denial of subjectivity:* The objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account (1995, p.257)

Nussbaum argues that it can be the case that objectification is a 'relatively loose cluster-term', where just one of these features may be present, or several may be present at once (1995, p.258). Nussbaum also accepts that objectification is simultaneously a slippery and multiple meaning term (1995, p.266). This anarchism of multiplicity is however not a negative issue if we adopt an approach to pornography studies that incorporates a particularist approach that allows for a multiplicity of meanings to surface. This will be discussed further in Chapter Three. Nussbaum makes what she deems a fundamental point: 'in the matter of objectification, context is everything' (1995, p.271). It is also arguable that alongside context, consent plays an important role, especially in relation to pornography. This point means that a nuanced approach that accounts for consent and context within pornography studies is an opportunity to expand on objectification theory. Pornography studies are a fertile area for cultivating new theories on objectification, and context is the nourishment needed for the efflorescence of theory.

While a sizeable part of pornography discourse examines the objectification of performers within the industry, or the objectification of women as a whole as an effect of pornography, this thesis will utilise Nussbaum's' nuances of objectification to explore how discourse can objectify performers.

Cahill argues that only three writers have adequately addressed the concept of objectification-LeMoncheck (1985), Nussbaum (1995), and Langton (2009). Cahill argues that Langton builds on Nussbaum's checklist of objectification and adds reduction to body, silencing, and reduction to appearance, although she argues that Nussbaum would have disagreed with Langton's formulation of this addition (2012, p.19). Cahill argues that an important feature of Langtons' divergence from Nussbaum is that she calls for a recognition of the difference between an intentional denial of autonomy, and the non-attribution of autonomy: non-attribution is primarily a matter of attitude, whereas autonomy-violation is something more—a more active doing, perhaps one that prevents someone from doing what they choose' (2009, p.233). Langton argues that an overarching label of denial of autonomy does not allow for this nuance to be visible.

To build on a nuanced reading of denial of autonomy, we can also add to an understanding of intelligence of the object. Leyens et al. argue that humans can be objectified if they are believed to have low intelligence and sociability (2000, p.188). Thus, when performers can be excluded from the status of expert or authority of their own experiences, then it follows that they can be objectified. This exclusion is discussed further in Chapter Four and explored through the lens of stigma in Chapter Five when discussing performers' access to community. The impact of exclusion through being relegated to the outer limits of respectability can be said to contribute to delegitimization, which Bar-Tal defines as the 'categorisation of groups into extreme negation social categories which are excluded from human groups that are considered as acting within the limits of acceptable norms and/or values' (1989, p.170)

Cahill also highlights LeMoncheck as a writer who has enhanced the study of objectification. LeMoncheck argues that objectification would be less repulsive to women if the binaries of 'good sex'/ 'bad sex' and 'good women'/'bad woman' did not exist. Within LeMonchecks' work there is an acknowledgement of the 'good sex'/ 'bad sex' binary that Rubin has developed and which is discussed in full in Chapter Four.

MacKinnon famously said 'Man Fucks Woman. Subject. Verb. Object' (1989, p.124) to highlight objectification in sex and in the sex depicted in pornography. However, through the positioning of the performer as other in pornography discourse, this slogan now becomes '*Feminist Discusses Performer. Subject. Verb. Object'.* The exclusion of the performer from the status of expert in this discourse contributes to their objectification. The same positioning happens when religious rescue organisations try to 'save' performers: '*Activists Rescue Victims. Subject. Verb. Object*'. Through this othering, the power dynamic is prohibited from achieving subjectivity, and is contained in object status. Thus, a building of collaborative creation of knowledge that does not harm the performer or deny them their subjectivity is also hampered. This objectification through discourse is discussed in further detail in Chapters Four and Five.

## 2.7. Epistemological violence

Fortifying a nuanced reading of objectification, this PhD adds the concept of epistemological violence to this reading of how objectification can operate.

## 2.7.1. Definitions

Epistemological violence is defined by Teo as:

> [T]he interpretation of social- scientific data on the *Other* and is produced when empirical data are *interpreted* as showing the inferiority of or problematizes the *Other*, even when data allow for equally viable alternative interpretations (2010, p.295).

This form of violence is important to consider as it can have a negative impact on the person concerned. If the only data on pornography performers is negative, this can impact how the performer is perceived, despite the opportunity for data to show positive interpretations. Teo also outlines how epistemological violence is linked to structural violence:

> It is argued that the concept is closer to personal than to structural violence in that it has a subject, an object, and an action, even if the violence is indirect and nonphysical: the subject of violence is the researcher, the object is the Other, and the action is the interpretation of data that is presented as knowledge (2010, p.295).

This facet of violence is important to consider when studying pornography, given that it is an extremely confrontational field, with some claims positioned as the truth despite challenges from performers or other academics. If the performer's voice is missing completely from claims about the reality of being a performer, the data that is perceived as knowledge places the researchers' interpretations as true at the expense of the performer. The researcher is therefore positioned as the authority about the performers' experiences- not the performer. Thus, the performer experiences epistemological violence.

**2.7.2. Objectification through Epistemological Violence in the Research Process**

While much of the feminist debate around pornography centres on the issue of the objectification of women in society, little research has been conducted on how women working in the industry have reported feeling objectified as a result of this debate. There is fierce debate over whether the women working in pornography can truly consent to working in pornography that exists under a patriarchal, capitalist society (Habib, 2015; McElroy, 1997). Some allege that women working in the industry have been brainwashed and are blind to their own oppression (Rubin, 1986), while others claim the only reasons that women would engage in sex work are money or a need to have their identity and self-worth validated through the male gaze (Stark, 2005). Juffer argues that the victim discourse produced by anti-pornography feminism is 'ahistorical but also placeless (...) women and children everywhere are destined to be victims, without ever achieving access to positions that might help them reconfigure porn's meanings and uses' (2004, p.49). Others reject this as a positioning of the performers as victims and point to a variety of reasons why the women work in the industry (Abbott, 2010; Griffith et al., 2012), and claim that this approach silences those who report positive experiences (Hartley, 2016). A silencing of the voices of any researched demographic can be considered a form of objectification, and this chapter will address how the concepts of silencing and Othering applies to ways of knowing within the feminist pornography debate.

Teo that argues that violence can result from the action of the interpretation of data:

> [I]nterpretations, as most often expressed in the discussion section of empirical articles, are a form of action, and if concrete interpretations have negative consequences for groups – even though alternative,equally plausible interpretations of the data are available – then a form of violence is committed. Because the interpretations are presented as knowledge, or because they emerge from science, they represent EV (2010, 296).

Thus, if speculations about performers are analyzed in exclusively negative terms that can result in violence, through stigmatisation, objectification, or even physical violence. Teo argues that alongside violence through interpretation, violence can also result from policies or legislation that are based on those interpretations. In the example of sex work, if the only interpretations of the realities of this kind of work frame its workers as deviants, criminals or victims, then legislation may be enacted to protect or punish those in sex work, and their individual testimonies may not be listened to. The intention of the researcher must also be accounted for- if the researcher has a particular aim, this will influence the data produced and thus, has the potential for both epistemological violence and real world violence.

In the context of this argument, when the performer is excluded as a source of knowledge, the object is the performer whose testimony is silenced through this debate (the action) by those who disavow their testimony (anti- pornography feminists occupying the position of subjects). This chapter will also address how actions like silencing, even if unintended can be considered to be a form of epistemological violence.

Chapter Five outlines some of the consequences of this violence, in terms of stigma production. It is most often theories that are analysed, given the lack of data in this area, thus theory and speculation take the place of concrete data. This can also perpetuate a high risk of epistemological violence.

### 2.7.3. Interpretations

Most academic fields and discourses have ample data to utilise in discussions and theory development. However, in the case of pornography studies, this is a relatively recent field of academic enquiry with the vast majority of studies focusing on the effects of pornography on

its consumers. Large scale, longitudinal, methodological sound studies are sorely lacking. A wealth of data on performers' experiences *simply does not exist*. It thus follows that there are no systematic reviews of existing data since there isn't enough data to do so. What we have instead are the four studies mentioned in Chapter Two, from Abbott (2005), Griffith *et al.* (2012), and Griffith *et al.* (2013) and Miller- Young (2014). These studies explore reasons for entering and staying in the industry, and experiences of childhood abuse and drug use. Additional stories and anecdotes come from performer autobiographies, social media accounts/blogs, anonymous stories told to researchers, or collections of interviews*.* However, often these personal testimonies are discounted as seen later in this chapter. Where then, do performers find a space to discuss their experiences? And crucially, which spaces do they access where they are *heard*, and even more critically- *believed*?

It must be asked- why, for a topic that is so contested, are there so few studies that challenge or confirm widely published speculations? Are the experiences of performers outside the realm of traditional academic research? Are they *unsayable*? There are plenty of academics opposed to pornography who have made claims about the experiences of performers-  one must query why have they not conducted large scale research with performers to support their claims? Teo claims that it is epistemological violence to interpret data in such a way that Others the performers, but where does this stand when speculations are not based on data, but are instead theories *without* supporting data? Teo explains interpretative speculations as actions that make data understandable to others, and labels this as 'the hermeneutic surplus of interpretation' (2008, p.51). Teo defines this as interpretations that give meaning to data instead of simply presenting them on their own.  Traditionally, research produces data, which is interpreted and theories are then formed. In looking at the experiences of performers however, this doesn't

appear to happen. If supportive data is lacking, then a hermeneutic surplus that is rigorous cannot be achieved. Instead, avenues of knowledge are closed off.

Teo states that it is 'it is methodologically incorrect to present data *and* interpretations as *facts* or *knowledge'* (2008, p.51). But it is also methodologically incorrect to present speculations as true *without* data. The dispositif on pornography appears to function on two levels- it discards testimony that does not fit its 'knowledge', and also positions its knowledge as true despite a lack of evidence that would traditionally be present in other academic fields. This two-pronged approach functions as epistemological violence as it contributes to an othering of the performer. It does so through silencing since it positions performer knowledge as problematic, unworthy of inclusion in the dominant knowledge knot. This can indeed be categorised as violence, as Teo argues the impact of epistemological violence 'ranges from misrepresentations and distortions, to a neglect of the voices of the 'Other,' to statements of inferiority, and to the recommendations of adverse practices or infringements concerning the 'Other' (2008, p.57). Thus, this silencing has real world consequences in relation to healthcare policies, legislation/regulation of the industry, and creation and contribution to stigmatisation, as discussed further in Chapter Five.

This lack of data means that ideology is presented as fact; an unscientific approach that forms a hermeneutic deficit which forecloses any nuanced approach and contributes to epistemological violence through discourse. Teo explains a hermeneutic deficit as favouring one explanation only at the expense of other possibilities, as opposed to a hermeneutic surplus which allows for a multitude of explanations and meanings. In order to increase 'hermeneutic

credibility and responsibility' (2008, 63), this must be addressed in ethical research in an effort to reduce the risk of contributing to objectification through epistemological violence.

Teo argues that in order to examine how epistemological violence functions, three main aspects of discourse must be considered (2010, p.300). Firstly, it is important to conduct what he terms '*an analysis of the context of discovery*', that is, looking at biases that might appear due to social, cultural and political beliefs that might expose how the researched other is positioned. In pornography studies, that can be explored through looking at the language and methodology used. This thesis will address this through the use and language which are deemed acceptable to use. Secondly, an '*analysis of the context of justification*' is required which challenges the objectivity of studies and the results produced. Finally, Teo calls for an '*analysis of the context of interpretation*', which involves dissecting how data has been interpreted in order to produce theory. These criteria can thus be adopted in a reflexive approach within research and work to produce more ethically sound research. This approach also makes the research process more transparent and opens up new methods of knowledge discovery.

The concept of epistemological violence can be explored in the feminist debate on pornography by a close reading of the definitions used, the people speaking in the debate, the people stating that they are not being listened to, and the power dynamics present in the battle for legitimacy between academic writers and those with lived experience in the industry. How the experiences of violence are framed, and the definitions of what constitutes violence are important to critically analyse. What is also important is an examination of how discourse itself can be considered to be violence. Through descriptions of the pornography performer as Other, violence through contribution to stigma, objectification, dismissal and denial of agency can create a toxic mix of

symbolic and actual violence. This will be discussed further throughout the following chapters. When the voices of those who are being spoken about are missing from the debate, this impacts the episteme both on how knowledge is produced and legitimised, and how the discursive structure is maintained or challenged. As Mills argues:

> A discursive structure can be detected because of the systematicity of the ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of thinking and behaving which are formed within a particular context, and because of the effects of those ways of thinking and behaving (1997, p.17).

Thus, when the discursive structure around pornography is tainted with epistemological violence, the effects of this discursive structure contributes an impact on the real world, sometimes contributing to stigma. A discursive structure that systematically prioritises a singular truth of academics over researched subjects with lived experiences can stifle discourse. This silence in turn then contributes to nuanced forms of violence such as epistemological violence and symbolic violence. Foucault posits that truth can be interpreted subjectively depending on the speaker:

> Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is the types of discourse it harbours and causes to function as true: the mechanisms and instances which enables one to distinguish true from false statements, the way in which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures which are valorised for obtaining truth: the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (1979, cited in Mills, 1997, p.46).

These techniques for obtaining truth are important to consider in pornography discourse- how do researchers work to uncover knowledge, who is spoken to, whose testimony is granted validity, and who holds the power to grant this validity? In Foucault's work, a panopticon was a device used to monitor people with the aim of correcting alleged deviant behaviour. In turn, people begin to self-police their behaviour if they feel a constant sense of being watched

(Foucault, 1995). In pornography, visibility is omnipresent- from visibility of the naked body, of sex that is usually hidden or private, to the visibility of the discourse on assumed trauma or deviancy of its performers. How does discourse influence the self-regulation of performer behaviour?

This visibility is translated into accessibility where researchers can experience entitlement to know the performers' trauma, or entitlement to make assumptions about the realities of their lives and work experiences. It is important to note that pornography discourse can function as a panopticon of the methods of truth/knowledge obtainment. The epistemological violence that can result can reveal another discourse on power and pornography that adds to the many jigsaw pieces of the episteme on pornography and violence. Throughout the following chapters, this episteme will be explored through the subjects of stigma, claims of false consciousness, the battle for expert status, agency, the research process, and objectification.

### 2.7.4. Linda Lovelace

We can see an example of objectification in the case of Linda Lovelace. While, as documented previously, Linda's story proved beneficial for anti-pornography feminists building their case, the outcome for Linda was starkly different to the outcome for those who promoted her story. Linda experienced severe financial hardship after she left the pornography industry and worked with the anti-pornography feminist movement, and complained that:

> Between Andrea Dworkin and Kitty MacKinnon, they've written so many books, and they mention my name and all that, but financially they've never helped me out. When I showed up with them for speaking engagements, I'd always get five hundred dollars or so. But I know they made a few bucks off me, just like everyone else (McNeill and Osbourne, 2005, p.439).

Linda's experience raises questions about the ethics of telling other people's stories, especially when money and power are involved, and when the telling of the story increases career opportunities for the teller but not the person whose story is being told. In this case Linda outlines how the power lays with Dworkin and MacKinnon who benefitted from her story, and goes on to state: 'I guess I'm more disappointed in the Women's Movement than anything' (Sullivan and McKee, 2015 p.161). In Linda' eyes, the women's movement abandoned her after using her story for their own goals, and she was left to move on with life by herself.  It was a process that objectified Linda and positioned her as a mere tool to use in the feminist war on pornography; objectifying her through instrumentality, fungability, and a denial of subjectivity. This did not go unnoticed by pornography producer Candida Royalle who stated ''It infuriated me that Women Against Pornography (WAP) would take this deeply troubled, traumatized woman and just basically use her for the movement' (Porter, 2013, p.604).

At the end of her life, Linda's views on pornography changed, where she became more accepting of it. She outlines her change of mind:

> Although hundreds will follow after me, I was the original porn queen. I legitimised pornography for better or worse, even though I campaigned against it for years. But in the final years of my life, as I set out to capitalise off my porn past, I have become more tolerant as I talked to hundreds of Americans and came to see that in some cases, porn enriched their lives and even saved their marriages. It's got its bad points, God knows, but what doesn't? (Porter, 2013, p.618).

While Linda's experience of being the 'original porn queen' changed her life in many ways, it is notable that while she returned to the industry in order to survive, those who told her story did not have equitable economic experiences. In fact, Dworkin went on to dismiss Linda's change of mind, stating that:

> Thank God for freshmen who hadn't heard the story of her past before. Otherwise, Linda had nothing new to say, no new insights. She hadn't grown like some of us (Porter, 2013, p.614).

Linda's experiences post *Deep Throat* also includes escaping from a husband she accuses of domestic violence, addiction, and multiple rapes when people in her town found out who she was, forcing her to move over and over again, leaving her in poverty (Porter, 2013). It appears Linda's focus was on surviving and constantly navigating risks of new violence and processing trauma, rather than meeting expectations for her to contribute to anti-pornography discourse. Thus this expectation for her to 'grow' in a way that was acceptable to Dworkin ignored the precarity of Linda's real life experiences, and ignored the impact of trauma. Dworkin's belittling of Linda's journey and change of opinion places her experiences as *wrong* and Dworkin's as *right*. Her claim that Linda had 'no new insights' dismisses her observation noted above, and treats her as disposable in favour of those who Dworkin deems to have 'grown'. Linda was framed as the subaltern, but is now rejected as unknowing. She is precluded from growth and through this relegation, also excluded from expert status.

Given that Linda's experience in the pornography industry was relatively short lived, it must be asked how many newer insights could she be expected to gain by anti-pornography feminists? We can also see her being excluded from knowing the truth, which functions as a shutdown of the possibility of multiple truths in favour of Dworkin's own claim to truth. Linda is also objectified through fungability, through her rejection as expert and the subsequent prioritisation of newer stories to continue the campaign against pornography.

Several features of objectification can be seen in this example, from intentional denial of

autonomy, to denial of subjectivity. Epistemological violence can be detected here through Linda's exclusion from expert status, and placed firmly as Other, and not holding the *correct* knowledge about pornography. Dworkin's statement tells us to disregard Linda, who is positioned as not being able to interpret the reality of pornography correctly, and this causes harm as it continues to position non academics as untrustworthy, unintelligent, wrong, and frames performers as other. Chapter Four will explore how epistemological violence plays out through the power dynamics visible in the battle for expert status. In this chapter legitimacy and how it is deployed as a tool in the relationship between power and knowledge in pornography discourse is discussed. Questions arise over whose experience is considered to be legitimate, who challenges this appointment, and how the division between lived experience and theoretical approaches is marked and protected.

## 2.8. Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter that pornography and violence are a multi-faceted discourse, with many competing narratives and grasps at power present. The 'porn star' as celebrity trope is also introduced through an examination of how performers and feminists have discussed the link between victimhood and celebrity. The following chapters will examine this dance between feminism and pornography, primarily in the areas of methodology, the industry, and feminist discourse, using a lens of power and violence. This research also introduces the concept of epistemological violence to pornography studies. By focusing on the issue of performers nuanced experiences of violence, these findings aim to contribute to this under researched and over- postulated area and place these experiences in the wider context of violence and pornography studies. This will contribute to an understanding of how objectification operates within pornography; however, this time the focus is on objectification through discourse as this

is an under researched area.

**Chapter 3: Methodology**

Methodology in pornography studies is another area that contains competing views and ethical considerations, as this chapter outlines.

**3.1. Introduction**

This chapter will address the methodology used in this research project and the justifications for this choice. This chapter will also address the justifications for choosing the method of analysis, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). In Chapter One concerns relating to methodology in pornography studies were addressed, and in this section this will be explored further. It is important to recognise that the methodology used within research projects can affect the outcome and can highlight or conceal bias. This section will also examine the need for reflexivity to be a central part of pornography research. Research methodology will also be discussed, and the reasons for choosing semi-structured interviews will be explored. Issues of bias and objectivity are rife within pornography studies, as we shall discuss in this chapter when analysing definitions and nuances of power.

**3.2. The Principles of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis**

Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) was chosen as a research approach for the project for several reasons. One of the strengths of using this framework is its flexibility and ability to incorporate a multidisciplinary approach. As pornography analysis can encompass many fields from sociology, feminism, history, psychology, philosophy, media studies, cultural studies and so on, a method of analysis that allows for this multidisciplinary approach is appropriate. FDA has been developed by several international groups (Given, 2008); thus this also aligns with the international development of the field of pornography studies. Discourses that address pornography also need to critically examine the relationship between power, sex, and

knowledge that plays out in the study of pornography, and an analysis that incorporates texts, language, and how lived experience is discussed is well placed to contribute to this critical analysis.

Power can be inherent in discourse, according to Link who argues that discourse is an 'institutionalised way of talking that regulates and reinforces action and thereby exerts power' (Link, 1982, cited in Jäger and Maier, 2009, p.35). Thus this approach is useful to examine power in pornography discourse and how this power can impact effects like stigmatisation and violence, and how it can influence how pornography is discussed at institutional and societal levels. Jäger and Maier argue that discourse is not abstract, and can have a real impact on how a subject is viewed, noting that '(d)iscourses are not 'mere ideology'; they produce subjects and reality (2009, p.37). The following chapters examine how feminist discourse and performer discourse battle for validity, and how their discourse is received.

The issue of who is speaking, what is being said (or *not* being said), which discourse is awarded validity, and which language is used is an important aspect to consider in looking at these nuances of power-knowledge battles. FDA, according to Jäger and Maier (2009), allows for the critical analysis of knowledge and knowledge acquisition and how this knowledge can constitute subjects. In this research, the question of how pornography discourse conceptualises performers is explored, alongside the question of knowledge and the ethics of pornography discourse. What Foucault refers to as 'the limits and forms of the sayable' (1968, cited in Locke, 2004, p.29), is important to consider here given the cultural, political and historical aspects of pornography research and discourse. In the feminist debate around pornography, some narratives appear to be more dominant than others, and when these narratives are rejected or challenged the response is often a fiery one.

Jäger and Maier also concur with Foucault here, and argue that analysis of the relationship between power and discourse takes two main forms: power of discourse, and power over discourse (2009, pp.37-40). The power of discourse, they posit, follows Foucault's writing on what is sayable and unsayable, and this can impact on subjectivity and reality. Power over discourse looks at how subjects can contribute to discourse and how they can control it and challenge meanings. This can be seen in examples of terminology, which is discussed further in Appendix Two and Three, and Chapter Four.

Pornography has so long occupied the position of 'taboo' since its inception and subsequent banning by the Catholic Church, that to speak in any positive or even neutral way on it is a relatively new approach. To advocate that pornography may be pleasurable, may be more nuanced than usually discussed, or that it may be empowering for the women working within it can certainly be controversial viewpoints still within some feminist circles. Jäger and Maier argue that these taboo areas can be called discursive limits (2009, p.47), and we can see these limits enforced in discourse on sex through examples such as Rubin's charmed circle which shows the operation of the limits of 'good sex'. The fear of the boundaries between 'good sex/bad sex' by sex that can be perceived as fear inducing, as we saw Smith and Attwood outline in Chapter Two, operates as the policing of this discursive border. Jäger and Maier also claim that 'tricks' such as allusions and relativazations are used to maintain the limits of discourse, and in Chapter Four these tricks of language are discussed further, giving examples of their use in pornography discourse.

The approach of using FDA is also useful for identifying nuances of power within the feminist debate. Locke identifies the positives of discourse analysis as beneficial for asking questions such as who has access to what discourses. It includes questions such as 'How is the relationship institutionalised between the discourse, speakers and its' destined audience?' and

'How is struggle for control of discourses conducted between classes, nations, linguistic, cultural or ethnic collectivities?' (Foucault, 1991, cited in Locke, 2004, p.30) This is particularly useful when applied to analysing how the discourse of pornography performers is treated, particularly when both performers and anti-pornography feminists make claims of being silenced and dismissed, and in examining whose discourse is awarded legitimacy; which is discussed further in Chapter Four.

Fairclough, one of the founders of critical discourse analysis (CDA), builds on Foucault's work in defining a discourse as 'a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning' (1992a, cited in Locke, 2004, p.5). Subjects and meaning can be constructed through discourse, what Locke calls the *constructedness* of meaning (2004, p.6)- but this positioning also allows for resistance, as Locke outlines:

> It also makes it easier to engage in acts of dissent- to take issue with these constructions and to *resist* the *storied meanings* any text is *positioning* one (another technical term) to subscribe to  (2004, p.6).

The flow of power within this battle in discourse and positioning will be analysed in this thesis through an examination of stigma in Chapter Five, and how performers experience and resist stigmatisation from discourse. Meaning is not fixed and stable, but can be used to flirt with and is 'an opportunity to challenge, skirt, and reinvent received knowledge and identity', (Eisenberg, 1998, p.97), and this is critical to reflect upon in qualitative research. In interviews, the interviewee's answers have the potential to be influenced by their interpretation of the questions. Their answers may be affected by the meanings understood by the researcher who applies an analysis the interviewee may not agree with, and then the research will be interpreted by other scholars, government policy, the general public etc. There can be no singular meaning found that presents itself consistently throughout this process. However, this

can be a positive and can result in new concepts coming to light from new research methodology and demographics.

### 3.2.1. Rationale for Choosing FDA over other methods

FDA was chosen instead of CDA for specific reasons. Firstly, this project is concerned with issues of power and resistance within the pornography debate, and thus Foucault's work appears to be more appropriate here. Given that a Foucauldian approach recognises that macro discourses can have an impact on an individual, and conversely that individuals can shape macro discourses in different ways; this approach places an emphasis on power dynamics in pornography discourse. This approach also allows space to explore how the Other is constructed and positioned in any hegemonic debates.

FDA was selected rather than CDA additionally due to its approach to objectivity. Van Dijk outlines how CDA takes the side of the oppressed:

> CDA starts from prevailing social problems, and thereby chooses the perspective of those who suffer most, and critically analyses those in power, those who are responsible, and those who have the means and the opportunities to solve such problems (van Dijk, 1991, cited in Baxter, 2010, p.128)

While this is clear in its position on objectivity, this is problematic in terms of this thesis. Positioning oneself as on the side of those 'suffering the most' is making an *a priori* assumption that the pornography performers are indeed powerless. Thus, this stance transforms themselves into the 'voice of the voiceless', a position one should avoid in ethical research. This also automatically frames anti-pornography discourse of 'performers-as-victims' as *true,* which is problematic for the ethics of the research that follows. Additionally, this approach

contains the potential to remove or decrease agency from the performers. The ethics of this approach are discussed further in Chapter Four.

Similar to feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis, FDA does not assume the emancipatory approach. Indeed, Baxter argues that this approach "is a 'will to truth' leading to a 'will to power' which will ultimately transmute into its own 'grand narrative' (Foucault, 1972, cited in Baxter, 2010, p.131). This research project does not aim to uncover one overarching truth, but to examine multiple claims of truth while allowing for multiple realities, following Graham who argues that this approach separates FDA from CDA approaches. Indeed, Graham argues that claims to truth function as rhetoric themselves (2005, p.3).

As Foucault argues that power is not unilateral but rather operates within a variety of structures and is experienced in different ways, FDA is well suited to this project. This approach does not assume a binary, but instead looks at *why* we assume a binary. Pornography research is littered with binaries, from 'good/bad/, to 'powerful/powerless', to 'empowered/exploited'. This investigation does not want to stay within this binary approach but to explore the nuances contained within. Following in the work of Rubin, who argues for an approach that recognises pluralities of sexualities (1984), rather than a singular sexuality, the field of pornography is not a singular monolith block but rather contains *pornographies*. This approach builds on Locke's explanation of CDA, which he outlines as a method that looks at literacies rather than a singular literacy, thus allowing for multiple interpretations. Locke further suggests that '[t]his sociocultural approach to literacy allows for the observation that some versions of 'literate' practice are discursively constructed as having higher status than others' (2004, p.13). This is useful for questioning why some discourses are awarded the status of *true*, utilising a postmodern approach that recognises the pluralities of truth. Discourses are not merely descriptions, or unbiased rhetoric, as Diaz-Bone *et al.* (2008) note:

> The strands of knowledge with which we engage in our attempt to describe and understand the world are produced in complex power relations in which different actors and institutions work to establish a dominant interpretation of "reality" (2008, p.12).

Thus discourse is a way of navigating the world through knowledge, and therefore occupies a position of power. This is why an analysis of power must be a part of pornography research.

### 3.2.2. FDA and an Interdisciplinary Approach

Some may claim that because FDA is not a specific method that it is lacking in rigour and that students find it difficult as there are no specific guidelines. Graham addresses these concerns. She notes that researchers are often cautious about choosing FDA because of the lack of concrete guidelines. However, she refers to Thomas who celebrates the concept of 'methodological anarchy' (Thomas, 1997, cited in Graham, 2005, p.6). She explains this approach thusly:

> This requires, not that I dogmatically follow someone else's model for doing discourse analysis but that I ground my work in careful scholarship and engage in a respectful conversation with Foucault; whilst looking to and building on the insights of others, all the while making what I am doing clear without prescribing a model that serves to discipline others (2005, p.6).

This allows for a multidisciplinary approach while contextualising power dynamics. This framing is appropriate for this thesis, which as previously stated, adopts a multidisciplinary approach to meet the nuanced realities of the pornography industry. Samuels also advocates for a multifaceted approach, which he terms methodological or epistemological pluralism, and notes that there are some who argue for:

(1) a given reality (2) one correct theory and/or (3) one correct methodology and who further assume that (4) that our task is to find those singular things; that is, for those who seek determinacy and closure and are uncomfortable with open-endedness and ambiguity (1997, p.67).

Thus, an approach that allows for an untangling of a multitude of discursive strands that enmesh themselves in a 'discursive knot' (Jäger and Maier, 2009, p.47) must allow for flexibility in methods, meaning construction, and competing discourses from different fields of study. It must also allow for reflexivity on the part of the researcher as they may work through personal uncomfortableness with the lack of a singular 'correct' approach and embrace an anarchist/pluralist approach; the need for reflexivity is discussed below. Therefore, FDA will create space for drawing on different fields and explore the methodological and epistemological anarchy (Feyerabend, 1975) that can be present in pornography studies.

Given how interdisciplinary pornography discourse is, this bricolage of research might appear to some as chaotic. To others like Halberstam, a 'scavenger' methodology can work to produce research that challenges hegemonic academic discourse, and allows for new perspectives to be heard- in this case, the perspectives of porn performers (1998). This approach eschews a singular methodology, as Kincheloe argues: '(t)he attempt to construct a universal critical postmodern research method is as futile as physicists' quest for the ether' (1997, p.119). This approach builds on the growth that results from chaos, once the researcher is comfortable with methodological chaos. This thesis draws on this permission to engage with concepts of flexibility and draws on fields such as history, feminist theory, communication studies, psychology, sexuality studies and more to delve into the data and reflect on pornography's interdisciplinary strands of knowledge.

Halbstam calls for this scavenger methodology to draw from different and nontraditional sources, and argues that queer methodology attempts to combine methods that are often cast

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as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence (1998, p.13). This approach recognises that human experiences and realities do not occupy a singular meaning that is unchanging over time, but instead allows for the chaotic nature of human experience to be witnessed. Additionally, queer methodology rejects the idea that truth can be found in singular meanings. Differing discursive planes and sectors (Jäger and Maier, 2009, p.48) will contain differing knowledge and realities, and thus an approach that allows for this divergence is one that can breathe fresh air into stale discourse and methodology. The FDA approach allows for a recognition of multiple meanings, realities and interpretations that are ground in various socio-historical contexts that allows for a more nuanced approach to pornography that has perhaps been missing in the field historically.

Graham notes that because FDA does not insist on objectivity or a singular truth in the traditional academic approach, it may be rejected as unscientific and its methodology unsound. She points to the need to accept and respect uncertainty within poststructuralism, and to respect that findings will always be challenged by others who have different experiences (Humes and Bryce, 2003, cited in Graham, 2012, p.666). To seek a definitive account is, thus, a misguided undertaking' (Humes and Bryce, 2003, cited in Graham, 2011, p.665) Thus, in line with the argument presented above, Graham argues that:

> Discourse analysis informed by Foucauldian or other poststructural theory endeavours to avoid the substitution of one 'truth' for another, recognising that "there can be no universal truths or absolute ethical positions (and hence).. belief in social scientific investigation as a detached, historical, utopian, truth- seeking process becomes difficult to sustain" (Wetherall, 2001, cited in Graham, 2005, p.3).

Opponents of this approach may claim that this lack of insistence on truth and objectivity can lead to a rabbit hole of research having no 'meaning', and that it goes against the privileging of hard science and empirical evidence. But we must question the insistence on this in research

in the social sciences, especially on the subject of lived experiences. Research should be constantly evolving, and should allow for pluralities, instead of seeking a definitive answer. Foucault maintains that in order to modernise science, science itself should be analysed as a 'discursive formation' that can regulate discourse (Foucault, 1980a, cited in Graham, 2005, pp.7-8). Thus, the objective of this project is not to prove whether or not women in pornography are exploited, or that pornography is 'good' or 'bad', but instead will look at how these issues are discussed and the subjects of the debate are formed and the effects of this subjectification.

While some theorists such as Hartsock (2013) argue that Foucault's theories on power fail women, this thesis accepts that Foucault's work functions as a springboard rather than a definitive treatise on power. FDA facilitates the incorporation of a scavenger approach that brings in interdisciplinary approaches that can address women and power. While Hartsock notes that power is a concept that is 'essentially contested', she also argues that 'different theories of power rest on differing ontologies and epistemologies' (2013, p.58). Thus, research that takes account of different approaches can result in a contemporary reading of power in pornography epistemology.

It must be made clear that it is not the case that the truth is unknowable; but rather it is the case that many versions of truth exists. Academia may or may not be the site where all answers are revealed, due to issues such as trust of researchers by participants, historic biases and gender discrimination in academia, resistance to newer forms of research, the demographics of researchers themselves, etc. Researchers must be cognisant of this and view their research as functioning as a jigsaw piece, instead of being the completed puzzle itself. Research in pornography studies would benefit from adopting a postmodern approach which Graham posits allows for a 'a picture of cultural viewpoints, discourses, 'takes' on the meaning of life, genres, jostling with one another in a kaleidoscopic mélange susceptible to rapid hybridisation and

pastiche' (2012, p.34). A pornographic kaleidoscope may therefore prove to be a contemporary way to examine the multitude of experiences within pornographies and their industries.

### 3.2.3. Power and the Participant Voice

An interdisciplinary and epistemological anarchist approach also works to navigate the issues of the 'romance of the voice' as explored by Mazzei and Jackson (2012, p.745). Mazzei and Jackson argue that within qualitative research there can be a desire to oversimplify the voice, which has the effect of stripping context from experience. This can stem from a need to achieve academic coherence and have a 'result' in a study. If we accept that the answers given in research contain within them a multitude of meanings, are affected by reciprocity, addressivity and more, then we can challenge 'romanticized and oversimplified narratives that attempt to veil the fragmented subject that speaks with a voice that can never bear the burden of its weight' (2012, p.746). This can thus free the interviewee from having to provide the ultimate truth, and recognises that focusing only on the meaning within a participants' speech can inhibit an analysis of the wider context and the presence of a multitude of meanings and truths. This stance also has positive implications for reflexivity from the research and for resistance to the framing of a research project as an absolute truth.

Mazzei and Jackson recognise that having participant voice and researcher voice present in data analysis is complicated, and they refer to their methodological approach to this as plugging in- where alongside the participant voice the researcher adds in 'ideas, fragments, theory, selves, sensations' in an assemblage of research (2012, p.747). This approach initially appears to discount the idea of the participant speaking for themselves. When read closer we can see that this approach allows for a recognition that both the researcher and participant contribute to research and inform each other. In the case of this research, it is an interlocutionary assemblage of semi structured questions proposed by the researcher which are then added to

by the participant; and rich data provided by the participant. This data is then taken by the

researcher and connected to other ideas, examples and theories. It is a recognition that this

process would not be possible without the participant, which also gives power to the participant.

Ideally, to adopt a participatory approach the second stage would have returned to the

participants for inclusion in the analysis stage; further research would benefit greatly from this

inclusion. This is discussed further below.

## 3.3. Ontological and Epistemological Concerns within Methodology

Ethical research must be cognisant of concerns around bias and how this can impact research.

This should include a reflexive approach from the researcher, outlined in the following section.

### 3.3.1. Reflexivity

In the quest for improved quality in the research process, it is important to note that the

intersections and experiences of the researcher can affect how the results of this research are

analysed. Reflexivity therefore should be acknowledged as critical in methodological concerns,

especially given the history of fiery personal feminist discourse on pornography since the

1970s, as outlined in Chapter Two. Berger outlines what reflexivity is:

> Reflexivity is commonly viewed as the process of a continual internal dialogue
> and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active
> acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the
> research process and outcome (2015, p.220).

Personal interpretation cannot ever be completely free of prior historical, cultural, gendered

experiences, and thus the statement that 'all social observation depends upon the perspective

of the investigator, so that there are no perspective-independent facts' (Little, 1993, 364) needs

to be borne in mind. This project will be an analysis of the performers' current interpretation of their experiences, which are coloured by their processing at the time of interview of my trustworthiness and personal viewpoints. This is in conjunction with an examination of anti-pornography feminists' analysis of these experiences, which is informed by their own experiences and biases. This circular process means that claims of objective truth or a grand narrative are therefore questionable, as summed up by Little:

> Social phenomena are not objective in the first place, but rather defined by the fluid and changing intentions, meanings, and beliefs of the participants and observers (1993, 364).

This does not however mean that any attempt at objectivity must be abandoned, but that one must bear in mind the need for social scientists to be reflexive about their interpretative work and their positionality. Within this research process using FDA allows for a reflexive position to be adopted; one that recognises that any interpretation has multiple layers of values, realities and is dependent on several factors. Given outlines what this approach means:

> Constructivists,(..) consider not only that objective knowledge is impossible because of these problems of interpretation, but also that – given that the world is variously constructed by human beings with their context- and interest-specific views of the world anyway -- that reality is itself multiple, contingent and value-laden (2008, p.662).

In order to practice ethical reflexivity, Locke argues that 'researchers need to acknowledge the provisionality of their findings' (2004, p.36). Accepting the above mentioned status of being a jigsaw piece rather than a completed jigsaw puzzle would assist with this acceptance. Kincheloe suggests that 'The empirical data derived from any study cannot be treated as simple irrefutable facts. They represent hidden assumptions- assumptions the critical researcher must

dig out and expose' (1997, p.11). As previously discussed, the will to power in striving for a definitive answer is not one that allows for a plurality of meaning, experience, and this will limit the quality of the research findings in their ability to contribute to a nuanced understanding of a fast changing industry and the reactions to it. Kincheloe argues that the 'required researcher attitude is modesty or ''reflective humility''' (1994, cited in Locke, 2004, p.37). This approach may benefit the ethics of any research study.

### 3.3.2. Addressivity

While the issue of interpretations must be addressed, the issue of content and responses is equally as important to address. In such a hotly contested area such as pornography studies, participants have to weigh up several issues before taking part in research. These concerns are situated in the context of previous experiences being used against performers, or as 'proof' that the industry exploits women, or of testimonies being dismissed (Berg, 2013). The performer must choose who to trust, and may not have a large amount of time to research the researcher to see what their biases are. This will be addressed further in Chapter Four and Five. Thus, responses may be anticipatory in nature, a feature of speech that Bakhtin terms 'addressivity', which Locke describes as 'ways in which utterances are constructed to take account of possible future responses' (*ibid,* p.16). When performers have seen their previous trauma used against them to justify campaigns against the industry, as performers Stoya and Belle Knox experienced, it is of course possible that performers would exercise caution in divulging information in interviews. This form of labour is discussed further in Chapter Six. This 'power asymmetry' (Anyan, 2013, p.1) between researcher and research participants must always be accounted for in ethical research.

Bakhtin also notes that the relationship between speaker and listener is crucial to take into account; what he argues is the expressive element, defining this as: 'the speaker's subjective

emotional evaluation of the referentially semantic content of his utterance' (1986, cited in Locke, 2004, p.17). One must take this into account whenever looking at issues of power, truth, objectivity, and reflexivity in this kind of research. As a young, female, white, Irish researcher that attended the AEE/AVNs with dyed hair and tattoos, it must be noted that I may have received different answers than a male researcher, or an older, openly anti-pornography researcher may have received. Issues of race may also be taken into account, as a black researcher may receive different answers than a white researcher may when interviewing black participants, and vice versa. These gender and racial nuances are important to acknowledge in a poststructuralist approach that acknowledges issues around singular truths and universalistic interpretations within research.

This recognition of nuances and the impact of the researcher has consequences for claims of replicating research results, but in taking a poststructuralist approach, one acknowledges the impossibility of exactly replicating results. This approach also practices reflexive humility. Studies of lived experiences from different time periods may no longer apply to current lived experiences, and lived experiences of different genders, ethnicities and socio-economic groups all vary in nuanced ways that need to be accounted for. This is certainly applicable when it comes to pornography studies, given the previously stated high turnover of workers and rapid changes in working conditions. To assume that a study on lived experiences from the past can be equally replicated today must assume a homogeneity of experience, a homogeneity of working conditions, and in relation to pornography, a homogeneity of attitudes towards the industry from outsiders. This view does not allow for the construction of reflective, modernised research.

### 3.3.4. Objectivity in the Research Process

This issue of objectivity is a concern in any research project in the social sciences, especially so in the field of pornography studies, where ideology and bias appear to loom large in areas such as definitions of pornography, definitions of consent, agency, violence, and discussions on the experiences of performers. McElroy argues that anti-pornography feminists 'view the world through the lens of ideology.'' and offers examples to support her claim such as:

> Pornography is called "genocide"; Susan Brownmiller describes it as "the undiluted essence of anti-female propaganda"; Judith Bat-Ada compares Hugh Hefner to Hitler; Andrea Dworkin's book on pornography begins by claiming "men love death... men especially love murder'' (1991, p.43).

These examples do not appear to make any claims of objectivity. This lack of objectivity has also been noted by Gilman who states:

> Pornography seems to encourage the worst intellectual qualities in nearly everyone who writes about it. This is doubtless because it's extremely difficult to maintain a disinterested, reflective attitude towards imaginative work whose chief, indeed only, purpose is to cause sexual excitation (Gilman 1979).

Indeed, activists such as Jensen have noted that they have experienced arousal and shame when watching pornography, and he further admits to crying after visits to the AVNs, while making statements such as 'If I look at another of these images I will die' (2010, pp.107-110). Others such as Dines have stated that they are not objective: 'It is impossible to do the work I do and not be deeply affected. I am affected as a mother, a feminist, a teacher, and an activist. (2010, p.xiii). This overt admission of bias is important in a field where bias can be substituted for truth. Others such as McKee who does not adopt an anti-pornography approach has been subject to criticism for admitting that he has watched pornography for pleasure (Pringle, 2011). This implies that any admission of pleasure to be experienced from watching pornography is

to be dismissed, and thus the research produced is dismissed. This hierarchy of attitudes is discussed further in Chapter Four.

Williams addresses this issue of objectivity, in asking 'what kind of attitude should be struck towards such a classically ''bad object''?' (1989, p.x), and argues that objectivity is not possible: 'It is utterly hopeless to be neutral towards so controversial and physically ''moving'' a topic. Yet to be moved by pornography is not to be uncritical' *(*1989, p.xi). This is an important distinction, and one that should be situated in context- how do researchers in other fields such as Hollywood film studies express their personal approach to the content they research? Williams admits early difficulties with the issue of admitting any pleasure she experienced in watching pornography, or even admitting she watched it personally, a topic still relevant in current pornography studies:

> For even though I know that the slightest admission that not every image of every film was absolutely disgusting to me may render my insights worthless to many women. I also know that not to admit some enjoyment is to perpetuate an equally invidious double standard that still insists that the nonsexual woman is the credible, 'good'' woman. Clearly, it is difficult to strike a proper attitude toward pornography (1989, p.xvii).

Williams' writing here points to a very real problem- how much of oneself does one reveal in research, and how is this revelation treated? This is an issue that academics who are also sex workers have faced. Some such as Christina Parreira have been open about working as a sex worker while completing a PhD. Parriera outlines the benefits of this: 'I felt comfortable asking other workers questions of an intimate and personal nature because of my status as a fellow worker (Berlatsky, 2017). Parriera thus enjoyed a more equal relationship with her interviewees, where both researcher and interview occupy insider status, rather than an outsider-insider relationship that can often take the form of a subject-object relationship. Parriera believes inclusion in the research process is critical for ethical research:

There's the saying, ''nothing about us without us," she says. "I firmly believe this. If the research is about us, we should be involved in the process in some way; our voices need to be included'' (Berlatsky, 2017).

In light of a research history that has traditionally not centred the sex worker/ performers' voice, Parrieras' words are grounded in a very real exclusion in feminist discourse. Moving forward to contemporary research on pornography, it is essential for ethical research that the performer is to be included as the author of their own experiences, and that exclusionary research cannot be held up in academia as ethical or methodologically sound.

Another open sex worker who conducted academic research is Tara Burns, who explained how her work led to easier access to her target population:

I didn't interview people I knew very well ... but they referred interview participants to me and those people were more willing to speak with me than they might have been with someone who was a total outsider.[...]So you could say that I had special access to what's traditionally considered a hidden population (Berlatsky, 2017).

Burns and Parriera thus highlight the benefits of being open about sex work experiences, and the advantages of participatory research epistemological approaches. Their inclusion in analysis allows access to expert status, which is explored in Chapter Four. But this is not risk free. Some former or current sex workers who are found out report being fired from their teaching jobs (Lubin and Dean, 2016; Petro, 2012). Juniper Fitz argues that while sex workers and academics occupy precarious positions, when a person is a sex worker and an academic, this presents its own challenges:

Not only do sex workers navigate two extreme identities, we must also work harder at convincing academic colleagues of our intellectual rigor and of the

seriousness of our research (especially if we happen to also focus our research on gender and sexuality) (2015).

This risk of negative repercussions for those with knowledge gained from lived experienced points to a belief in academia that theories on sex work are best when written by those with no direct experience. Those who do have direct experience can be marginalised and experience risks that non sex-working academics do not. This has implications for access to legitimacy, which is discussed further in Chapter Four. Some new approaches to academic transparently include the researcher's personal experiences, in what Nash and Bradley (2011) call 'me-research' where self-narratives are included in research. This has positive implications for levels of transparency, reflexivity, objectivity and ethics in the research process, and certainly could be incorporated into pornography research. Queering the research process in such a way may create more space for additional narratives to be heard, and to be heard without stigmatisation like Burns (2017), Fitz (2015), Parriera (2017), and Williams (1989) outline above.

When it comes to objectivity in social science research, especially in pornography studies, it is important to examine how power operates, and how the 'truth' and validity of a study is perceived according to one's own biases. This can be seen in definitions used in a study, and the validity afforded to language such as 'sex worker' or 'prostituted woman', and which groups use or reject these terms. This topic is discussed further in Chapter Four. Finding neutral language can be challenging, as well as finding neutral starting points in research. As Little states, within social science this may be an impossible quest:

> There are no pure "facts," but only facts as couched in one conceptual system or another. There are no pure observations, but rather observations couched in a theory-laden vocabulary. Theories bring with them their own empirical criteria, which bias the findings in support of them (Little, 1993, p.364).

Therefore, this thesis does not endeavour to make universalistic claims. It recognises that the intention of the researcher is to provide an interpretation of performers' experiences and their treatment in feminist discussions on pornography, with performers who may or may not be in the industry when this project is finished. It is not claiming to generalise to all performers; indeed, generalisations of studies with small sample sizes has proved problematic in uncovering truths about pornography and how it is spoken about. This research does not claim to speak to the realities for the majority of performers, as to over-generalise is a logical fallacy and results in simplification. Instead, it will provide a nuanced approach to a small number of performers. In an industry that experiences huge turnover and rapid changes in production methods, it is unrealistic to argue for a small scale study to be held up to contain the singular truth about the industry. This nuanced approach needs to be incorporated into porn studies in general in order to improve the quality of research in the field.

## 3.4. Methods

The method of investigation chosen was semi structured interviews. This method was chosen for several reasons.

### 3.4.1. Qualitative Research versus Quantitative Research

Initially a survey was considered as a research tool in order to capture a wide range of responses to a longer list of questions. The reasons for this consideration were that due to a lack of research in this area, and a larger range of responses could provide a wide range of data. However, this was discarded as a possibility for this project. While surveys have potential for a large data yield, it would not provide enough detail to critically be able to apply FDA as a method of analysis. It would also not allow for in-depth analysis of lived experiences due to the

structure of a survey. Finally, it would not allow enough space for the performer's voice to be heard or give the performer enough space to go into details on what they choose to divulge. This would not allow for a nuanced subject-subject relationship between researcher and performer; therefore, the power would remain solely with the researcher in setting the terms of discussion.

A participatory research epistemological approach would be ideal in order to work to create a more equal relationship between researcher and interviewee. However, given the challenges of distance and time frame this was not chosen for these practical reasons. A lack of opportunity for relationship building also prohibited a true co-working relationship in research design. However, it is recommended that future research projects adopt this approach where possible in order to create a more egalitarian approach to knowledge creation and control. This approach can utilise feminist and queer methodology approaches to transform the research process into one that is more inclusive and nuanced, and recognises power dynamics within the researcher-participant relationship. This approach recognises the impact of issues such as structural control, linguistic control, thematic control that can affect the research process and inclusivity (Chaudhary, 1997, pp.115-116). Anyan notes that even if interviews can work to address the asymmetrical power dynamics, the data analysis stage can be where the power returns solely to the researcher (2013, p.6) as they are the only ones conducting the analysis. To offset this, future research projects would adopt the participatory approach that allows the interviewee to be a part of the analysis stage of research; this inclusion of participants in the analysis stage is also called for by Burns (2017).

Thus, to allow for a more inclusive subject-subject relationship instead of an object-object relationship, semi-structured interviews were selected as the research tool. This method allowed the performer to add any additional information they wanted to share, and space to

provide as much detail as they wanted to. The use of semi-structured interviews rather than a structured format allowed for the performer to exercise more freedom to express themselves in their own terms. As not all questions are cemented before the interview, flexibility is permitted to explore concepts that may come up during the interview that may not have been considered previously.

Anyan (2013) considers power within the interview process, and draws on Lukes (1974) to outline how both the researcher and participant can experience covert and overt forms of power in the interview. The power that a researcher has in dictating the interview is known as the 'agenda setting power' where they can decide on the topics discussed, thus allowing for research participants to contribute topics they wish works to navigate this covert power. Lukes also notes that in an interview setting, the participants can have the power to refuse to answer, what Lukes terms 'deterrence power' (1974, cited in Anyan, 2013, p.3). The participants also hold the power to end the interview. Thus, Anyan claims that an interview can utilize 'transactional power dynamics' where both researcher and participants enjoy different forms and levels of power. Nonetheless, Anyan does recognise the asymmetrical nature of this power, as the researcher is the one requesting the interview, setting the location and time and questions asked. However, in this PhD the participant chose the setting and time for the interview, and had space to talk beyond the questions offered, thus offsetting the asymmetrical nature somewhat.

### 3.4.2. Personal Aptitudes for Qualitative Research

I have previous experience with the topic of women and sexuality, conducting through previous qualitative research and was able to build on this experience for this thesis. As I also have substantial experience working in the field of social care with vulnerable women, the issue of

discussing potentially difficult or personal topics is one that I am familiar with and have undergone extensive training for. This training is inclusive of the areas of domestic violence, sexual violence, drug use, sex work, homelessness, etc., and this training is appropriate for preparation for these topics if they should arise in the interviews. This training allows for conducting interviews where the interviewee is given freedom to speak, at their own pace, and compassion and respect are shown throughout and especially if difficult, emotional topics are raised. The guidelines of non-judgmental interactions and a person centered approach are also an established part of my experiences and training. This also prepares me to deal with personal emotional reactions and to practice good self-care in the event of traumatic disclosures. All participants were supplied with the details for support agencies in the case of requested post-interview support, and provided with the contact details of the research projects' supervisor and ethics committee.

Situating the interviews in such a data-rich field site (Comella, 2014, p.64) allowed for valuable personal insights to be gained, and had the potential to result in different responses than would have resulted from email interviews due to the level of personal interaction. This method also gave the performers the opportunity to ask questions about my research in real time, face to face, and allowed them to make the decision to participate in the interview more holistically. An email interview would not have achieved the more equal power dynamics of an in-person interview, nor provide the same level of support if a traumatic situation arose.

### 3.4. Accessing Research Participants

Many factors were considered in the selection process in order to ethically access participants.

### 3.4.1. Ethics Approval

As this thesis involved interview human subjects, ethical approval was sought. An application for ethical approval was submitted to the DCU Research Ethics Committee. This application outlined the process of interviewing participants in Las Vegas at the AEE/AVN expo, and attached the Plain Language and Informed Consent forms, which can be found in Appendix Three and Four.  Ethical approval was granted in 2015, and a copy of this can be seen in Appendix Five. A recording device was sourced in order to record the interviews for later transcription.

### 3.4.2. Selection Methods

The participants were chosen using snowball sampling, approaching performers at the convention and randomly contacting performers through social media prior to the event. Snowball sampling, also known as chain referral sampling, was chosen due to time constraints and it allowed participants to refer their friends to participate if they felt that they had a positive experience. This method represents an opportunity for the performer to experience more power in the research process, and is close to a participatory research approach. However, to counteract the risk that snowball sampling would result in sample bias, performers were also randomly approached at booths. There, the performers were engaged in conversation and the research project explained to them, and they were and asked if they wanted to participate. This was in conjunction to contacting performers via social media and making arrangements to meet at the event to conduct the interview.

Damianakis and Woodford argue that snowball sampling can increase negative implications for confidentiality in small research populations, in what they refer to as 'ethical vulnerabilities' (2012, p.709). They posit that measures taken to negate these risks can include the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying details, as well as giving the participants the right

to refuse to answer any questions they are uncomfortable with. Damianakis and Woodford also support the process of reflexivity in order to examine ethical issues. These measures were adopted during this PhD. While these concerns with snowball sampling in small communities are valid, the potential for equalisation through giving participants choice, agency and opportunity to participate in the research process cannot be dismissed.

### 3.4.3. Participant numbers

The number of interviews planned for was capped at 10, and resulted in 8 interviews conducted. I approached approximately twenty performers at the expo, and approximately 5 on social media before the exp.  All were contacted at random, and a range of ethnicities and ages were included. Two performers who were contacted via social media agreed to meet at the expo; I received no response from the others.

The small number of interviews was due to time constraints, both at the event itself, and within the time constraints of the PhD for in-depth analysis and write up. However, it is recommended for future research for a larger number of semi-structured interviews to be conducted in this area to contribute to the pool of knowledge to build a bigger picture of the realities of working in the industry.

### 3.4.4. Research schedule

The interviews took place over five days at the AEE/AVN event in January 2016. Interview times averaged approximately 40 minutes, with the shortest being approximately 30 minutes and the longest being almost one hour.

The participants chose the time, date and location of the interviews. This freedom of choice was to ensure the interviews did not conflict with their schedules, and to allow them control over this aspect of the interview process. For Amanda, Louise, Emma and Sophie, this was a quiet place in the hotel away from the expo. Katie wished to conduct the interview over breakfast in the hotel restaurant. Holly chose to meet and have food in a cafe away from the hotel. Ava chose the location of the Cupcake Girls suite. This was a rest area run by a support organisation for sex workers who provided a chill-out space for performers during the expo that was off limits to non-performers. Hannah could not make the allotted time in the end and so emailed her answers as she still wished to take part.

### 3.4.5. Performer Profiles

The performers had a mix of educational and professional experiences, as well as differences in age and ethnicity:

| Name | Age | Experience | Ethnicity | Education |
|------|-----|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Louise | 27 | 8 years | White | Did not finish high school |
| Katie | 33 | 2 years | Hispanic/ Native American | Master's Degree |
| Emma | 32 | 7 Years | Jewish | PhD |
| Sophie | 21 | 11 months | White/ Romani | Currently enrolling in undergraduate degree |
| Amanda | 43 | 7 Years | Filipino | Degree |
| Ava | 39 | 17 years | Native American/European | Degree |
| Hannah | 31 | 13 years | European | Degree |
| Holly | 34 | 12 years | White American | High School |

Table 1.

Due to the performers' ages and length of experience in the industry, this thesis will most likely differ in experiences from those who are very new to the industry, are younger or are different ethnicities. However, people with extensive experience in any industry will have built up a large amount of experience and should be considered as experts in their own experiences.

It is notable that with the exception of Sophie, the performers were not new to the industry, and were older in age. Younger participants were asked but declined to take part. It could be speculated that participants were older and more experienced and this gave them more confidence to take part and discussed their wealth of experiences, whereas a younger or newer performer may not have this confidence yet.

The mixture of educational experiences is also interesting as it may challenge any stereotypes that women turn to pornography due to being uneducated or having a lack of options. Participants did not reference their own levels of education or those of their colleagues; instead they focused more on their ages or levels of life experiences. For example, Emma, who had the highest educational achievement at PhD level, referred solely to life experience when discussing the vulnerability of new entrants to the industry. It appears that the level of stigma and negative on-set working experiences did not vary due to educational achievement, as all participants reported incidents of stigmatisation. Therefore, this variable was not explored further.

The performers self-identified within a variety of ethnicities. However, it must be noted that despite being asked to participate, no African-American/Black performers chose to participate. Some of those asked refused outright, others stated they were too busy. As Miller-Young (2014) outlines, black performers experience the industry in different ways than white or Asian performers. The racial dynamics of a black woman being interviewed by a white woman is also

to be considered as part of reflexive research, and it may have been a factor in their decision not to take part. All performers mentioned stigmatisation so race was not counted as a distinguishing factor in this context. However, it would be interesting to consider racial differences in future research.

### 3.4.6. Anonymity

The participants were ascribed a pseudonym to protect their anonymity in publication. Each pseudonym was chosen randomly from a list of popular girls names and assigned randomly to the participants.  This was decided upon in order to allow the participant more freedom to give personal opinions without fear of having this affect their employment opportunities, and to protect them from personal attacks from those who may dispute their accounts e.g. anti-pornography feminists or religious protestors. However, the participants were reminded that while this was done as much as possible, complete anonymity could not be absolutely assured due to others recognising anecdotes etc. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and then held on a secure computer that only the researcher had access to.

### 3.5. Research Questions and Emergent Themes

The participants were asked questions on how they dealt with interactions from fans and anti-pornography protesters, if they would join a union for performers, the best moments of their career so far and conversely what they found to be the least positive aspects of their work. They were also asked about Measure B, which aimed to force performers to wear condoms that was topical at the time of interview, whether they identified as feminists, and whether they felt their work was violent. These questions were chosen to shed light on some working practices, and to give performers space to talk about on-set conditions if they wished. Outside of these questions, performers were informed before the interview commenced that they could

talk about whatever they wanted, and the interview was free to follow whatever the performer wished to speak on. Performers were also advised that they were free not to answer any of the questions put to them.

The two dominant themes that emerged as a result of the data provided related to stigma and working conditions, with the underlying theme of violence connecting both of these. Data on performers' best and least positive experiences related to both of these categories, and all the participants mentioned stigma in depth. Performers discussed stigma in relation to the general public, their families, relationships, jobs, and their feelings towards colleagues, some of whom they viewed as contributing to stigma. On-set experiences became a theme through answers on sexual practices and impact on the body, interactions with fans and protesters, Measure B, and STI rates. These two overarching themes were the ones that performers spoke most on, and thus themes such as their identification as feminists or the plans after they left the industry yielded little data. Performers were also asked if they had engaged in escort work, but the answers to this question were either short or could be considered under the themes of stigma and working conditions. Thus, it was not explored as a theme on its own.

### 3.5. Rationale for Research Location

After approval from Dublin City University's ethics committee, the interviews were conducted at the AEE expo/ AVN awards in Las Vegas, Nevada. The expo sees thousands of fans turn up to meet hundreds of performers, directors, etc. over a number of days, with the event culminating in an awards show. The American mainstream industry that focuses on heterosexual sexual activity was chosen as the hub for this project for the following reasons:

Firstly, the majority of pornographic material consumed in the Western world is American made (Holmes, 2013). While alternative and/or feminist pornography companies thrive in areas such as San Francisco, mainstream American pornography is generally made in LA. A smaller industry exists in Florida, and while this industry has been the subject of documentaries such as *Hot Girls Wanted* (2016), most American content consumed originates from the LA industry. Most of the arguments around pornography centre on the mainstream industry and the effects on consumers of this content, so it is logical to interview people operating within the same industry relevant to this particular debate.

Secondly, the cultural context was important to consider- as the American industry is situated within a Western, patriarchal society, this is the society that the researcher also has experience of. Focusing on a different industry, such as the Japanese industry, would require much more nuanced understanding of cultural norms, values, and positioning of female sexuality than the constraints of this current project could allow for.

Accessibility was also a factor. As the industry hosts events such as the AVNs, book signings, etc., and maintains a high level of social media usage from companies and performers, contacting performers is much more accessible than an unregulated, underground industry such as the Irish or Hungarian industry. At the AVN's award show and AEE expo, performers are based at booths and spend time talking to fans. This provided an opportunity to witness firsthand the performers at work, and to put Comella's idea of 'porn studies-in-action' into practice (2014, 64).

Language also played a part in this choice. As a monolingual English speaker, it would not be within the researchers' skillset to conduct research into an industry using a different language.

The availability of source material was also a consideration. As there is a wealth of information already available on the American industry and Western feminist discussions on pornography, it is more appropriate to study this industry, especially bearing in mind time constraints of this research. While feminist pornography is an area rich in material and conversations concerning agency, feminism, politics and the body, it is still a nuanced conversation within the wider debate on pornography. Most source material is additionally on mainstream pornography, while academia still has to fully catch up to a fast growing international feminist pornography industry. The anti-pornography feminist argument has mainly excluded analysis of the gay male pornography industry, in favour of a focus on the mainstream industry and the experiences of the female performer. This increases the availability of source material available and is thus another justification for the same focus of this particular study. It is recommended to greatly expand pornography studies into all aspects of the industry, which would include pornography featuring all sexualities and genders of performers, producers, and consumers

Additionally, legal reasons were an essential factor to consider. The Californian industry is regulated and taxed, and performers must supply photographic identification to prove they are above the age of 18. This minimises the risk of being exposed to material depicting underage people. Because of the case of underage performer Traci Lords, the industry has introduced age verification checks known as 2257 which records the performer's age via ID. Lords was the industry's biggest star in the 1980s until it was discovered she was actually 15 at the time, instead of 18. Lords had produced fake documents, and as a result of her real age becoming known, her entire back catalogue was now classified as child pornography. The industry was forced to destroy all content or risk imprisonment. Currently, as the performer also signs consent forms for each scene and produces several forms of identification, and the industry is regulated, this minimises the risk of exposure to this content.

Finally, the mainstream industry was chosen instead of a study of independently produced feminist pornography as the focus on this study is how the experiences of mainstream performers are discussed by feminists. Similarly, this study excludes amateur pornography. Amateur porn is uploaded by often anonymous couples who film themselves engaged in sexual activities and then put the content on tube sites, often for no monetary compensation. This is a separate category of pornography and not applicable to this particular study.

## 3.6. Definitions

Definitions are a contentious issue in pornography studies. This thesis uses the term 'pornography' to refer to the content that the performer produce from their labour. The word 'performer' is also used to describe the research participant.

## 3.7. Conclusion

Ethical methodology is critical in contemporary pornography research. As outlined above, both knowledge and knowledge production have a close relationship with power, the realities of which formed the basis for the selection of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis as the theoretical framework for the analysis of the interviews. The concepts of how discourse can contain power through terminology and resulting discursive knots must be considered in such a heated field as pornography studies, and this chapter has outlined ways that this has been addressed in methodology and through this research. Pornography studies has much room to grow, and adopting approaches that centre ethical methodology and reflexivity contain the potential for advancing the discourse in this field, if it is centred on the experiences of those working in the industry. The following chapters document some of these experiences and explore how they are constituted through feminist discourse.

**Chapter 4: Power, Knowledge, and Violence through Discourse**

In contemporary research on pornography, the study of violence and power should not be confined to content, but must include an examination of discourse also.

**4.1. Introduction**

This section explores power and violence within feminist discourse on pornography, and theorises how these concepts can intertwine in contributing to the objectification of performers. This will be examined through a reading of how research can other the performer, how the will to confess operates alongside the will to knowledge, and how the framing of women performers as victims of childhood sexual abuse (CSA) functions in the discourse as a silencing tool. Langton argues that pornography silences women in society (2009, p.3), but this research asks the question: what does pornography discourse say about women performers? Does pornography discourse silence performers, and if so, who and how? Langton argues that pornography is an authoritative speech act (2009, p.5), but what kind of speech acts are constructed within feminist discourses on pornography, and do these speech acts legitimise stigmatisation, violence and the positioning as deviant/victim of its workers? Developing Nussbaum's definitions of objectification, this section argues that objectification through epistemological violence must be considered when discussing objectification, power and knowledge in relation to pornography.

When the experience of working in pornography is framed as a universalistic negative experience, this positioning can be interpreted as an example of epistemological violence due to its contribution towards the othering of the performer. When researching groups deemed to be marginalised, paying close attention to this nuanced risk of violence and objectification is especially important as it may manifest as exclusion from subjectivity. In the case of knowledge

about pornography, anti-pornography feminists have positioned themselves as the true knowledge keepers of the truth of the experience of pornography, at the cost of the individual with the lived experience. This violence presents in several forms in this debate, and this section will examine these manifestations through the othering of the woman in pornography. This chapter will also highlight how the research process can contribute to the dehumanisation and dismissal of the researched subject, and positions the academic 'absent nonrepresenter' (Spivak, 1988, p.292) as the authority, rather than the performer with lived experience. Questions of who is considered to be an expert and who is refused this status will also be looked at.

## 4.2. Epistemological Violence through Silencing

Kirsty Dotson also analyses the problem of epistemological violence and explores this concept through an examination of silencing. She argues that this violence materialises through two methods of testimonial oppression: *testimonial quieting* and *testimonial smothering*.

## 4.3.1. Silencing Through Testimonial Quieting

Dotson defines testimonial quieting as a practice of silencing, as opposed to a once off event (2011, p.241). According to Dotson, this practice can be thus considered reliable, and with regards to pornography discourse, it can be argued that a practice of silencing reliably occurs in relation to hearing performers' testimonies. She states:

> The problem of testimonial quieting occurs when an audience fails to identify a speaker as a knower. A speaker needs an audience to identify, or at least recognize her as a knower in order to offer testimony (2011, p.242).

As discussed in this chapter, we shall explore how the performer is excluded from the status of expert in the pornography debate and dismissed as non-representative. Dotson illustrates her

argument through the example of Patricia Hill Collins who argues that black women are subjected to 'controlling images' of themselves that contribute to stereotypes and stigma, and hence also to silencing (Collins, 2000, cited in Dotson, 2011, p.243). In the case of performers, it appears this is also the case, where their controlling images position them as abused women, often drug addicts and criminal or deviant. In this chapter, we will explore this positioning- how it leads to stigma, and how it functions as epistemological violence in the feminist discourse on pornography.

### 4.3.2. Silencing though Testimonial Smothering

Dotson further identifies a second kind of silencing, which she labels as testimonial smothering, which occurs when a person self-silences due to a lack of faith in having their testimony truly heard. She states:

> Testimonial smothering, ultimately, is the truncating of one's own testimony in order to insure that the testimony contains only content for which one's audience demonstrates testimonial competence. Testimonial smothering exists in testimonial exchanges that are charged with complex social and epistemic concerns (2011, p.244).

> Dotson explains that testimonial smothering is a result of three conditions:

> 1) the content of the testimony must be unsafe and risky; 2) the audience must demonstrate testimonial incompetence with respect to the content of the testimony to the speaker; and 3) testimonial incompetence must follow from, or appear to follow from, pernicious ignorance (2011, p.244).

This kind of silencing is not truly voluntary but is instead coerced silencing. Testimonial smothering results from this fear of contributing to stigma and Chapter Five will highlight examples of this from performers. Dotson points to Kimberlé Crenshaw who exemplifies this by outlining how domestic violence is often not reported in black communities for fear of

contributing to the wider stereotype that black men are inherently violent (1991, cited in Dodson, 2011, p.244). The concepts of testimonial incompetence and inaccurate intelligibility are also at play here. Dotson explains the concept of inaccurate intelligibility as occurring when the audience demonstrates that they will not listen to the nuance and intelligibility of the story. Instead, the audience will disbelieve testimony of the performer in favour of controlling images, stigma, or discourse from those granted expert status such as academics, politicians, etc. This hierarchy of listening privilege will be discussed further on in this chapter. Chapter Five addresses how societal stigma towards performers is noted in various studies which highlights how widespread this testimonial competence towards performers is, and how its acceptance as 'true' has complications for ethical research.

Thus Dotson argues that in order to avoid epistemological violence, the audience need to prove that they have the capacity to listen intelligibly in order to achieve reciprocity in communication (2011, p.238) where the speaker feels heard and believed. This is a requirement that Dotson believes the speaker needs in order to safely impart their testimony. This can also be considered extra labour by the performer who has to decide if the listener is able to provide this reciprocation, this extra labour is not undertaken by the listener and is thus asymmetrical labour. This reciprocation is also necessary for the speaker to gain subject status instead of being positioned as object, while the audience retains subject status exclusively. In academic research, achieving a subject-subject relationship instead of a subject-object relationship would provide a safer space to discuss lived experiences, and would work to minimise the likelihood of committing epistemological violence.

Dotson suggests that this form of epistemological violence stems from what she terms 'pernicious ignorance', defining this as ignorance that harms another person (2011, p.248). While ignorance that is not harmful may be present in many fields (what Dotson calls reliable ignorance), pernicious ignorance is context dependent and related to how power is operating in the discourse to determine who is heard and who is silenced- thus contributing to harm. Pernicious ignorance means an audience does not reciprocate in dialogue in effect and thus leads to testimonial silencing as the speaker deems it to be unsafe to share testimony, developing a sense that they will not be believed.

Dotson also points to Langton's concept of locutionary silencing and how power operates through this silencing. As speakers may feel no one will listen to them, they self-silence despite wishing to speak. Langton argues: '[t]hey do not protest at all, because they think that protest is futile … [these] speakers fail to perform even a locutionary act (Langton, 1993, p.315). If performers feel they will not be listened to, they may feel it is pointless to engage in research projects. This labelling also contributes to epistemological violence by positioning the performers as the problematic group, without highlighting this testimonial smothering. Thus, this phrasing without nuance operates further as testimonial quieting and as a vehicle of stripping power and agency further from performers. This may also function as an example of what Langton frames as 'illocutionary disablement' (2009, p.5). While Langton was referring to pornography and its effects on women in society, this expression can also be applied to the effect of discourse upon the discussed group- in this case, feminist discourse upon women performers in pornography industry.

### 4.3.3. Refusal to Speak

There is a further response to testimonial smothering and quieting. There is power to be found in *refusing to speak,* and a refusal to participate in an asymmetrical process. In rejecting the position of subaltern, a performer may maintain subjectivity and exercise power in refusing to engage with a process that may frame them in ways they do not consent to. Performers may find power in refusing to have to justify their subjectivity and have to give up details of personal issues such as abuse to a potentially hostile audience. This potential for exercise of agency cannot be dismissed. While it may be difficult to identify due to testimonial quieting and smothering, it cannot be discounted as a possibility. This will be further discussed in Chapter Five, in relation to stigma and speaking.

### 4.3.4. Reciprocity

In order to achieve successful dialogue, Dotson contends that the speaker must feel like they are being heard, and reciprocity must be present. Without this reciprocity, the speaker is subject to epistemological violence as their testimony is dismissed or unheard, and the speaker is positioned outside the realm of expert. For Foucault, this silencing contributes to a maintaining of the episteme. For Bahktin, this approach of silencing testimony produces a monologism- that is, one single voice is heard, at the expense of dialogism where a multitude of voices and experiences are heard (Robinson, 2011). Allowing for dialogism and micro narratives in researching lived experiences means that instead of a singular 'truth' being established through epistemological violence, a richer analysis of varying experiences can be established, with a minimised risk of a construction of otherness. This approach also allows for an ethical subject-subject relationship to be more accessible, rather than continuing to frame the researched person as Other. Robinson explains:

In monologism, 'truth', constructed abstractly and systematically from the dominant perspective, is allowed to remove the rights of consciousness. Each subject's ability to produce autonomous meaning is denied. Qualitative difference is rendered quantitative. This performs a kind of discursive 'death' of the other, who, as unheard and unrecognised, is in a state of non-being. The monological word 'gravitates towards itself and its referential object' (2011).

Thus it follows that in the discourse around pornography, when often one perspective only is permitted to be valid, a monologism is produced which works to silence those who challenge this dominant narrative. Ideology is taken as truth in this approach. This violence positions the performers' testimony of positive experiences in the realm of the unsayable. Since this produces a death of the other, as Robinson argues, it can thus be viewed as violence. As we will explore in this research project, this death is not merely symbolic, but has real world implications through its contribution to stigma for performers.

## 4.4. Power, Violence, and Knowledge in Discourses of Abuse

The theory that 'women in pornography were abused as children' has existed in both feminist and societal discussions since at least the 1970s. In feminist discussions on pornography, Catherine MacKinnon was one of the first to assert this theory (1996, p20). This metanarrative of 'performers-as-abused-victims' is followed up by more recent anti-pornography feminists such as Farley who argues that there is no difference between prostitution and pornography, thus allowing studies solely focused on those in prostitution being extrapolated to those in pornography. She argues that:

> Although the real lives of those in prostitution and pornography are often indistinguishable from the experience of incest, intimate partner violence, and rape-human rights violations are obscured when pornography is falsely differentiated from other kinds of prostitution, as if they're not at all connected (2011, p.150).

Farley goes on to state that it can therefore be unequivocally stated that entry factors are the same for both prostitution and pornography, such as poverty, lack of other educational and employment options, and childhood sexual abuse. This equivalence leads her to state that '(m)ost women in the sex industry were sexually abused as children' (2011, p.151). This is of course problematic given the lack of rigorous evidence for this statement, and the power dynamics contained within such a statement. As outlined earlier by Teo, speculation without data can result in epistemological violence, and these assumptions may also contribute to testimonial oppression.

Other approaches allude to the lack of research in this area, but go on to make absolute assumptions despite this concession. This can be seen in the work of Levy, who acknowledges that performers often do not want to talk to researchers. However, she places the blame for this exclusively on stigma and laws (2005, p.180), rather than any unwillingness of the performer to discuss this topic with someone who is also campaigning to close down their industry. This functions as a positioning which strips power away from the performer and frames them as victims - unwilling to talk because of external influences, not *by personal choice*.

Again, this presupposes a *right* to know this information, and a demand that performers confess this and contribute to the knowledge strands on pornography. This is also a form of objectification as it insists the performer function as a tool for the validation of theory, with no regard for their feelings or boundaries. The performers' agency is not recognised, and the demand may be placed upon them to confess and contribute to the power/knowledge metanarrative of 'women in pornography are abused'.

Levy beds down on this metanarrative by quoting Farleys' claim that 65-90 percent of sex workers experienced incest or childhood sexual trauma, without giving any comparisons with

workers in other industries (2005, p.180) Differences in varying aspects of the sex industry, across different countries are also not considered. Without context, it is difficult to determine if this is a higher rate than other industries, amongst other methodological concerns, as pornography and its workers do not exist and labour in a vacuum. Thus contemporary pornography studies call for pornography to be studied in context, as acknowledgement of nuances is vital to building sound knowledge about lived experiences.

Despite declaring the statement 'women in pornography are abused' is lacking in substantiation (2005, p.180), Levy goes on to write as if it is a correct statement regardless. She argues that performers should not be seen as sex symbols:

> There is something twisted about using a predominately sexually traumatised group of people as our erotic role models. It's like using a bunch of shark attack victims as our lifeguards (2005, p.180).

This is an interesting statement. Levy frames 'shark attack victims' as never being able to become 'lifeguards', as if once one is bitten, one can never use this experience to save others or make swimming safer. The choice of analogy is also significant, insomuch as the lifeguard is given hero status, while the bite victim is a damaged, incomplete person. Thus this framing reinforces the binary of 'good woman/bad woman' by placing performers in victim status outside the reach of being able to help others as a lifeguard selflessly does. The analogy of a shark bite also evokes images of blood and gore, and something disgusting or terrifying; further othering the performer as some *thing* that is a signifier for fear or disgust. This use of fear and disgust is discussed further in Chapter Five and Six in relation to stigma and sex in the outer limits.

Levy again doubles down on this 'truth' of 'performer as victim' by referring to superstar performer Jenna Jameson, who disclosed an incident of sexual assault as a teenager in her autobiography. Levy argues that 'Jameson, like most employees of the sex industry, is not sexually uninhibited, she is sexually damaged' (2005, p.183). Levy backs up this statement by pointing to Jameson stating she cannot watch her sex scenes and calls her vulva a 'ding-ding', (2005, p.183)- as if having a nickname for your genitals is a signifier of sexual trauma instead of a common occurrence. Indeed, Jonathon Green traces the use of sexual slang for genitals back as far as the year 1230 (2010). Additionally, actresses not wanting to watch themselves on screen is not limited to pornography- mainstream actresses such as Meryl Streep and Reese Witherspoon have also stated that they do not watch themselves on screen (Weaver, 2017).

Levy concedes that sexual assault victims can recover, but one must question the ethics of labelling a stranger as 'sexually damaged' then subsequently complaining that performers do not want to speak to researchers. Levy's statement about being sexually damaged feels like a sleight of hand in a battle for power-knowledge, which simultaneously others and removes the power from performers to own any experiences of abuse. Furthermore, this framing also negates the performers' choice not to talk to outside sources who demand they confess these experiences in order to be redeemed. This is a dismissal of both the impact of testimonial quietening, and also the power found in the refusal to speak. Additionally, the use of language here is objectifying. Levy stated Jameson '*is*' sexually damaged, not '*was*' sexually damaged, thus framing her in perpetual victimhood and denying her the agency to move on from this status

### 4.4.2. Risk of Trauma

This expectation of the *right to know* coupled with the *demand to confess* creates a situation that can cause trauma, while cementing the performer as an object with inviolable boundaries.

This also applies to any kind of abuse, not just CSA. A prime example of this is performer Stoya's experiences. When Stoya disclosed her experience of abuse at the hands of her now ex-partner James Deen in 2015, the reactions she faced were multifaceted. She received support from many, disbelief from others, and many anti-pornography feminists used her experiences to write articles arguing her experiences were proof that the pornography industry as a whole should be shut down (Nova, 2015). At the Sexhibition expo in Manchester in 2016, Stoya participated in an onstage interview and Q & A where an audience member asked about Deen. When interviewed via email about the impact of being asked about personal traumas, Stoya replied:

> I'm feeling like there's a lot of progress as far as getting my life/brain in order and under control recently, but I still can't think too hard about *why* I can't answer those questions without derailing my whole day, much less explain why or--eeee--actually answer them (2016, email interview with West).

Stoya's answer makes it clear that there is an enormous risk of personal re-traumatisation to engage with outsiders asking her these intimate questions and potentially using it to call her the industry to close and thus, losing her job. This use of personal testimony by anti-pornography feminists as a tool for a call for closure of the industry has happened before, as seen with Linda Lovelace, so this would not be an ungrounded fear. This *right to know* and *demand for confession* ignore this risk of trauma to the individual and gives priority to the answering of questions, rather than to the impact of them on the person asked. This prioritisation of asymmetrical knowledge maintains the subject-object relationship, again preventing the performer from enjoying an equal relationship with the researcher or question asker.

Jameson herself has expressed that this choice to talk and to have personal experiences used against performers to confer victimhood on them is a difficult one to navigate. Discussing an

appearance on the *Howard Stern Show*, where performers are regularly asked if they are sexually abused, Jameson states:

> Howard asked me if I'd ever been molested or abused. It was the one question I wasn't prepared for. 'No,' I told Howard, in answer to his question. I lied like a rug. I wasn't ready to tell anybody about any of this (being gang raped, beaten and left for dead), and I certainly wasn't ready to deal with Howard's reaction. I didn't want anyone to think that I was in the business because I was a victim (2010, p.391).

It does not appear to be inconceivable to expect a similar reaction from a performer who confesses to a researcher that they experienced CSA. The performer is also faced with having to consider that their personal experience may be used in academic and media discussions to argue about the legitimacy of the performers' work, choice, and lived experience in the porn industry. The research impacts of this question is discussed further in this chapter.

### 4.4.3. Societal views

Of course, academia does not exist in a vacuum, and these metanarratives about performers and CSA also exist in general society. It could certainly be argued that academic metanarratives such as the ones discussed above can influence societal assumptions, perpetuating the stigma that performers experience. Georgina Voss argues that this metanarrative is entangled in 'the broader rhetoric of moral panic and culturally specific contexts of 'the language of condemnation', because it is assumed that pornography causes harms to those who watch it and those who make it. Voss goes on to state:

> Female performers in particular are painted as pitiable and abused (...) presumed to have been abused as children, engaging in drug use, and mired in a host of psychological problems when compared to women outside the adult industry (2013, p.193).

Sullivan and McKee agreed, stating that 'those who see pornography as a social ill regard actresses as abused, exploited, or otherwise desperate victims' (2015, p.30). It is therefore not surprising that those opposed to the pornography industry will engage in this metanarrative despite this lack of concrete evidence. The only study that has addressed this topic is Griffith et al., (2013) which explored this and levels of drug use amongst performers, the findings of which are discussed below. This almost totality of silence still speaks despite this being speculation rather than evidence.

### 4.4.4. What does the research say about performer experiences?

Weitzer states that approximately 1500 performers are employed by the industry in the LA area alone, and argues that 'only a handful' of researchers speak to the performers. This lack of interaction with those engaged in the industry means that 'the (usually negative) depictions of those involved in the pornography industry are rarely based on anything more than anecdotal tidbits' (2013, p.265), with Sullivan and McKee agreeing (2015, p.30).  One attempt to address this comes from Griffith et al. (2013). In their study, they aimed to test this 'damaged goods' hypothesis, interviewing 177 female performers and compared their self-reported rates of childhood sexual abuse, amongst other issues such as drug use, self-esteem and number of sexual partners to a non-performer control group. The study of the performers took place in the now closed Adult Industry Medical (AIM) healthcare centre, which was based in LA and was operated by people with prior experience in the industry themselves. As well as providing services like sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing, AIM also addressed performers' physical and mental health needs, and supported both new performers and those wishing to exit the industry (Voss, 2013, p.199).

Pointing to a lack of existing research, the authors state that most stories of performer experiences are anecdotal in the form of autobiographies such as that of Linda Lovelace (1980), or small scale studies (Abbott, 2000; Stoller and Levine, 1993). However, these reports and autobiographies are outdated, being published over twenty to forty years ago. Within an industry that has a high turnover of employees, not including those on the edges such as cam girls and amateurs, we have to ask if it is ethically or methodologically sound to apply these experiences to current day performers, or to promote these experiences as universal over decades without an abundance of data to back up this speculation. Similar to the motivations why women enter the industry, the reasons given in Abbotts' study of thirty one actresses published in 2000 may have changed. For contemporary pornography studies to develop into a sound body of research, we must highlight the lack of systematic data to support the existing episteme. Facilitating any epistemic break in knowledge is difficult when little to no research is conducted.

The authors state that one of the reasons for a lack of studies 'has been the extreme difficulty of gaining access to this population' (2013, p.622). Furthermore, they claim 'that there are few settings in which a large number of performers can be found at a given time', despite multiple platforms such as annual expos all across the country where performers and other industry personnel interact with the public. Additionally, social media is a popular platform utilised by performers to connect with their fan base. This statement is thus problematic. Similar to Levy's statement, by positioning the performers as inaccessible- indeed, to an '*extreme*' level- this framing continues to Other them. This stance is also seen in Griffith et al.s' study on motivations for performers entering the industry, where they are positioned as 'difficult to access' (2012, p.165). Statements such as these paint performers as people on the edges of accessible society- where we can more freely ask questions and demand answers about lived experiences. This framing functions as an example of the need for reflexivity within academic

research, especially research with marginalized populations. The researchers do not appear to have asked themselves why the performers did not want to engage with them or other researchers; instead the blame is laid with the performers. Additionally, the authors neglect to acknowledge that silence is also an answer- an answer that also contains power and subjectivity. Engaging with reflexivity here would allow for a more nuanced conversation about why performers may not wish to engage with research, or be wary of engaging with certain researchers, and why we expect them to *want* to engage in research.

Issues also arise when it comes to the sample population. The study notes that the comparison group comprises of students (38.4%) and women at an airport (61.6%) but does not break down any differences between these two groups themselves. The comparison group is reported as stating lower levels of CSA experience. However, what stands out here is the ethics of asking people returning or going on holidays or business trips about their sexual abuse history and the potential for trauma to the respondents at the unexpected discussion of CSA in this context. Ethical considerations are critical to take into account when asking people such a personal question, especially in an airport where they may be travelling for an important reason. For example, women in Ireland were forced to travel to have an abortion until 2019, and one can imagine this question may be traumatising to face in the airport before or after such a journey.

Another concern from a methodological standpoint is that for the control group, the women were approached personally and filled out the questionnaire with a researcher nearby, unlike the women in the performer pool who handed it in to a receptionist in a place many would be already familiar with. One may wonder about the levels of openness a woman may feel with a researcher nearby waiting for her answer and being potentially linked to her answer; while the performers had more anonymity so may have felt more comfortable being honest. Additionally,

while the authors acknowledge the limitations of the study in relation to the term 'childhood sexual abuse' not being defined, they also acknowledge that CSA is vulnerable to being interpreted differently by different people. Furthermore, we must also be cognisant of the risks and variations of the respondent self- identifying their experiences as abusive, potentially for the first time and the potential for trauma and re-traumatisation.

The control sample were also permitted to see the folder with previous responses, to give assurance of their anonymity. This approach does not appear to have been taken for the performers. Questions arise in relation to the possibility that the respondent may have been influenced by the answers if they looked through them; perhaps choosing to answer lower or higher for fear of being judged. For example, if they see most respondents have provided a low digit for the number of sexual partners, it could be a possibility they might adjust their answer to match.

While Shira Tarrant rightly points out that the study only focuses on women, her commentary on the findings must be critiqued. Tarrant states:

> In any case, the assumptions and stereotypes that female performers are more likely to suffer from drug addiction and abuse are simply not true. The bottom line is that the damaged goods hypothesis is not supported by scientific research (2016, p.66).

Similar to how there is no extensive research to support the statement that 'women in pornography suffered childhood abuse', there is also not enough research to state categorically the opposite. One study is simply not enough to support a meta-narrative on any topic, no matter which 'side' of the argument it is used to support as it cannot provide enough data to be representative of all experiences. Weitzer also does not challenge the limitations of the study, calling the findings 'quite remarkable' (2013, p.265) but does not call for more research on this

topic. We know the research is not there to support assumptions of rates of CSA, but that is not to say those assumptions are 'true' or 'false'. It merely means they are -as yet- unproven still, and thus remain a metanarrative challenged by a minute number of micro narratives. Both metanarrative and micronarratives also predominantly focus on women's experience. For a full episteme break to occur, a more inclusive approach of other genders and experiences needs to be taken into account, always bearing in mind the ethics of needing to know this information.

### 4.4.5. To ask or not to ask?

When developing the questions for this study, the issue of asking about sexual abuse arose. Performers are a group that are subjected to stigma that they are sexually damaged (Levy, 2005) and have experienced CSA (MacKinnon, 1989). As outlined in the study by Griffith et al. (2013), there are societal assumptions that performers are sexual abuse survivors. This thesis could have functioned as a vehicle to challenge or confirm those studies. However, there were several ethical considerations that are critically important to consider here, both from a theoretical research perspective and from the perspective of being an ethical, reflexive researcher.

The question of sexual abuse was not considered appropriate in this research project for several reasons. It is an asymmetrical question- the researcher does not experience the same potential for trauma as the interviewee from the discussion of this topic. The interviewee also has to undertake the labour of weighing up if the researcher is a safe person to disclose to, and worry about how the information will be analysed and disseminated. Asking such a question at an interviewee's workplace may impact on their potential future earnings if they become upset and need time out. Finally, if the question caused upset the researcher was not in a position to

pay for counselling or other support. For future research projects, it would be a reflexive exercise to consider not only how this question can be approached, but also to consider who should be asking this question, how this is interpreted, and indeed- whether the question should be asked at all.

If the issue of being framed as 'hard to access' is revisited, we can argue that these concerns should be borne in mind. To reflect this exercise of agency in the right *not* to speak, we must also ask why performers would not *want* to speak to researchers. Spivak argues that silence is significant, and raises questions about the interpretation of agency from the researched subject, and the researcher's approach to them (2001). This positioning as inaccessible also denies the subjectivity of the performer, and challenges their right not to answer, while not challenging the issue of the asker having the *right to know*. To work towards ethical research, we must question the sense of entitlement from researchers of the *right* to know this information, and the *expectation* that the subject confess or risk being labelled as 'hard to access' or lying about experiences. The issue of asking performers if they have experienced sexual abuse raises questions about the violability of the performers boundaries, which are already framed in a subject-object dynamic that already others the participant.

While I have extensive experience working with adult and children who have experienced sexual abuse, and have undergone extensive training in dealing with disclosures of abuse, this may be uncommon amongst researchers. This lack of practical training in general academic education may contribute to further traumatisation of the interviewee in how they react to disclosures of abuse. It is critical to shine a spotlight on this power imbalance in order to develop

sound methodological approaches to researching this issue in ways that do not harm the interviewee.

### 4.4.6. The Need for Confession

Why *do* we as a society expect others to confess their history of abuse? If, as Foucault argued, sex has become a 'privileged theme of confession' (1978, p.61), then pornography and its workers have been held up as the most visible signifiers of this confessional need. Pornography functions as a modern panopticon; its workers are subjected to demands of confession from multiple external prison guards who operate as arbitrators of 'good' and 'bad' sexual activity. According to Rubin's pyramid of 'good' and 'bad' sexual hierarchies, pornography is positioned in the 'bad' section. Therefore, its workers are expected to confess and recognise that their work is 'bad' and that they are a victim in order to be redeemed and thus re-enter the 'good woman' category as a compliant subject. Taylor looks at this demand for confession:

> Confession as giving rise to a bond of humanity, to community, and to reciprocal forgiveness and physic peace, present the expectation of the others confession as an ethical demand. Nevertheless, it will be argued that the demand that the other confess, or that she reciprocate a confession and counter-confess, is very often a demand that she do violence to her alterity. Moreover, it will be seen that when the other resists doing this violence to herself, so great is the desire for confession that she may find herself confessed for, assimilated or 'translated' despite herself into the desires of the confessing subject, and this will also be argued to be a violence to the other  (2010, p.168).

This demand to confess through research can be often missing from discussions on best ethical methodological practice. Reflexivity from researchers is crucial here in order to avoid committing epistemological violence.

This 'translation' can be also be seen in this debate, with the statements that claim 'empirically' 'most' performers are abused, and are 'sexually damaged', (Levy, 2005; MacKinnon, 1989). These statements contribute to violence not only through the means Taylor describes, but to violence in the form of stigma from the wider society. Performers are placed on the lower end of the graduation of respectability; or what Gayle Rubin terms the 'fallacy of misplaced scale' (1983, p.149). This scale singles out sex as a unique category through which people are labelled, with Rublin further describing this scale as 'a corollary of sex negativity' (1983, p.149). In this scale, Rubin argues that sex is treated with suspicion, existing as a 'marked category'; therefore, 'sex is presumed guilty until proven innocent' (1983, p.148) with the dominant discourse around pornography positioning it as a cause of harm or a contributor to violence. It follows that the person associated with that 'bad' sex act is also perceived as guilty until proven innocent, which can be said to be achieved by them disavowing their work and occupying victim status.  Furthermore, the positive contributions of pornography are negated or dismissed and any discourse on this eschewed in favour of alarmist discourse on harm. Indeed, Voss argues that pornography is given 'pariah status' amongst other industries (2015, p.193).

Taylor points to Sarte who posits that the person who demands the confession is called the 'champion of sincerity' who, through their power as the subject who can objectify others, 'fix(es) the other in an identity which would rob him of his freedom to be otherwise' (2010, p.174), thus contributing to this violence and denying mobility and autonomy. This facet of objectification and violence must be considered when developing ethical research in pornography studies.

The act of a performer having to confess to being a victim of abuse appears to have become so normalised that it can be offered unprompted. While personally delivering a workshop on this topic at a sexuality conference, a woman in the audience put up her hand and identified

herself as a former pornography performer who had never been abused. When later privately

asked via email why she felt the urge to confess this, she wrote:

> I wanted to share the information that I was not sexually abused as a child because
> I think it's important for people to know that making the choice to get into the adult
> entertainment was a conscious healthy choice that I made. It wasn't because I had
> been sexually abused as a child. (..) not all researchers research this issue
> objectively. Some of them have their own agenda that they want to push, like trying
> to prove that porn is a horrible evil and it's bad for everyone who watches it and
> everyone who participates in it.(...) (]It] is like saying all rock stars are alcoholics and
> drug addicts. Yes, the rock business has its share of alcoholics and drug addicts,
> but not everyone who is a musician is an alcoholic and a drug addict. Same for the
> adult entertainment industry, sure there are women in the industry who were
> sexually abused as children, but it doesn't mean everyone was. I'm proud of my
> choice to work in the industry (email interview with West, 2017).

This person submitted herself for public confession as a risk to herself, in order to challenge

this narrative. This decision could have potentially placed her at risk of emotional trauma, or

her words being used in a negative manner. This risk is asymmetrical as the researcher does

not face the same risk for trauma, and this risk and emotional labour must be accounted for

when asking performers to confess.


## 4.5. Expert status

According to Rubin's pyramid, those who are positioned at the higher end of this scale and

hierarchy are seen as respectable and healthy. Notably in the debate on pornography, those

at the higher end of the scale are also awarded expert status. This Othering of women silences

their voices when they use their experience to make critical observations of the industry. Yet

again we can see here an example of asymmetrical positioning, as anti-pornography feminists

such as Dworkin are not excluded from expert status because of their experiences of sexual

abuse as children and adults.

This violence translates to what Rubin outlines as the punishment for this refusal to acquiesce to the high standards of sexual behaviour demanded for inclusion in respectability:

> As sexual behaviours or occupations fall lower on the scale, the individuals who practice them are subjected to a presumption of mental illness, disreputability, criminality, restricted social and physical mobility, loss of institutional support, economic sanctions, and criminal prosecution (1983, p.149).

Sex workers who use their experiences to speak about pornography are subjected to a denial of agency and subjectivity by theorists such as Jeffreys. Jeffreys adopts a universalistic approach to frame performers such as Annie Sprinkle as abuse victims, and she considers their sexualities as inauthentic. Additionally, Jeffreys unequivocally excludes these women from the status of expert despite their lived experiences, and dismisses those who support them as mistaken:

> Victims of the sex industry have become "sex experts." Sexual capitalism, which has found a way to commoditize nearly every imaginable act of sexual subordination, has even found a way to repackage and recycle some of its victims. As a result, a small number of women who have had lifetimes of abuse and learned their sexuality in the sex industry serving men are now able, often with backing from male sex industrialists, to promote themselves as sex educators in the lesbian and feminist communities. Some of these high-profile women--who are hardly representative of most victims of the sex industry--have managed to set up sex magazines such as *On Our Backs* (for practitioners of lesbian sadomasochism) and stripping and pornography businesses. Many women have mistakenly accepted these formerly prostituted women as "sex experts." Annie Sprinkle and Carol Leigh, for instance, have recirculated into women's communities the woman-hating practices of the sex industry (1989).

The language used here also strips the women of their agency to decide to use their experiences in an educational way; instead it is framed as something done *to* them, as it is the sex industry 'repackaging and recycling' them, rather than being their own agent. Not only does this framing deny the expertise of Sprinkle, it also dismisses those who accept performers as experts, through calling this acceptance mistaken. The labelling of Sprinkle as a 'formerly

prostituted woman' is also an example of objectification through denial of Sprinkles' agency, given that this word frames Sprinkle as a victim rather than a person who choose to work in the industry. In being again positioned as passive rather than active, this statement further objectifies these women in several ways- through denial of autonomy, inertness, and denial of subjectivity. Furthermore, as we can also see reduction to body employed here as the women are reduced to the assumed negative experiences inflicted upon their body, unable to speak and act beyond this; also fitting the criteria for objectification through silencing. We also see a presumption of a history of abuse, and this assumption being used as a tool to legitimise an anti-pornography stance; this objectifies the performer through instrumentality and positions their boundaries as involatile. Thus, through these examples, the performer is objectified through the refusal to acknowledge their personhood.

The element of ontological distinctiveness as outlined by Cahill in Chapter Two is important here, as Sprinkle's subjectivity through their expertise is dismissed here and they are referred to as victims, all similar in their perceived violation. Sprinkle uses her autonomy to claim space and put a face to their work, but this distinctiveness is dismissed and she is submerged back into a sea of faceless victimhood by Jeffreys.

In relation to the lack of substantial data on the demographics and experiences of women working in pornography, how can claims of being representative or non-representative be made? Who is viewed as being in a position to decide this criteria, and who challenges this? How do we *know* if performers such as Sprinkle are or are not representative?

The wealth of experience that Sprinkle has would appear to easily qualify her to give an opinion

on the realities of working in both the pornography industry and the wider sex industry:

> First, I was a sex worker for twenty years, in which time I had sex with thousands of people of all types, in a wide variety of ways. I then did a lot of sex experiments through performance art, such as an onstage 'sex magic masturbation ritual to evoke the legend of the sacred prostitute.' I traveled the world studying ancient sex techniques and the spiritual side of sex. I went on to learn the academic part, and earned a Ph.D. in human sexuality. I've since taught a quadrillion sex workshops. I've been doing sex life makeovers for singles and couples the past few years, and that has been very enlightening. (Sprinkle, no date)

In context, if this level of both personal and academic experience existed in another occupation

that was unrelated to sex, it would be deemed to be valid experience. Thus, sex can be seen

to be the signifier for exclusion from expert status. It appears acceptable to Jeffreys to facilitate

testimonial quietening of Sprinkle and the depth of this can be classified as pernicious

ignorance as it is consistent. The positioning of expert as outside the realm of the performer

reflects how they are silenced through this epistemological violence. The academic is given the

status of authority with the correct knowledge about the realities of the pornography industry,

rather than the person with lived experience. This framing raises questions about who is the

governing agent who decides who is permitted to be an expert and who is excluded. Who

challenges this? How does power operate, and how does discourse support or challenge these

power structures? How do performers challenge this positioning if their voice is silenced in the

episteme, and thus the dispositif around pornography? In an email interview, veteran performer

Nina Hartley expresses what this silencing feels like:

> It feels shitty, is what it feels like. When I first encountered it early in my career I had a flash: this is what it felt like to be accused as a witch. They silence me because I scare them, because they see me as an apostate, because they're forced to confront an aspect of their sexuality they'd thought was hidden, because they see me as Other, because they believe what they've been told about sex, sexuality and sexual expression, because they've been taught that I'm a whore and whores deserve no respect (email interview with West, 2017).

Hartley also feels that the silencing contributes to an othering of performers:

> It's a way to Otherize us and, being already degraded and unworthy (as, you know, whores are), they don't have to listen. We're just brainwashed head cases anyway, don't cha know. It's patronizing, matronizing, infantilizing and infuriating. It's also been going on my whole career (email interview with West, 2017).

This silencing can be seen in this refusal to accept lived experience as a qualifier for expert status, reducing the person down to a perceived victim despite what the person said. Thus this silence is the violence that occurs through this forced assimilation that occurs with the absence of a confession. The deliberate removal of a voice which objects to a metanarrative is in itself a form of violence as it presupposes that these voices are not in themselves critical of practices in the industry. This framing dismisses the work that performers do to improve their industry and everyday working conditions, such as those steps taken by Sprinkle as outlined in Chapter Two.

More recently, we can see this exclusion from subjectivity and expert status in the protest against Tristan Taormino being included on the board of a new journal entitled *Porn Studies*. This protest was on the basis that she is 'a pornographer who has worked with some of the most hard-core directors in the industry,' with Dines arguing this will lead to bias (Cadwaladr, 2013). Before the launch of this journal, a petition gathered over 1000 signatures to protest on the basis that it would be biased scholarship. This petition, run by Stop Porn Culture, stated that because the board included Taormino, the title should be changed to 'Pro-Porn Studies', while a journal featuring exclusively those opposed to pornography should be set up and entitled *'Critical Porn Studies'* (White, 2014). This statement positions those who are opposed to pornography as the only people able to be critical of it, once again excluding those who work in the industry as experts, and dismissing the voices of those who are critical of the industry but not of the industry's existence itself.

One of the petition leaders stated of the editorial board of *Porn Studies*: '[t]hey are akin to climate-change deniers. They're taking a bit of junk science and leaping to all sorts of unfounded conclusions (Bahadur, 2013). This statement once again positions the anti-pornography episteme as the *true* episteme. Using the words 'deniers,' 'junk science,' and 'unfounded', it categorically dismisses these attempts to make a break in this episteme, and challenges the credentials and reliability to those who do. This statement is also interesting in the context of Hartley's feelings on anti-pornography feminists and how she interprets this as silencing and othering:

> If we're over here being sexual in a way that defies their theories, they'd rather silence us than adjust their theories as, you know, smart people do. Anti-porn feminists are the flat-earthers of the intellectual world (email interview with West, 2017).

The dismissal of those who challenge anti-pornography feminist discourse, and denial of expert status is interesting for the positioning of what's true in pornography, and what is not considered to be true; but critically, what is at stake is what is considered to be *the* truth. Taking a postmodern approach challenges this positioning of a singular metanarrative and looking for micro narratives and nuance in pornography, rather than accepting a universalistic approach. Jeffreys dismisses this approach and argues that 'eroticism of inequality is celebrated and justified in queer and postmodern theory', and states that postmodernism is nothing more than 'unregenerately sexist French men, notably the gay sadomasochist Michel Foucault' who damage the goal of women's equality (1999). Such attacks on personal sexual preferences and orientations aside, such criticism of those who challenge the discourse appears to be a mainstay of the dispositif. With Sprinkle and Taormino reduced to victims and denied expert status, their combined four decades of varied experiences both in the sex and pornography industries and

writing about it are silenced, and they are reduced to their bodies through this objectification and violence.

## 4.6. Language

This denial of subjectivity and status of expert through epistemological violence can also be seen in the dismissal of new language created by those working in the pornography industry. Carol Leigh, a sex worker turned sex worker rights activist, states that in 1979 she coined the term 'sex work' when she encountered the terminology 'Sex Use Industry' at a feminist conference on prostitution and made the suggestion to use the term 'sex work' instead. She states she did so in order to recognise the labour of the performer- usually female- instead of rendering it invisible through the exclusive focus on the consumer- usually male. She opines that she recognised how crucial it was to 'create a discourse about the sex trades that could be inclusive of women working in the trades' (2004, p.69).  She stated that she found the use of the term 'sex use industry' to be one that she felt objectified by:

> The words stuck out and embarrassed me." (...) "How could I sit amid other women as a political equal when I was being objectified like that, described only as something used, obscuring my role as actor and agent in this transaction? (2004, p.69).

The term has gone on to be adopted by organisations such as such as Amnesty International and the World Health Organisation (WHO), as well as international advocacy groups. Rights groups such as Stella, a Canadian based organisation run by and for sex workers, states that other terminology such as the term 'prostituted women', is not one they accept, stating that:

> This terms denies the agency of sex workers by suggesting that prostitution is something done to us. Many sex workers consider this framing and language around prostitution or sex work as disrespectful, alienating and invisibilizing of our realities (Bruckert, C. et al., 2013).

Ziv also argues that agency is found in language, defining this as 'grammatical agency' (2015, p.33). Both Leigh and the Stella organisation understand the power contained in language and the real world impact that this language has on their lives. Leigh understood this power when she coined the term sex work:

> As a poet and a wordsmith, I was intrigued by the potential of linguistic activism to bring women out of anonymity and proudly write our new herstory (2004, p.66).

Linguistic activism is critical to consider when we are writing the stories of others, and how they respond to them. For Leigh, a move out of the shadows of anonymity meant subjectivity through visibility and demanding inclusion in the process of knowledge creation. Her activism also meant creating an avenue for multidirectional meanings into the episteme of pornography discourse. Indeed, she created a rupture in how women engaged in sex work were discussed, who discussed them, and highlighted power, ethics and violence in terminology.

However, these organisations and individuals' rejection of a passive positioning in self-identification has not been universally accepted. This terminology has been rejected by anti-pornography feminists who argue that sex work is not work, and this phrase is positioned as rendering trafficking invisible (Bettio, Giusta, Tommaso, 2017). However, this is another example of epistemological violence through the adoption of a universalistic perspective that misrepresents the concerns highlighted by sex workers. Sex workers and allies have repeatedly made a distinction between consensual sex work and trafficking/forced participation in the sex industry (ibid). This is dismissed by radical feminist activists such as Jindi Mehat as 'an empty nod to actual facts' (2015). This approach appears to again dismiss critical approaches to trafficking from those with lived experience who do not agree with the dominant episteme, and has the end result of contributing to stigma and objectification through the denial of agency and autonomy.

Similar to how Jeffreys spoke about 'experts' in relation to Sprinkle and Leigh, often the phrase sex work is written as 'sex work' by radical feminists. This use of inverted commas deliberately situates the term in a state of ambiguity. This use of these scare, or sneer, quotation marks position the phrase as an illegitimate descriptor that is outside acceptability (Miles, 2003, p.134). This in turn contributes to the othering of the performer and their knowledge.

This denial of a persons' grammatical agency is objectification. Through this denial of the performer's autonomy in describing themselves and their job, the performer is reduced to their body. They are not permitted to be an individual who possesses the intellect and ability to name themselves and to construct and contribute to knowledge that makes sense of their experiences in a way that feels right to them. However, individuals can use language to challenge as well as be oppressed by it. It appears this is what Leigh has done- creating a term that allows for both power and a challenge to occupy space in the narrative about her lived experience. A descriptive term can function as a signifier for agency or exploitation and operate as a site for control of power-knowledge, as we see here.

Fairclough outlines how the use of scare quotes constitutes 'boundary maintenance' (1992, p.179), and in cases like this, they maintain the boundary between legitimacy and illegitimacy, of dominant, respected language and other languages. In creating epistemic uncertainty, they function as the markers of respectability, dictating words which exist at the top of the hierarchy and delineating those which must be regulated to the bottom. Scare quotes also function as a mark of *us v them*, and contributes to what van Dijk refers to as 'ingroup-outgroup polarisation' (2008, p.105), with sex workers placed in the outgroup category through this ideological approach to discourse.

The perceived silencing of the voices of those engaging in pornography has also lead to the coining of the term 'SWERF'- Sex Worker Exclusionary Radical Feminist, to denote those who dismiss the voices of those who report positive experiences as a sex worker. Similar to the term sex work, SWERF is also dismissed as a concept by antipornography radical feminists such as Jindi Mehat, who derisively writes that this term is something 'shit liberals say', arguing that 'SWERF is a schoolyard taunt employed to shame critically-thinking feminists into silence' (2015). Again we see the exclusive of sex workers from 'critically-thinking feminists', while ignoring the creation of this term from a woman with lived experience in the industry. Similar dismissal is seen with the term 'whorephobia'. Jane Brazen, who describes herself as a whore activist, explains what whorephobia is and how it manifests:

> Any time you make an assumption that someone is involved in the sex industry because of a history of mental illness or abuse, that's whorephobia. Any time you think that people in the sex industry are damaged, deficient, cheapening sex, morally lesser, or without common decency, that's whorephobia. Whorephobia is the policing of the women in the sex industry through a variety of controlling images that reduce an extremely complex situation into a trope (2009).

Anti-prostitution writers such as Bindel have disputed this term, stating that women in the industry cannot reclaim the word 'whore': 'Men get to define who is a "whore", and women cannot reclaim a word that has never been ours in the first place' (2017). However, this dismissal of the ability to contribute new knowledge and terminology to the debate on pornography denies the ability of the performer to become a speaking subject (hooks, 1989) and contributes to the objectification of the performer through denial of autonomy, subjectivity, inertness and contributes to a feeling of silencing. Hartley discusses how this silences her and her fellow performers:

> MacKinnon really does feel like she is helping women, while at the same time, she and Dworkin and her ilk silence women. They won't listen to our stories, our truths. Somehow a woman's ability to tell her own story, to talk about her own

life, the teller of her own truth, is a no go in third wave feminism (email interview with West, 2017).

Here, we see an example of testimonial quietening and pernicious ignorance within feminism, with Hartley stating how her experiences are not considered good testimony that can be spoken within feminism. If a woman's testimony is unsayable, where and how does she gain subjectivity and visibility? hooks argues that 'language is a place of struggle' (1989, p.15), and the ability to name oneself and tell one's own story, is also a struggle for power. Finding a space in dominant language to name oneself is thus a search for power and self-determination. Mills argues that language is a site where people are constituted as individuals (1997, p.133) and therefore language is also a site where objectification can flourish at the detriment of those trying to gain subjectivity.

The struggle to find an accepted universalist term for those in the pornography and sex industries is surely doomed to failure; instead, perhaps a better approach is to recognise different attitudes and experiences and accept that those who embrace the work may refer to them in terms they identify with, and those that had negative experience use the term they identify with. hooks argues that new language emerges when people transform from objects to subjects, and this is a vital process for self- recovery. As self-recovery materialises in many ways and means different things to different people, it is surely impossible to utilise a 'one size fits all' term to name their experiences. Foucault argues that 'where there is power there is resistance' (1978, p.95), and this can clearly be seen in this attempt to name a lived experience. Again this calls for a move away from a meta narrative approach and the utilisation of a postmodern approach that recognises that power comes in many forms and is not hierarchical but can be horizontal too, as Foucault argues; recognising a 'plurality of resistances' (1978, 96).

## 4.7. The Hierarchy of Privilege

As outlined above, the issue of who speaks and who is silenced is essential to explore in the feminist debate on pornography. One way to explore this is to analyse the positions of privilege that those involved in the debate occupy. We can see the existence of a hierarchy of power and speaking privileges, conceptualised as a pyramid. Similar to Rubin's hierarchy of 'good' sex and 'bad' sex (2011), this privilege pyramid describes how academics are positioned at the top of this hierarchy, while current self-identified sex workers occupy the lowest position, enjoying the least amount of privilege. In this dispositif, victim positioning cannot be navigated to include expert status, intelligence and respectability unless one confesses their victimhood and 'bad' woman status.

Academia has had a colonial tradition of speaking for the Other (Spivak, 1988), and of denying the opportunity of the other to become a speaking subject, instead framing them as objects to be spoken for. Taylor highlights Sartre and his examination of this power dynamic: the champion of sincerity demands:

> 'that he consitute himself as a thing, that he should entrust his freedom to his friend as a fief, in order that the friend should return it to him subsequently- like a suzerain to his vassal'
>
> (Sartre, 2003, cited in Taylor, 2010, p.178).

Through this process the object is seen to speak, but this is not a true voice as it is filtered through the academic, who does not approach the subject free of bias. Fabian argues, 'there is no knowledge of the other which is not also a temporal, historical, a political act' (1983, cited in Mills, 1997, p.111), and this knowledge is also affected by class, race and gender.

This hierarchy of privilege is exemplified in the graphic that I have designed below:

*Privilege Pyramid Fig.2.*
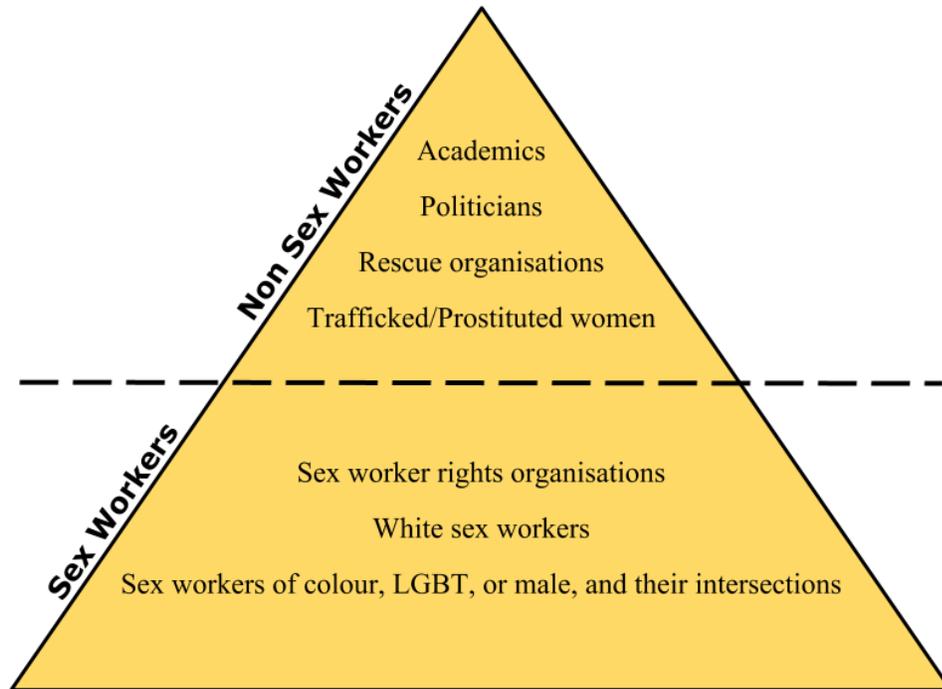


As discussed in the preceding section, the battle for control of the descriptor 'expert' has generally mean this term is reserved for those above this line of respectability, along with the signifier 'authority'. The lived experiences of people such as Sprinkle are not permitted by academics such as Jeffreys to be considered for inclusion above this line. Outsider experience is viewed as more respectable above this line. The performers have the most expertise as the authors of their own experiences, but the external writers of their experiences are instead considered the real experts, and negative experience trump positive experiences. Thus those who report negative experiences, or self-identify as victims (forced/trafficked) are higher on the

pyramid than self-identified sex workers, who are subject to accusations of being brainwashed (Hartley, 2017; Rubin, 2011). This hierarchy also reflects the intersection of race and privilege, and highlights how non-sex worker white Western academics are afforded more status than sex workers of colour. This access to privilege and legitimacy also has an impact on the production and acceptance of what is considered to be knowledge.

Teo additionally argues that epistemological violence is also likely to be asymmetrical, as the value of knowledge held by a 'respectable person' such as a scientist is given a higher status than that of a lay person. He argues that this inequality in status means that epistemological violence: 'executed by scientists cannot be countered by public rejection because the name of science has a higher status than theoretical criticism expressed by a marginalized *Other'* (2010, p.299). This is demonstrated in the pyramid above. Spivak agrees that this violence is asymmetrical, stating that when the other is spoken for, it can result in the 'asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of the Other in its precarious Subject-ivity' (1988, p.76). Spivak frames native knowledge as subjugated knowledge in this framing. It is knowledge that must filter through a respectable source before it is considered legitimate knowledge.

These 'respectable' institutions (academia, government, mainstream media) function as the dispositif that uphold the episteme that sex work is a negative experience. However, as Foucault points out, where there is power there is also resistance. Sex workers have utilized new forms of media to connect with other sex workers and form a community. One way this has occurred is through the use of blogs, but predominantly social media has proved to be a medium which provides a visible platform for engagement. Twitter especially has served as a vehicle to being seen as a speaking subject, although more recently this has been challenged as twitter appears to shadowban those working in the pornography industry, hiding their

profiles. However, sex workers have utilised the space to challenge existing narratives about sex work, utilizing hashtags such as #sexworktwitter to build community and interact with clients, fans, academics, politicians, and more. Challenges to campaigns such as Prop 60, the attempt to force pornography performers to use condoms was mounted online, with performers tweeting their fan base and asking them to vote, and politicians were also lobbied. Chapter Six addresses this in more detail.

Challenges to this harnessing of power and resistance are never far away, with these attempts reduced to a hashtag such as #twitterfeminism, which is afforded less legitimacy than academia.. Indian sex worker Molli Desi argues that dismissal of these mediums is 'a disingenuous argument and disqualifies our attempts to participate' (2014). This is a dismissal of the deliberate choice of sex workers to use technology to contribute to discourse, a process Fairclough calls the 'technologization of discourse' (1995, p.3.) It is important to highlight this denial of respectability through an intersectional lens as it shows a lack of privilege afforded to platforms that are more accessible to people of colour and lower socio-economic groups than traditional academia. Sex workers who use social media platforms such as Twitter are dismissed as being non-representative and privileged, as opposed to sex workers interviewed by academics. Desi explains how this feels to her:

> Before I spoke English and could use Twitter I was [considered to be] representative of some young Indian sex workers. Now I have broken through that technological and cultural glass ceiling I am no longer representative and I can be ignored (2014).

She goes on to state that this approach of privileging the research of the academic over the experience of the worker continues the Othering of sex workers by silencing them. Desi argues this process 'also allows for the unheard voices of my still "representative" friends to be appropriated and spoken for by others (2014). This exclusion from the discourse also can be

seen in the control of how new knowledge is created, and the acceptance of new terminology used by those in the industry.

This argument over representation is seen in Jeffreys' discussion of Sprinkle, and in Ireland as seen on the *Pat Kenny Tonight* show. Immediately after Irish pornography performer Amanda Norton told her story of working in the industry, an academic named Patricia Casey immediately dismissed her as not representative. Another example of this dismissal in regards to being representative occurred to performer Minnie Scarlet, who explains how she has experienced denial of autonomy over her own experiences:

> I have felt dismissed and silenced by feminists who thought their research was more credible than my first-hand experience. There is room for both opinions and both things to be talked about, but the moment their research is given more representation than my voice, it's a problem (Rankin, 2013).

She points out how intuition and other people's lived experiences trump her own subjective experience:

> There have been feminists who have spoken over my sex worker peers and myself about how degrading porn is because you can't prove what is consensual and not. They know this because of things they have read and they "know a couple of girls in the porn industry." Hello! I'm a sex worker who works in porn!' (Rankin, 2013).

Exploring power-knowledge in this debate means asking who is deemed to be representative, and who is not permitted this status, which is linked again to respectability and expert status. What is the impact of being denied a speaking voice because others decide on a person representativeness? Performer Conner Habib discussing this silencing: 'What's more dehumanizing: showing your butt cheeks to an audience or having someone tell you that you don't exist?' (2015). Finding agency through linguistic activism or establishing a place to speak can remove the veil of invisibility from the performer, but even then they are not guaranteed acceptance. Additionally, they face further risks such as stigmatisation, as discussed in Chapter

Five; risks that are asymmetrical as the person dismissing them does not experience the same risk.

## 4.8. Voice of the Voiceless

Epistemological violence came occur even with apparent well-meaning intentions, which still have the adverse effect of othering the performer. The positioning of oneself as the 'voice of the voiceless' situates the performer as victim, in need of help, and the researcher as the active subject. Claiming to be the voice of the voiceless is also positioning the performer as lacking in subjectivity, when the issue is not that the performer *cannot speak*, but why the voices are not *listened to,* nor afforded validity in some cases. This is because, as Arundhati Roy posits: 'there is no such thing as the voiceless, there are only the silenced and the deliberately misheard' (Roy, 2002, cited in Batsleer, 2008, p.11).

This approach of being the voice of the voiceless also frames the researcher as 'rescuer', which continues to position the performer as lesser than in the hierarchy of speaking privilege and respectability. Spivak criticises this as the 'first world intellectual masquerading as the absent nonrepresenter who lets the oppressed speak for themselves' (2010, p.263). It should not have to be a praiseworthy act of benevolence to include the voices of the people at the heart of any debate; it should be a standard methodological approach in any ethically conducted research.

If the case of Linda Lovelace as outlined in Chapter Two is recalled, we see how she functioned as a tool for the enabling of a metanarrative. The performer is brought on stage as a complaint subject to confess to an audience and then sent away while the 'champions of sincerity' construct the metanarrative. This silencing through being spoken for has been challenged by

performers such as Hartley, and performer Conner Habib posits some questions to consider in relation to this silencing. In asking how this silencing constitutes violence, Habib asks:

> I asked, "Why do you hate us?" and "What is it about us that you don't like?" Here are different versions of those questions:
>
> Why do you feel like you can speak for us?
>
> Why do you feel like your voice, your concept is more real than we are?
>
> Are you listening?
>
> Have you noticed that you're hurting us?
>
> Am I still standing here?
>
> Hello?
>
> When you try to save me, have you noticed that you have to kill me first? (Habib, 2014, original formatting)

Utilising objectification as a lens, we can explore how the discourse on pornography inflicts violence with its *right to know*, and its forced assimilation into the episteme of this discourse. Taylor points to Butler who questions the ethics of this, and the need to let go of this demand for the 'truth' of the Others' experience, stating that:

> For Butler, as Sartre, if we seek the fulfillment of our desire to know the other, we would be willing that the lack, alterity, and thus the freedom and vitality of the other be extinguished. The ethical relation, for Butler, is thus a desire to know the other, to ask,(...) 'Who are you?', but without expecting a response or a fulfillment of one's desire (2010, p.175).

Habib's answer shows this extinguishing of the performers' subjectivity through the demand to know. This leads to questions regarding the ethics of doing pornography research, and how objectivity and bias are addressed within the debate. If, as Butler and Taylor suggest, we enact violence through this demand to know, how do we navigate doing this research ethically, bearing in mind the subject-object relationship and an ethics of consequences? One way to navigate this would be to recognise an interdisciplinary approach that does not position pieces

of research as a true metanarrative, but to recognise them as snapshots of a wider picture. This picture may never come into focus, but we must allow this to be acceptable, rather than forcing the lens to settle on an unchanging focal point. As researchers, we must examine how we constitute our subjects, and how we approach their subjectivity in this quest for truth. As academics, we should not aim to 'humanise' our subjects, since this presupposes they are in need of our 'support', and this position serves to dehumanise them instead. Similar erasure happens if the academic tries to be a 'voice for the voiceless'; this will be addressed in section 4.8.

The Othering of the performer occurs again in their positioning as native informant in academic research that adopts a postcolonial voice of the voiceless approach. Yeğenoğlu highlights this concern of the power dynamics in a veneer of validity applied to the performers' experiences through the researcher's voice:

> This liberal desire to turn me into a native informant and thereby re-value the weak and the subjugated is the very gesture by which the sovereign Western subject constructs himself/herself as considerate and benevolent (1998, p.121).

Thus this framing of performer as voiceless continues to exclude the performer from a subject-subject positioning, further facilitating the demand for confession in order to be seen as human. Through the support of the dispositif, this universalistic approach is also understood as a form of epistemological violence through the use of a hermeneutic deficit, where one interpretation is presented as the sole interpretation, rather than a hermeneutic surplus, where the interpretations are recognised as one among many, and not necessarily generalisable. This argument is important to consider when analysing how researchers contribute to the Othering of the researched subject and their perceived victim status. Different dialogues can be

produced when the questions are reframed, as seen in the case of domestic violence, when the question is revised from 'why did the victim stay', to 'why did the abuser choose to abuse?'.

## 4.9. Dehumanisation

The Othering of women who do not agree with the radical feminist perspective is entrenched further with comments such as 'sex radical women do the pornographers' dirty work by promoting pornography and prostitution as work, freedom, fun, and choice in both lesbian/bisexual communities and mainstream society. They front for rapists and racists' (Stark, 2005, p.290). Stark argues that these women are selling out other women, and contribute to their abuse: 'When women sexually use or defend the sexual use of other women, they are complicit with abusers or abusers themselves' *(ibid)*. In this framing, there can be no feminist pornography, no attempts within from the workers themselves to change the content or production of pornography, and nor can the women involved be permitted to call themselves feminist.

Epistemological violence is also present in the Othering of those who make feminist pornography. Through the dismissal of their work as incompatible with feminism under Western patriarchy, women who make pornography and use it to challenge patriarchal stereotypes (Taormino et al., 2013) are silenced, along with their analysis of the issues of mainstream pornography. Feminist pornography producer Ms Naughty details her experience of this:

> I make porn and I make a living from it. This doesn't mean I'm going to blindly endorse every aspect of the porn industry. I know there are problems, I know it's often sexist and derogatory. On this I can find some common ground with anti-porn people. But they will dismiss my opinion as being flawed by money (like they don't make money of their activism), they'll say I am deluded, not in possession of

all the facts, that I'm living with a false consciousness, that I'm not a real feminist. And they'll say this to performers and porn-studying academics alike (2014).

Those who make feminist pornography such as Anna Span are subjected to being labelled as 'scabs' and accused of betraying women and selling them out (Saner, 2011). This analogy is interesting. As a scab may be used to describe someone who crosses a picket line, it is therefore in this case used to deliminate the performer as a 'bad' woman, but it is also another example of the weaponisation of disgust in pornography discourse. A scab may also be the covering for a bodily wound, which may evoke disgust in some and brings to mind images of gore, disease and fear of contamination. This connection of fear and disgust to pornography is discussed further in Chapters Five and Six.

This violence within language must be examined when looking at epistemological violence and how it contributes to real-world stigma and objectification. Indeed, this positioning as betrayer is a stark example of othering, as those who working in pornography are excluded from the privilege of calling oneself a feminist. The work of women such as the aforementioned Sprinkle, and others such as the contributors to the Feminist Porn Awards is thus dismissed. The use of phrases such as 'orgasm politics' by radical feminists such as Jeffreys (1996), or 'choice feminism' by Cross (2015), deride the idea that an individual woman can make a free choice under existing systems of oppression such as patriarchy, and be allowed to call this a feminist choice.

Dworkin also dismisses the possibility of feminist pornography within her framing of pornography as a site of oppression: 'You couldn't sell diddly-squat of anything that had to do with equality' (1996 p.211). This once again has the effect of othering these women, while dismissing their criticisms of the mainstream industry and additionally, of the politics of pleasure within feminist pornography (Siouxsie Q, 2014). It also continues to exclude them from contributing to knowledge and promoting a universalistic definition of dehumanisation.

Some go even further with what may be considered hate speech against a dehumanised target, as illustrated by radical feminist Birchill's shocking statement: 'When the sex war is won prostitutes should be shot as collaborators for their terrible betrayal of all women' (1987, p.743). How far removed from being considered a woman must sex workers be for a woman who has experienced domestic violence herself, to frame their murder as acceptable? Women who, according to radical feminist framing, are victims already, and also at increased risk of violence. This shocking public advocating for sexworkers to be 'shot' is jarring with basic feminist principles of advocating for women's safety.

The source of the ability to advocate for violence while opposing violence against other non-sex working women thus appears to be a result of the objectification of the person. This objectification leads to the dehumanising of the person, through their position as the enemy; outside the realms of acceptability. This can also be seen in the verbal abuse directed at performers going to an industry event in the UK, where they were subjected to screams of 'rapists' by feminist protestors as they entered the venue (Barnett, 2016).

Through the dehumanisation facilitated through objectification, the individual is reduced to an object when their experience is manipulated to serve the subject, in this case, those campaigning against pornography. This instrumentality constitutes epistemological violence, as Habib asks of anti-pornography campaigners:

> See, it's hard for me to hear from you that we're responsible for objectification—
> that we objectify each other and help our audiences objectify us. It's hard to hear
> because aren't you the same person who won't listen to us when we tell you we
> enjoy it?' (2014).

This reductive object status was seen in the gallery entitled 'porn star mugshots' on the now defunct website of anti-pornography group The Pink Cross Foundation, run by ex-performer Shelley Lubben. While claiming to want to rescue women from the industry, the site also hosted a gallery of mug shots of performers, documenting the charges against them. This positioning as deviants can contribute to real world stigma, where performers can lose their jobs if their past involvement in pornography is exposed, thus making exiting the industry harder due to fears of loss of income. This objectification continues even in death, as for the tidy sum of $95.95 a year, subscribers could access obituaries of over '400 dead porn stars', whose deaths from accidents or illness were blamed on their involvement in pornography.

This framing does not encourage sympathy for the performer as they are framed as deviant and criminal. Holtz and Wagner (2012) argue that this is an element of dehumanisation, as they state that through objectification dehumanisation means that:

> A person is not only merely perceived as a representative of a certain social group and not as a unique individual, but by being a member of this group, the person is disqualified from being a fully fledged human being deserving sympathy and respect (2012, p.2).

Holtz and Wagner further argue that dehumanisation and depersonalisation consist of stripping a person of agency and community. They describe community as referring to 'the person as being interconnected with other people who feel attachment to each other and who care for each other' (2012, p.2). Therefore, if a performer is excluded from family or their local community through being perceived as a deviant or criminal, which may happen as a result of their inclusion in a mugshot gallery, this may impact their sense of belonging in a wider community and may lead to smaller communities of colleagues being the only source of support. However, if the ability to name this community or name the occupation of its members is threatened, and as previously discussed this can impact the formation of this community.

This suggestion that the feminist debate on pornography contributes to real world consequences for the performers is often dismissed, with Stark deriding it as 'especially specious' (2005, p.278). While it cannot be said that there is a single root cause of the dehumanisation of performers, the nuances of dehumanisation must be considered to build a particularist analysis of the issues facing those who work in the pornography industry. This includes examining how this debate contributes to this through epistemological violence.

Because the performer is positioned as Other, and an enemy of women, they are dehumanised through language, which paves the wave for real life consequences as a result. These objective assumptions lead to objectification, where the dominant episteme is that '*these people are lesser than*', or '*these people are deviants*'. Their identity is reduced down to their job; they are assigned an 'absolute' identity and thus their feelings need not be listened to.

Having your personal rights, values, and standing in society debated publicly has been found to have a direct impact on the health of the people at the heart of the debate, as suggested by a study that looks at how LGBT people in Ireland felt during the same-sex marriage referendum debate in 2015 (Moore, 2016). Most of the 1600 respondents reported feeling victimised by the debate, with 80% of respondents feeling upset at being exposed to the arguments proposed by the 'no' side. Over two-thirds of respondents additionally reported personal distress as their human rights were endlessly debated, while they personally dealt with the stigma. Similarly, performers in pornography are also a group that has experienced long-term othering from society, and has been vulnerable to increased levels of violence in many forms.

It follows that the possibility for trauma from being at the centre of a debate about violence and abuse where some hold the performer accountable for violence against women (Stark, 2004, p.284) and are worthy of being 'shot' (Birchill, 1987) is more than merely tangible. As well as having an impact on mental health, the effects of stigmatisation as criminal, deviant, or abusive

translate to risk of job loss, loss of child custody, and ostracisation from family and friends. Details of these events can be found in performer Jiz Lee's collection of 'coming out' stories from performers across the industry (2015). These stories included experiences of having bank accounts closed, and being banned from accommodation sites such as Airbnb.com. These impacts are detailed further in chapter Five.

The issue is not about an ethics of intentions but about an ethics of consequences (Teo, 2008), and this is where epistemic responsibility becomes a factor in the objectification experienced by performers. Real life consequences of this othering can be seen in examples of real world violence committed against performers.

## 4.10. Conclusion

This chapter how outlines how objectification through epistemological violence operates on several levels with a variety of consequences. The power dynamics of the hierarchy of privilege can impact on how a performers' testimony is heard, if it is heard at all. Testimonial smothering and testimonial quietening must also be considered in how testimony from performers is produced or considered, and ethical research must be conscious of this dynamic. This chapter also explored the issue of performers and childhood sexual abuse, and the power dynamics present in asking about this. Given that this is already a sensitive topic for the majority of people, it can be an especially charged question to ask a performer due to the risk of trauma. This risk is twofold- the risk of personal trauma from asking, and the risk of having that trauma used publicly against the performer or their industry. This risk is asymmetrical since the asker of this question does not face the same risk, or the same demand to know this information. This chapter also examined the dehumanisation that objectification through epistemological violence can result in. Teo asks if epistemological violence in academia could be considered an 'academic hate crime' for these consequences (2010, p.299). This is a question certainly

worth pursuing in future research, given the power dynamics and hierarchical status afforded

to academic research over other sources of knowledge.

**Chapter Five: Stigma**

This chapter outlines how multidirectional stigma must be considered in discourse in violence and pornography, with the source of stigma included. Currently, this is a major gap in knowledge.

**5.1. Introduction**

Williams highlights Biddy Martin's question 'How are discipline and power constituted at the moment at which woman is made the object of knowledge?' (1989, p.4). We can explore this question in relation to pornography through a nuanced examination of stigma. Goffman defines stigma as an attribute that is deeply discrediting and which reduces an individual 'from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one' (1963, p.3). This taint can have impacts on the creation of knowledge in the pornography discourse.

The identity of the performer can be impacted by society, given that the relationship between an individual and society is described by Berger and Luckmann as a 'dialectical' relationship, one that 'once crystalised, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations' (1991, p.194). The dominant episteme on pornography can shape how society perceives the assumed identity of the performer, and encapsulate her in a stigmatised identity that the performer then has to choose to accept or to fight against. The performer can be objectified through being subsumed into this collective identity of what a performer 'is', rather than being viewed as an individual with agency. This objectification also includes fungibility, as the performers are treated as homogenous. Berger and Luckmann claim that 'specific historical social structures engender identity *types*', *(ibid*, italics orginal), and this section will explore if and how feminist discourse on pornography can engender the stigmatisation of the performer through framing the performer as a deviant or victim, building on the previous chapter.

Stigmatisation can result in the person affected experiencing consequences such as police harassment, judgement from society, exclusion from employment, and negative feelings of self-worth. These impacts on performers will be discussed throughout this chapter. In relation to knowledge production, stigma has the effect of delegitimising the person's knowledge and can work as a barrier to having their experiences heard and accepted as true. This can then impact the type of knowledge that is available to society, and can continue the objectification of the performer through this incomplete and exclusionary process.

In order to navigate the effects of stigma, the affected person can engage in 'identity work' (Giddens, 1994, p.7). Identity work consists of the affected person adopting tactics to manage their self-identity and minimise impact on their self-esteem. Identity work in pornography can take several forms, from making a clear distinction between the performers' personality and their work persona, and disassociating themselves from performers who are deemed to be drug users or less than professional. This section will outline how the performers in this research project undertake identity work. In relation to pornography, one effect of stigmatisation is the exclusion of the performer from subjectivity, containing to frame them as objects. Thus, stigmatisation works to exclude them from a position of power in the discursive formations of pornography epistemology. This chapter will discuss some of these tactics, while addressing how stigma operates as a discursive formation in the feminist debate on pornography. The stigma experienced by those who are not sex workers, but are also involved in the discourse on pornography, will also be discussed.

## 5.2. Stigma in pornography

Foucault (1990) and contemporary postmodern theorists (Nicholson, 2013) suggest that power is multidirectional and that a multiplicity of truths exists. Toyoki and Brown argue that those

who are stigmatised do not merely accept this but are 'co-constructors of social outcomes' (2014, p.716) and are thus active agents, not passive recipients of stigma. Therefore, this section will also examine resistance to power and how stigma is navigated in order to contribute to the episteme on pornography specifically by looking at the relationship of stigma with fear and disgust.

Toyoki and Brown argue that stigma utilizes four main strategies to operate, namely the techniques of surveillance, categorization, normalization and correction. This builds on Foucault's work on discipline and punishment (1975) and how the panopticon is used to make individuals self-regulate their behaviour in the face of constant monitoring. Stigma can therefore be said to function as the regulator between 'good' and 'bad' when it comes to sex and pornography. Additionally, the tool of confession is also used to regulate access to respectability and acceptability. Toyoki and Brown posit that stigma is not monolithic and allows for Foucault's idea that power is multilateral, as they claim 'stigmatized identities (can) be embraced, rejected, appropriated, modified and adapted' (2014, p.718). This chapter will explore how this is achieved.

### 5.2.1. The Charmed Circle

Pornography has historically operated hand in hand with stigma from society at large to institutions in the fields of medicine and sexology in the 19th and 20th centuries (Kendricks, 1987; Weeks, 1991). Those who engaged in both consuming and working in pornography were pathologised and subjected to stigmatisation, relegated to deviant and/or victim status. In her 1984 essay *Thinking Sex*, Rubin examined the issue of stigma while calling for a radical theory on sex. Rubin outlines how stigma arises from societal hierarchies of what is considered to be ''good sex'' and what is relegated to ''bad sex'', and utilizes the concept of a 'charmed circle' to illustrate this.
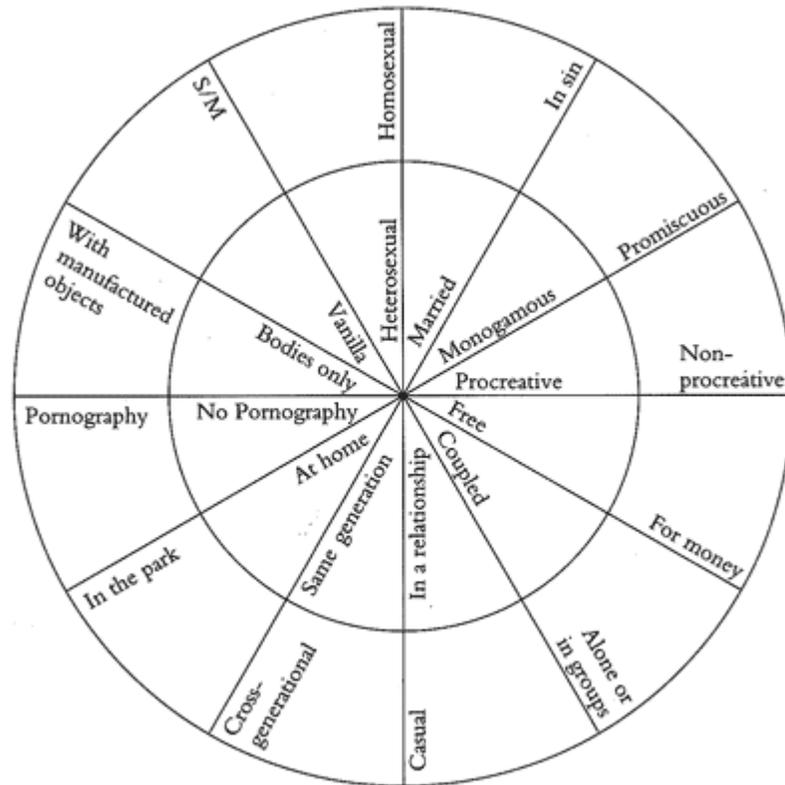
*Fig 3. Rubin's' Charmed Circle (2011, p.152)*

In the centre of the circle, Rubin places sex that is married, heterosexual, monogamous, and which occurs in private, with no toys or accessories. These acts are firmly in the category of acceptable sexual activity. The outer circle is designated to be the outer limits, where sexualities and sex acts are deemed to be deviant, abnormal, dangerous, and something to be avoided by 'respectable' members of society. These activities consist of being promiscuous, engaging in BDSM, public sex acts, using toys and sex for money or making/consuming pornography. In this category of 'bad, abnormal, unnatural, damned sexuality', stigma is applied to participants and they are excluded from 'blessed sexuality', and respectability (2011,

p.152). Foucault argues that this framing of sexual activities and sexualities as 'deviant' or 'normal' functioned not as a benevolent quest for the truth, but in fact as a repression technique to stop truth emerging. He posits that

> It is as if a fundamental resistance blocked the development of a rationally formed discourse concerning human sex, its correlations, and its effects. A disparity of this sort would indicate that the aim of such a discourse was not to state the truth but to prevent its very emergence (1976, p.55).

The stigmatisation of sex and pornography performers still functions in this way, and still affects emerging truths. Indeed, Chapter Four discusses the impact of the dismissal of performer truths. The lack of interest in building an extensive body of knowledge on performer experiences could be related to this resistance, but this speculation is in need of further research to explore its validity.

The line between these two categories of good and bad is enforced by society, lest a 'good' person may fall prey to the deviance flourishing in the outer limits. This sexual value system perpetuates fear, what Rubin terms a 'domino theory of sexual peril' (2011, p.151), and thus a strict line must be drawn to protect the good people engaged in the correct acts. Rubin suggests that:

> The line appears to stand between sexual order and chaos. It expresses the fear that if anything is permitted to cross this erotic demilitarised zone, the barrier against scary sex will crumble and something unspeakable will skitter across (2011, p.151).

This fear of the unspeakable is also a fear of the power attributed to the outer limits and how easily this unspeakable *thing* can corrupt the 'good' people. This line is also the partition

between acceptance and disgust, and a universalistic approach versus a particularist, nuanced reading of sexual behaviour:

> As long as it does not violate other rules, heterosexuality is acknowledged to exhibit the full range of human experience. In contrast, all sex acts on the bad side of the line are considered utterly repulsive and devoid of all emotional nuance. The further from the line a sex act is, the more it is depicted as a uniformly bad experience (2011, p.151).

Thus as performers are relegated to the outer limits, their experiences as individuals are lost, and they are subsumed into the metanarrative of theirs experiences being uniformly bad and lacking in nuance. The performers placement as being in a marginalised situation is thus enmeshed with societal perception of them having a marginal personality which results in objectification, and the performer as a person being perceived as uniformly bad (Mann, 1958, p.77).

This fear of alleged deviancy has existed since the invention of pornography, in various guises and was cemented in Victorian times (Kendricks, 1987; Weeks, 2017) and continues today. Smith and Attwood state that:

> (t)hese panics about sex draw on narratives of danger, disease, and depravity to which ''we'' are all susceptible, and rely on the repetition of 'evocative sexual language and imagery'' that urges ''us'' to be vigilant at all times, both as members of communities and as individuals (2013, p.45).

Rubin argues that those engaging in acts relegated to the outer limits were viewed as 'socially inferior, or symptomatic of psychological impairment (2011, p.311), far outside the realm of respectability. It follows that these persons were then stigmatised, and stripped of their individuality in favourite of being part of the collective exile that were too dangerous or deviant to approach.

This charmed circle analogy is useful for examining power dynamics when analysing societal attitudes to sexuality, but also when focusing on the academic discourse on sexuality and pornography. When we look at existing studies and feminist theories on pornography and the definitions utilised, we can see words like '*degradation*', '*violence*' '*submission*', with simplistic definitions that only frame terms like these negatively. No space is allowed for the consideration that these activities may be pleasurable to the participants- however unpalatable these acts may or may not be considered by some.

This demarcation between 'good' and 'bad' sex is visible in the discourse around pornography. When performers speak up as having good experiences, they experience dismissal and are deemed to be 'not representative', as discussed in Chapter Four. The narrative here is that the experience of women working in porn is a uniformly bad experience. We also see this when the performers are labeled as victims. We can see a pattern building- those who report 'good' experiences are not considered legitimate sources, and those who report liking 'bad' sex acts are also dismissed.

This dismissal is the barrier between those who claim to know the 'truth' about pornography and those who are dismissed and thus are excluded from this expert status. Those who are disdained are also stigmatised as unknowing, on the wrong side of what the 'truth' is about these sex acts and the realities of working in pornography. This claim to truth functions as a boundary of this line between good and bad, respectability and stigmatisation. Additionally, it also functions as the lineation of nuance, and the divider between 'good expert' and 'deviant/victim with untrue knowledge', and a divider of different camps of feminism.

## 5.2.2. The Division of Knowledge

The claim of 'truth' also functions as a divider of knowledge, where those who claim to be 'true' knowledge keepers of the realities of working in pornography enforce the divide between them and performers. This segregation of knowledge reminds society not to believe the word of the performer thus keeping them positioned as deviant betrayers of 'good women', and also positions the industry as monolithic rather than multifaceted. Those relegated to the 'bad knowledge' category experience stigma, while the 'good knowledge' holders are exempt from this tarring. Here, stigma is weaponised to fortify this barrier that protects 'true' knowledge. 'Good' and 'bad' knowledge are also divided by universalistic and particularistic approaches. 'Good knowledge' only allows for the singular truth that 'porn is bad, and the experience of working in porn is bad'; while a multiplicity of truths is relegated to 'bad knowledge'. Thus, 'good knowledge' feeds into the episteme, while 'bad knowledge' is excluded from it.

This division of knowledge can be illustrated in this table on the following page:

| Good Knowledge | Bad Knowledge |
|---|---|
| Anti-pornography academics | Academics who research pornography and do not condemn it unequivocally |
| Ex-performers with negative testimonies | Current performers |
| Anti-trafficking organisations | Ex-performers with positive testimonies |
| Religious groups | Sex worker support groups |
| Anti-pornography politicians | Politicians who don't condemn pornography |
| White women | People of colour |
| Middle and upper class speakers | Welfare and working class speakers |
| Men who are anti-pornography | Men who are pro-pornography (including performers) |
| Anti-pornography feminists | Pro-pornography feminists |
| Negative media reports | Positive media reports |
| Anti-pornography celebrities (usually women) | Celebrities who admit to sex work involvement |

*Fig 4. The division of 'good knowledge' and 'bad knowledge' (West 2019)*

Those on the 'bad knowledge' side who are not sex workers themselves are afflicted with a second hand stigma, defined as a 'courtesy stigma' by Birenbaum (1970, pp.196-206), where they would normally occupy traditionally 'respectable' positions; yet are stigmatised because of their links to pornography. Voss argues this is because '[s]tigma is sticky and it travels' (2015, p.9). Birenbaum posits that this courtesy stigma places these agents in a position where they are 'normal' but 'different', and he considers this particular stigma to be a 'situationally induced social construct rather than a constant attribute of the person' (1970, pp.196-197). Mobility and flexibility to navigate stigma are an option here, however this privilege is not afforded to those working in the industry.

Those on this side can navigate this stigma by either embracing the 'different' status, or emphasising the 'normal' status. To a lesser extent, women who had previously engaged in sex work can navigate this stigma by condemning the industry and accepting victim status rather than deviant status. However, this is no guarantee of acceptability and reduction of stigma. Therefore, this group is still denied legitimacy and subjectivity and excluded from structural power, as they occupy object status in knowledge. Their stigma is more difficult to shake off- their stigma is stickier than courtesy stigma.

Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) argue that some jobs are seen as 'dirty work'. The stigma attached to this so called 'dirty work' can be threefold in nature: physical, social, or moral contamination. Pornography can be said to be tainted in all three categories. As the physical side in pornography includes the use of the body and the incumbent risks with this (body fluids, injury, and exposure of genitalia), sex workers experience all three forms of taints and stigma. Conversely, those writing about the industry will experience only social and moral taints. It appears the secretion of body fluids makes stigma stickier, with the stigmata of this particular dirty work being saliva, semen and STI's.

While it could possibly be argued that academics who admit to sexual pleasure in watching pornography enter the domain of the physical taint, this is not directly comparable to the physical stigma that sex workers experience. Women academics are more at risk of this courtesy stigma applied within the feminist debate, as they may be relegated to the status of 'betrayers'. Williams further notes this difference for women and the impact of admitting pleasure in watching pornography:

> For a woman to admit to any such coincidence of scholarly and sexual pleasure undercuts her authority in a way that does not occur with a male scholar. It is not surprising then, that I should want to protect myself against the perceived contamination of a ''filthy subject''- lest I be condemned along with it (1989, p.xvii).

Thus, having- and admitting- a pleasurable response to watching pornography is not permitted through this division of good and bad. Smith and Attwood agree, and argue that 'those who testify to porn's pleasures or sense of liberation don't count in the same way as those who present themselves as addicts, victims, or rescuers' (2013, p.54). An example of this is seen in Pringles' attack on McKee's admission of watching pornography for pleasure as evidence that his research was flawed. Pringle, an anti-pornography activist, uses this admission to dismiss McKee's research as not an 'intellectual inquiry but an ideological mission' (2011, p.122); neglecting to mention this same criticism has been directed at anti-pornography research.

Thus we can see how courtesy stigma is used as a discursive practice to regulate knowledge production and its contributors in the academic field. Several writers have also discussed the stigma that academics studying sex work can experience, alongside experiences of objectification and a dismissal of their work (Attwood, 2009; Hammond and Kingston, 2014;

Irvine, 2018; Marks, 2014; Reavey, 1997). The openness of a writer's bias and personal experiences also has impacts for objectivity and reflexivity.

This table on page 157 also accounts for the intersections of race, gender and class as these intersections are important to highlight since they function in the debate as markers of respectability. This table also builds on Beckers 'hierarchy of credibility' which Rubin utilises to examine how claims of bias are levelled at those with 'bad' knowledge in order to delegitimize them and control who is allowed to speak (1986, p.319).

Through this framing outlined above, stigma here has a fourfold function- (1) to delegitimise the acts themselves and the industry; (2) to delegitimise non sex workers writing about pornography; (3) to delegitimise the performer as a person; and (4) to delegitimise the knowledge and truths of performers. This multitude of effects can impact how discourse is contributed to, disseminated, and accessed.

### 5.2.3. Deviant and Disgusting

This stigma is propagated by anti-pornography feminists' tendencies to focus on the worst pornographic content they can find, often utilised in travelling slide shows as discussed in Chapter Six. Not much appears to have changed from the time of Rubins' writing in 1984 to present day writings as the same focus on the worst pornography is still present. In 2016 speakers appeared on the *Late Late Show* in Ireland to discuss pornography and spent their time talking about gagging and comparing the effects of pornography watching to suffering PTSD from watching ISIS beheadings (West, 2016). Rubins' words are as relevant today as they were when originally published in 1984:

> This discourse on sexuality is less a sexology than a demonology. It presents most sexual behaviour in the worst possible light. Its descriptions of erotic conduct always use the worst available example as if it were representative. It presents the most disgusting pornography, the most exploited forms of prostitution, and the least palatable or most shocking manifestations of sexual variation. This rhetorical tactic consistently misrepresents human sexuality in all its forms. The picture of human sexuality that emerges from this literature is unremittingly ugly (2011, p.172).

This approach also contains a refusal to acknowledge that pornography is fiction, and may or may not be representative of real life. Given the variety of sexual activities that humans can engage in, how do we make valid statements about what is or what is not representative of human sexuality, or the frequency of the 'most shocking' manifestations of sexuality. Indeed, to whom are these acts shocking to, and to whom are they excitable to? This framing closes down any particularist approach that allows for different interpretations and different content to be a part of discourse.

This use of the 'most disgusting' material cements stigma and works as a silencing tactic, for those who engage in this 'worst of the worst' behaviour are truly deviant, and far removed from 'normal' sexuality. While academics are stigmatised if they show a positive reaction, this kind of focus on the 'most disgusting' relies on provoking a physical reaction from viewers, one that is then translated into social and moral tainting. In addition, this tactic functions as a justification for the deliberation use of stigma as a weapon, as it dehumanises the people behind the acts, relegating them further to the outer limits of the charmed circle and therefore beyond respectability. It amalgamates the performer with disgust and horror, and suspends them in perpetual Otherness. Miller argues that 'disgust is a gatekeeper emotion', and it is utilised in this context to police boundaries through the use of this content (2004). It also draws a line between those who are anti-pornography, and those who can be said to defend this 'worst of the worst' content; an approach which not only homogenises pornography, but homogenises responses to it.

### 5.2.4. Stigma/power and fear

As Rubin (1984) claims, fear is the underlying source of this stigma, and to examine power/knowledge within stigma deployment in pornography discourse, one must look at this fear and see the relationship between stigma and power. Panic has accompanied pornography at each stage of its developmental journey (Kendrick, 1987). This ever present panic calls on society to be aware that danger through sex is always lurking, ready to claim innocent victims and turn them on to a life of depravity. Attwood and Smith argue that this call for vigilance is framed through narratives of disease and depravity, and claim that this operates through stigma:

> A target of blame is established through its potential to destabilise normative sexuality and practice, and individuals may be publicly shamed, but are so within the context of the constant, private self-policing of individual deviation from the ideal (2013, p.45).

These anxieties, Smith and Attwood claim, are fueled by fear which makes them powerful and perpetuates stigma as a tool of control and a way of creating a 'us versus them' narrative. This narrative continues Rubin's charmed circle and outer limits divisions, and continues to place the performer as a source of fear, disgust, disease, and otherness. Smith and Attwood suggest that fear, anxiety and sex can be a toxic mix:

> they draw their power from the broader emotional culture of sex: "an effectively dense mix" of dread, excitement, shame, and fear, often working to produce an emotional arc of 'outrage, anger and disgust". They may also provoke a "frisson of pleasure" for their audiences that mixes together sociality, emotional arousal, righteousness, and "the thrill of collective rage" (2013, pp.45-46).

These points about pleasure and the thrill of collective rage reveal a fascinating argument- that those campaigning against pornography and so-called deviant acts experience a personal

pleasure from this work. This has implications for how stigma in this discourse is viewed, and how power operates through stigma here.

Sexologist and former sex worker Carol Queen addresses this point, along with the idea that anti-pornography feminists are also anti-sex, an argument which has operated since the 'sex wars' of the 1980s in feminist theory. While many anti-pornography feminists will argue that they are not anti sex, but instead against how sex is depicted in pornography (Dines 2010), Queen argues this needs a more nuanced approach. Looking at the relationship between fear, sex and stigma, Queen argues that this approach is actually a sexualised approach and terms it *erotophobia*, a fear of sex which is reproduced over generations and is linked to shame and disgust (2002, p.x). As much as there appears to be a thin line between love and hate, there also appears to be a precarious line between sexual disgust and sexual arousal. Queen links this to absexuality and discusses how she sees those experiencing this as a fetish of sorts:

> Crusading against other people's sexual behaviours and images lets them wallow in a very safe form of sexual obsession. I believe that this crusade becomes intrinsic to the way they relate to sex, that their focus on awful, beyond the pale sexuality far over-shadows the importance of actual body-to-body sex in their own I believe their voyeuristic, judgemental peeping on other forms of sex is in fact, these people's sexual orientation (2002, p.33).

Queen's theory appears to be supported by research by Fisher et al. (1988). While arguing that erophobia can be a result of previous sexual experiences, Fisher et al., also offer another option: they suggest erotophilia as a motivation for why people are drawn to working in sexual fields, defining erotophilia as a very positive response to sex. They argue that those who experience erotophobia also score highly on authoritarianism, a need for achievement, and favour traditional sexual roles for genders. Fisher argues that both erotophobia and erotophillia can be a result of socialization and prior sexual experiences. This is supported by Macapagal and Janssen (2011) who found that erotophobia and erotophilia affect how a person

immediately responds to sexual stimuli. Further research could be beneficial here to explore if this fear if projected onto pornography and its workers, and how this contributes to stigma. Rye, Serafini and Bramberger (2015) also found that attitudes to activities such as BDSM are influenced by a conservative or liberal personality, and are unlikely to change with new information about the subject. There are certainly grounds to explore this nuanced aspect of stigma and the projection of personal sexual attitudes and experiences further in future research on pornography discourse.

Queen points to the speech patterns present in pornography discourse: 'a common thread in all of them is the explicitly sexual focus of their attention and/or the aroused effect of their speech and presentation' (2002, p.32), and we can see examples of this in the rhetoric of Dworkin. Queen uses social learning theory to suggest this approach as a new paradigm to understand why people feel strongly enough about pornography to dedicate their lives to discussing it, and why they focus on the worst aspects of it. This is in comparison to erotophillia, which may lead some people to work as sexual health support workers, or sex educators, taking a positive, supportive approach to sexuality.

In disseminating her theory, Queen is participating in resistance to the dominant episteme on pornography and its stigma. Queen engages in this resistance to stigmatisation through creating her own meaning and subjectivity, as outlined by Fairclough in Chapter Three. Queen here is engaged in constructing her own meaning for her own experiences, resisting the outsider insistence on storied meanings that are ascribed to her experiences.

Those like Queen who argue against this stigma can be said to be engaging in identity work, exploring a new approach to a collective and a personal identity and rejecting the dominant episteme and social positioning as deviant. When Goffman argues that stigma strips a person

of their personhood and reduces them to their stigmatised quality, we can see Queen resisting this stripping and refocusing on the source of stigma. In so doing, she is asking for the dangerous qualities of the person projecting stigma to be examined, instead of its subjects. Opsal argues that not everyone passively accepts the stigma bestowed on them (2011, p.147) and we can see this in operation here. Queen is rejecting the positioning of having a spoiled identity and through engaging in what Riessman called 'resistant thinking' (2000, p.123), she argues instead that it is those who engage in the creation of stigma that have a spoiled identity instead.

By calling for a nuanced examination of sexuality, Queen rejects a universalistic approach and opens up a new avenue to explore the relationship between power, sex and knowledge in the pornography discourse. This form of identity work positions resistors as ''intelligent strategist(s)' who have the ability to 'reflexively create, repair and discard identities' in order to address this stigmatisation (Giddens, 1994, cited in Toyoki and Brown, 2013, p.716). Queen points out that erotophilia can be a positive trait and can lead people into sex education for example. Thus, Orsal argues that stigma is not a fixed trait and since it is created through interaction, it follows that it can also be challenged through interaction.

Williams points to Foucault's theory of power having multiple points of resistance, and we have outlined this process in this section. This endeavor is important to modernise the study of pornography and view it through a nuanced lens. Williams argues that a rejection of a universalistic approach to pornography discourse is crucial for avoiding the same fate as traditional academic theory:

> The value of this plural conceptualisation of power, pleasure, and resistance lies in its potential to prevent the feminist critique of patriarchy from succumbing to the same imposition of a unitary norm as the phallocentrism being criticised (1989, p.56).

Avoiding a top down approach to power we can see new points of discourse forming through resistance, as well as a challenging of discursive practices by those directly affected, thus creating space for more equal power relations within the discourse. This also works to avoid the subject-object positioning between researcher and research participant that is explored in Chapter Three.

We can also see different approaches to discourse and look at how the body is utilised to challenge discourse and stigma, as Jill Nagle argues sex workers do. Nagle claims that the current discourse is too narrow to fully understand power and resistance, and sex workers challenge power in different ways:

> Various sex workers, however, expand upon the notion of resistance and on their turf by redefining their bodies, resisting norms, and employing their common-place struggles to obtain autonomy and respectability (1997, p.291).

It is crucial to take this aspect into account if we are to build a contemporary approach to pornography where discourse can be challenged through the body as well as through the written word. The body as a site of active speech instead of a passive recipient of outsider theory is a source of power and resistance. Resistance here also challenges the positioning of the sex working body as disgusting and fear inducing, and transforms the outer limits of sexuality into the centre of discourse. This approach contains power as it disputes the traditional approach to studying Othered populations and rejects dominant discourse on pornography. Instead, it fits with an epistemological anarchic approach that recognises that populations such as sex workers can operate under a "semiotic bricolage" (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock, 1996) approach to power, identity and community. Resisting traditional

approaches in order to navigate stigma and power dynamics results in fresh approaches that may reduce the risk of epistemological violence through the research process.

## 5.3. Stigma and Relationships

This section explores the impact of stigma on the relationships of performers. This examination is threefold: firstly, stigma and dating will be discussed, then the impact of stigma of long term relationships will be addressed, and thirdly the impact of stigma on family relationships will be discussed. How stigma affects the romantic and familial relationships of the performers varied, although most discussed heartbreaking results such as family estrangements due to their jobs, particularly estrangement from children. This section also explores performer resistance to stigma, and how identity work is utilised as a stigma management technique.

### 5.3.1. Dating

In relation to stigma and dating, three participants went into detail about how the stereotype of being sexually promiscuous or a 'nymphomaniac' affected their dating lives. Speaking of the challenges they faced in finding partners, these participants noted how these stereotypes left them vulnerable to abusive partners, with a feeling of being viewed as available to any man who wanted to have sex with them. The offer of being paid for sex was also raised by Louise who argued that this contributed to a sense of entitlement and accessibility.

Louise expressed frustration that she felt viewed as wanting to have sex with everyone:

> They view us as trashy.  As if we want to fuck everyone. That's weird. We don't. We don't. I don't know if anyone actually takes a look in the mirror half the time. But, 90% of the population we don't want to fuck.

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Louise engages in identity work here by establishing clear boundaries between who she is on screen and who she is in 'real life', stating that men can view performers as 'trashy, as if we want to fuck everyone'. She expresses that most of her work is for money, not simply for the love of sex: 'I mean even half the talent we don't want to fuck. Like, we're only fucking them because we're getting paid<laughs>'. Through these statements it appears that Louise's motivations for remaining in the industry are more connected to money than sex, and she appears tired of this association only to sex. Her laugh here points to how incredulous she finds these assumptions. She states that when it comes to her personal dating, she wants more than sex, and expresses frustration over potential partners that see her purely as a sex object:

> Really? I mean is that all that you see is that we wanna have sex with you? Because, we get paid for that. That's what we do. I want someone that actually wants to have a conversation with me. Sit down, I wanna Netflix but not chill.

Louise appears to identity objectification through depersonalisation and a reduction to body. Prospective dates must be sifted through to find those who see her as a complete person with agency and autonomy, rather than just a signifier for sex through a reduction to her body. Louise goes on to discuss how she spends her time with her cats, creating an image far from the wild 'nymphomaniac' stereotype that fellow performer Amanda also complains about. Amanda also documents how people assume she will have sex with anyone, and similar to Louise, also makes a clear dividing line between her on screen persona and her real life:

> They just assume that I'm a nymphomaniac. They think I will just have sex with anyone. They think who I am on camera is who I am in real life. (...) People don't understand that (Amanda) is very, very different than who I am in my real life. It's an act, and that's the thing; people can sometimes assume a lot of negative aspects of people in the industry. And I don't want them to do that.

Similar to Louise, Amanda again strives to make clear the differences between her job and real life:

People just don't understand. I just wish I could educate the entire world about who we are and what we are, and that we're not just a bunch of nymphomaniacs. Some are, and those are the people that there is something wrong upstairs that they feel they need sex to compensate that in their lives. It depends on where sex and sexuality stands in your life.

Both Amanda and Louise here are rejecting what Watson calls a social-identity (2009, p.431)- the assumed hyper sexual identity of a performer- and instead they place emphasis on their self-identity and normalcy (Toyoki and Brown, 2014, p.718). Self-identity is described by Giddeons as how the person reflexivity understands themselves in terms of their own biography (1991, p.54). This is a rejection of the public narrative about the performer and a focus instead on a self-narrative, or an 'ontological narrative' that supports the person to engage in identity work (Watson, 2009, p.431). Toyoki and Brown reference Mead's concept of a 'parliament of selves' which acknowledge that individuals use varying identities in different situations (Mead, 1934, cited in Toyoki and Brown, 2013, p.729). This parliament of selves is useful for the performer to be able to utilise their performer persona to do their job, and then return to their everyday self; outside of their job where they emphasize their normalcy such as cooking, having hobbies etc. However, while this is a skill the performer can use, having outsiders recognise this switching between identities appears to be more difficult. The skill present in switching between different personas in order to capitalise on sex appeal and sexuality should be recognised as a form of labour, alongside the reassessment and reassemblage of self that exists alongside stigmatisation (Toyoki and Brown, 2014, p.729).

Amanda passes judgement on those who she does term to be 'nymphomaniacs' and contributes to stigma by alleging that there is 'something wrong' with them. This intra trade stigma will be addressed in more detail in the latter part of this chapter, but it is interesting to

note the frustration Amanda appears to feel about this stigma as it impacts her life, as documented by the example she gives.

> One time I did the dastardly mistake of telling two people; and the one guy thought that meant he could just have sex with me, and the other guy just ran the other way...screaming. And the guy that just wanted to have sex with me, he found my civilian FB page, and I had to be straight with him and just tell him that I wasn't interested. And that usually, for a lot of guys, it hurts their ego, to say that I am not interested.

Amanda demonstrates here the thin line between desire and disgust that performers face. This is discussed further in Chapter Five when performers discuss their experiences with fans who appear to struggle with the boundaries between desire and disgust and how this affects their interactions. Amanda's' boundaries can be seen here to be involatile- the man's feelings about entitlement to having sex with her does not take into account her own desire to have sex or not have sex with that man- it is as if her needs are not considered at all in the imagined sex act between them. Again, this functions as an example of objectification through depersonalisation, reduction to body, denial of autonomy, and instrumentality, as the performer exists to serve the sexual needs to the man, not to have a mutually satisfying encounter.

Ava also discussed stigma and being viewed as someone who is sexually promiscuous. She speaks about how difficult she finds dating, as unlike people not involved in pornography, her body and previous sexual activities are already visible to the general public:

> You know, most people are lucky enough to explore their fantasies in the privacy of their own home, you know, mine are all out in the open for anybody to see. And, you know, it makes dating extremely difficult. Because most people do not understand….they have this Madonna/whore complex; this love and hate for the industry. That's difficult. All the stereotypes that you have to fight with people that aren't in this business. It leads to a ton of stigma.

Similar to Amanda, Ava has experienced negative issues with men who violate her privacy and boundaries, and states:

> It's a very difficult job, in a lot of ways. I've wound up with a lot of abusive, narcissistic ex-partners.

Abusive partners have a common history of ignoring partners' boundaries, and using the partner to satisfy their own needs while objectifying their partners and denying their subjectivity (Rakovec-Felser, 2014). Glick and Fiske (2001) argue that men who dislike women who challenge traditional gender and sex norms around being a 'good' submissive women react with hostile sexism and punish them. These men then elevate 'good' women who they see themselves as protecting through benevolent sexism.  Bareket et al., (2018) argue that research supports the hypothesis that those who believe in the Madonna/Whore dichotomy also report lower levels of sexual satisfaction and lower scoring in belief in gender equality. This may result in projection of those insecurities and frustrations on to an easy target- the performer who is the embodiment of flaunting of traditional gender roles for what 'good' women should do with their sexuality and bodies. Erotophilla and erotophobia may also play a role here in the perception of performers by potential partners, and this area of research would benefit from an in-depth analysis of links between narcissism and objectification.

Instead of positioning the performer as the problematic agent, researchers could analyse who constructs stigma, what this stigma may be rooted in for that person, and what they are projecting onto the performer who functions as a signifier for sexual anxiety.  Further research should ask why these projectors of stigma feel that the performer is a repository for their sexual issues and if this transference occurs in other areas of their lives.

As discussed in Chapter Five, a target of blame is established that functions as a site for projection of societal and personal fear around sexuality (Attwood and Smith, 2013). When looking at the Madonna/whore complex, we see that Amanda, Louise and Ava experience being the subject of this positioning as sexually accessible, and suffered rejection and abuse from male partners/ men hoping to be a sexual partner. This mixture of disgust and desire can be said to be linked to fear and should be examined at length when looking at why people hold these attitudes, and why they regulate performers to the outer limits of respectability. Griffith et al., (2012) list studies by Evans-DeCicco and Cowan, 2001; Polk and Cowan, 1996 that examine the stereotypes people hold towards performers, but do not engage in a discussion about why those people choose to believe these stereotypes. Therefore this research calls for more work to be done in this area in order to contribute to a deeper understanding of stigma, stigma/power, and how sexual anxieties manifest in discourse, both in societal discourse but also in relation to performers.

### 5.3.2. Existing relationships

After navigating stigma while dating, it did not always ease for the performer once they became involved in established relationships. Amanda reports that her partner initially appeared at ease with her performing, but ultimately it affected the relationship negatively:

> It was very strange. Like, one minute, he was all into it. He was all hot and bothered by it. He thought it was very very sexy, but then we started fighting about it.(...). One minute, he's taking me out to celebrate after my shoots, wanting to hear about the details, and then he started resenting me. And, after a while, I was like 'I can't do this anymore.

Amanda states that initially her partner was excited by her work, and they used to engage in swinging, which involves bringing new sexual partners into the relationship to have sex with one or both people. Amanda explains her partner videotaped her having sex with other men,

before the relationship turned sour and he responded negatively. Amanda stated that she has a new partner who was in the industry himself, and she maintains a strict division between her performer persona and her home life. Amanda stated her partner was there with her and she had encouraged him to enjoy himself, but also stated that her escorting was the source of arguments. Defending her work as an escort to her new partner, she explained that it supported her for daily expenses. She also stated it paid for their travel and accommodation to the expo. This is an example of the realities of lower payments that performers now can expect in the industry after the impact of internet piracy resulted in lower paychecks, and how performers often supplement their income with other forms of sex work such as stripping and escorting (Escoffier, 2008).

### 5.3.3. Marriage

Holly reports a different experience, as she has a supportive spouse but experiences stigma coming from outside the relationship. Holly states that she feels people judge her husband for wanting to be married to her, as if she were contaminated.

> When people find out that I'm married, they're shocked like 'who would want to marry you?' in a way. We're human beings, but I feel the stigma is we're somehow, damaged or broken, or we've been abused in a way that makes us seek that kind of life.

The assumption of being a victim of sexual abuse is discussed in chapter 3, and here Holly is showing the real life impact on her from this discourse. Her experience and description of finding it exhausting to continuously have to defend herself and her husband against stigma resonate with the experience of Linda Lovelace described back in 1980:

My husband is a strong man. He has had to be. The minute someone recognises me or discovers who his wife is, the remarks begin. He also happens to be an old fashioned man, the kind who believes you're supposed to defend your woman's honour. Defending the honour of a Linda Lovelace can be a full time occupation' (1980, p.243)

These examples highlight how pernicious the framing of *performer as damaged* is when it comes to relationships, and how it manifests in a belief that no one would want to date them, let alone marry them and build a life and family together. It also points to a belief that a performer is not suited for the traditional gender roles assumed to be present in marriage, similar to the Madonna/Whore complex. Marriage has traditionally been a site for reproduction, and the focus on pleasure rather than reproduction in pornography directly challenges this use for intercourse. By embracing the process of queering methodology and the focus of stigma and its targets, we can contribute to a new episteme of stigma knowledge and widen the field of not only pornography studies but sexuality studies as a whole.

## 5.4. Family

Several respondents spoke of stigma affecting their familial relationships and the pain this has caused. Family events are also places where performers may experience stigma from outside their immediate family, as performer Stoya experienced when she spoke to a woman at her family's wedding. This guest did not realise it was Stoya herself that she was talking to, and blithely discussed the scandalous porn-star stepsister who had quit her job to run away with the circus' (Stoya, 2013). Stoya writes: 'she babbled at length about her (my) moral shortcomings, including the rhetorical question of how one could invite a whore to their wedding' (Stoya, 2013). One wonders what this guest expected Stoya to do at the wedding and if stigmatised people are expected to be shunned from family engagements.

In this research project, Louise spoke of being denied access to step children that she had

raised for a number of years, because her partners' ex-girlfriend was against her job:

> I was an amazing parent and those children loved me and actually called me
> another mother to them. But they had no problem ripping them out of my life after
> five years of being with me and me taking care of them. Just because I did porn.
> All because of my job - which they knew nothing about. These were little kids. I'm
> not talking about grown kids. I raised these little kids into, you know, half-grown
> men. (...) And, you know, I raised them to those ages and because of my job, it...
> other people thought it was ok. In turn it causes little kids to cry. And it ripped my
> heart out. Just because they didn't...I didn't birth them. And it was, it was solely
> because of my job.

Holly states that although she kept the children sheltered from what she did for a living, the

mother of the children convinced her ex-partner that she should not have access to the children

anymore. This frames Holly as someone unsafe to be around children, solely because of her

profession, and is a real life consequence of stigma. Other respondents such as Ava stated

that her own biological child was withheld from her by her family, while her ex-partner's family

was vocally opposed to the relationship between her and her ex-partner. Ava places a lot of

the blame for this on stigma. She also states that the reactions to her work vary in her family:

> I have family members that are very okay with it, and then I have other family
> members that I just don't speak to.

Ava explains that she feels this is due to her family being Southern and Christian, which might

encompass traditional views when it comes to gender and sex, and female sexual activities

and sexuality in particular. Sophie also ties her family's reaction to religious influences within

the family; in her case, Southern Baptist:

> (M)y parents are not happy about it. They definitely think that I am ruining my life.
> But they don't get how great I feel personally. Growing up, I was one of those kids
> that was so social – I tried to be involved in everything; pageants, cheerleading,
> sports…a bunch of different things, so they think that I've kind of thrown all that

behind just to come out here and do what they would say being 'being a whore'. But there's so much more that goes into it and they don't see that.

Sophie speaks about this objectification where she is reduced to her body, and being seen as one dimensional (passive) rather than being recognised for her activism within the industry, or her other interests and accomplishments (active). This stigma from her family reflects mainstream societal stigma, as performers are reduced to their body, and framed as other. This erasure of personality functions as objectification through fungibility as outlined by Nussbaum in Chapter Two.

### 5.4.1. Family Stigma Reversal

However, we need to take a more nuanced approach to relationships and stigma. Emma also points to religion being a part of the stigma she faced from her family, but also looks at her own families' pre-existing issues. She explained that her sisters were supportive of her career, but her parents were not. Emma stated it was 'the worst day of my life' when she told them. She reported that her Jewish family held grudges against one of her sisters for her previous drug addiction:

> They would be much happier if I stopped porn, but it would be the kind of thing that I know I would never be forgiven. I would never be forgiven. It would always be there. My sister was a drug-addict for a while, and she cleaned up, and – to this day – my mom will never say anything, but it's clear in their interaction that she has not forgiven her.

Emma outlines how her family are conservative, and have not worked on their own issues:

> And my mom…I've kind of done a lot of work to kind of, be myself, but my mom never did. And she is very, lives very small and contained and she's miserable, but it's safe and it's what she knows and so. I'm like 'I'm going to go on the Internet, and I'm going to talk to all these people and I'm going to bridge porn and

education.' And she's like 'fuck you'. She would never say that, but that's essentially what she's thinking.

Historically it has been the position that the performer is the person who is pathologised or positioned as victim (Rubin, 2011), but if we are to take a nuanced look at stigma we need to look at its roots and the people who perpetuate the stigma. Sherkat and Ellison (1997) believe that people with strong religious beliefs will also oppose pornography on the grounds of moral absolutism and fear of social contamination. It is thus possible that religion plays a strong role in the creation and continuation of stigma towards performers, and may be the case of the people named here by the performers in this research. Further research is needed to examine the source of stigma in these situations.

Emma outlines how any family members who deviate from the norm experience stigmatisation, but identifies how she feels this is an issue that originates from her mother as an individual. She develops this further and highlights how she identifies as a risk-taker but sees her family as placing higher value on security, and how this has caused disharmony within their relationship:

> So, but anyway, to my family I have learned this in the process that my family's biggest value is security and mine is risk or risk-taking. And those two things don't really go well together, and, so I'm probably not going to be maybe talking to my parents very much longer. Because the past year has been like a series of just…explosion, explosion, explosion, explosion, and I can't handle it. That's the hardest part.

In Griffith et al.'s (2013) study, risk-taking as a characteristic of performers is discussed. Performer Kayden Kross agreeing with this suggestion, stating: 'I have a feeling we've probably, as a demographic, tried skydiving more (..) We've probably tried monkey brains in

South Africa more (Pappas, 2013). It can be posited that rebelling against family dynamics can also be said to be a component of risk-taking, as discussed below.

Abbotts' study identifies freedom and independence as two reasons for entering the industry and she relates this to restricted opportunities and flexible working conditions. However, we can also see in cases like Sophie's where freedom from a restrictive social environment with strict gender roles functions as a motivator to break away from that world and seek out an environment that is more sexually permissive. Sophie mentions the high value her hometown placed on the importance of traditional marriage and religion, and her need to explore her sexuality without these restrictions. Abbott lists another motivation of 'being naughty and having sex' as a reason for entering pornography, and states this reason is due to pornography being 'a vehicle for people who wish to violate, challenge, and refute social norms' (2000, p.26). Sophie appears to have used pornography acting as a means to explore her desires around BDSM, something she stated that, due to her family and social environment, was a source of shame and something to be hidden:

> I was really involved in BDSM, but that was secret. You know, that was my secret part of my life because, growing up, I was always the really 'good girl', you know? My dad's a preacher. I try to be the really good girl, but I was never happy until I found this weird niche – BDSM. I craved the discipline. So, that was something I was ashamed of, though. I had such a negative feeling about myself, the way I looked at myself was – my self-image was just horrible. So, I was hiding all that, so then I started doing things, in relationships I had; I was learning all about it. I loved it, but then I also felt guilty that I loved it.

It can be argued that freedom for Sophie in this case appears to be breaking away from family and the strict sexual roles she was expected to adhere to, and again the stigma attached to this exploration is tied to religion. Sophie mentions the pressure to be the 'good girl' and the 'All American' girl who participated in cheerleading and pageants, and how this could not align

with her own desires and self-esteem. The will to knowledge in Sophie's case outweighed the benefits of the external appearance of being the 'good' woman. Her rejection of the performative femininity inherent in being the 'good' woman carves a space in the discourse for exploring women's agency in the face of stigma.

Katie also highlights the problems with researchers asking what a performers' family thinks of their job:

> My other family, some of them are really judgemental people. But, honestly, I stopped talking to a lot of them well before I started doing porn, so it kind of…it's kind of hard for me to say 'well, what do they think?' Well, they…they judge everyone. It's like…they're not, exactly what I would call healthy people – psychologically. So, it's like, when people ask that question 'What does your mother, what does your father think?' A lot of times, most of us alive, don't have healthy, functioning families. So, asking some girl what her dysfunctional mother thinks of her job is kind of pointless, you know?

Those who break away from strict family impositions on sexuality or those who experience family dysfunction are often thought of as the person with the problem. However, it can be argued that it takes a lot of self-determination to break away from a situation that the person can find toxic, especially if it is related to the family of origin. This can be viewed as a reclaiming of power by the individual and a rejection of the unhealthy power dynamics of the family, often one of society's most violent units. (Steinmetz and Straus, 1974; Straus, Gelles, Steinmetz, 2017). The status loss that stigmatisation facilitates is constructed by societal and familial factors, and in the case of pornography performers it is important to also look at sources of power. Families such as those of Sophie, Emma or Katie utilise stigma power to keep family members in their envisioned 'correct place' and within 'good' woman status. Link and Phelan define stigma power as 'instances in which stigma processes achieve the aims of stigmatisers with respect to the exploitation, control or exclusion of others' (2014, p.24). We have seen above also, in relation to dating, that stigma power can be present in the weaponisation of the

Madonna/whore dichotomy. In the next section we will explore the impact of this stigma in examining infra trade stigma.

## 5.5. Infra-trade stigma

This section explores the issue of stigma within the industry, and judgements that performers hold against their colleagues. Infra-trade stigma manifested as a focus on the newcomers to the industry, particularly younger women, and those who are deemed to act in an unprofessional manner. This latter categorisation focused on performers who take drugs or who view the industry as a quick and easy way to make money instead of viewing it as a job. This section will examine these two categories, alongside an analysis of how talent agencies are viewed. There appears to be a mixture of frustration and concern in approaches to these issues, and the topics of personal responsibility and aptitude for self-preservation appears to be key.

## 5.5.1. Reactions to Colleagues

Many performers expressed a twofold reaction to new colleagues. Some expressed frustration with newcomers to the industry who come in and stay a short time; others expressed concerns over how vulnerable they were to people looking to take advantage of them and their lack of experience. Participants appeared to view themselves as professionals and newcomers as not taking the job seriously.

Those who expressed frustration such as Louise ('Fuck all the bitches that keep coming in and leaving. Fuck them.') explained this response went deeper than just jealousy of new

performers. The participants appeared split in their views on newcomers, particularly if they were young. Some viewed them with empathy and recognised their vulnerability to be exploited by unscrupulous agents; others expressed resentment at the bad image they gave the industry due to issues such as drug taking, STI transmissions, and a lack of professionalism.

### 5.5.2. Frustration

Sophie fell into the category of respondents who expressed frustration at the behaviour of young newcomers, as she felt they did not appreciate the hard work needed to make it big in the industry, stating:

> There are some girls that are, but – like I said – those girls shouldn't be in the industry, and right now there's just an overload of new girls coming in because everyone thinks that they can be a porn star. And it's temporary, they don't realise that.

While still a relatively new performer with less than a years' experience at the time of this interview, Sophie stated that she felt these girls were lacking in life experience and were therefore unequipped to handle life in the industry. Sophie argued for personal accountability and believed she behaved in a professional manner and felt this approach has worked for her:

> I hold myself accountable for things. Rarely am I late to a set, I try to be the most professional person possible. So, I approach this as a business, and I've profited from it.

Amanda had much more experience in the industry than Sophie but agreed with her. She also addresses the issue of professionalism and echoes Sophie's' thoughts that the work is hard and for her proved to be a steep learning curve. She also argues that a performer has to be professional if they want to succeed:

So, in time you start to realise what works for you, what looks good, what sort of things you will, or will not do on camera. And who you will, or will not, work with. But it's a process, but it's also one of those things…you have to take it seriously. You have to take it like a job, you have to take it like a profession. So, I would say a lot of the times that people would hire me back would be because of my attitude. Sometimes if you have a poor attitude, or you show up and you're drunk or you're high or you're bruised for some reason, they're not going to hire you again. You'd be lucky if you work that day.

Through her response Amanda argues that working in pornography is not unskilled labour, and believes it takes both physical skills and an appropriate mental aptitude, stating further: 'Like, really, you just have to be smart. After I did my first job, I was like, 'this is hard work – this is a job'. This may be a revelation to those outside the industry or very new entrants, given the level of professional behaviour that Amanda states is required, and these unrealistic expectations of the realities of the work may be a factor for those exiting the industry after a short time.

Katie also argued that labour in the pornography industry is skilled labour, and attributed the blame for stigma to young, inexperienced girls coming into the industry and not being prepared for its realities.

Yeah, so, one of the bigger problems is that the stigma generates that work. These girls - it creates two things. Stigma creates pimps who are unskilled to do anything else, and they join the industry. And, by the way, they wash out, in three to six months because they have a drug problem, or they don't have their head in the game, or they're not experienced, so they don't know what they're doing. When you're talking about 'performing sex', it's a skill, and it's a legitimate skill. It's not – it's not just something that you can pick up.

Katie's thoughts had parallels with Sophie's suggestion that young girls did not realise it takes hard work to make it to the top of the industry and navigate a competitive industry where new talent comes in all the time.

> There are more girls than there is work. And a lot of the girls come in going 'Oh! Fuck it! I'll just go do porn' thinking that they're going to make a fortune. And it's not like that. I guess it was like that years and years ago. These days, it's only really profitable if you have a name and if you work consistently, and that's not typical these days.

Katie posits that similar experiences can be found in different industries such as mainstream entertainment and music industries, and lays the blame for any burnout at the feet of the individual who is unprepared for the challenges of the industry. She argues that the responsibility for failing to succeed in the industry is solely the fault of the individual themselves: 'If you're not cut out for it, why should the industry be forced to give you work?' Katie states she feels these newcomers that exit after a brief, negative experience are unprofessional and unreliable. Arguing that one result of the industry being stigmatised was that the barriers to entry are low, Katie felt that the ease of entry for those who she deemed unsuitable for the demands of the work in turn contributed to an unprofessional atmosphere.

> They are unreliable because the barriers to entry are too low, and you have girls coming in who have never worked a real job. They get used to making a thousand dollars a day, and they work four or five days a month and they get used to the money and they decide to take the day off, cause they feel like it, cause they have no perception of how much money that is. They don't realise that that is a lot of money. So – those of us who are older – who have worked other jobs, are more responsible.

In Abbotts' study, money was cited as a reason to enter the industry, but her participants also cited that it is hard work, not just easy money (2000, p.20). Newer performers can benefit from a novelty factor and work a lot initially, as Amanda states was her experience. This approach however is not sustainable. It appears the reality is divided between those who get fast money then exit the industry, and those who treat it as a business and capitalise on initial success to build a brand, as Sophie states she did. Abbott also reports that female performers invest in

their appearance as a career move in professional pornography, which can be a substantial amount of money if cosmetic surgery is involved.

Trends for cosmetic surgery and beauty ideals come and go, and recent newcomers such as Riley Reid have built a successful brand being 'natural'. However, smart business acumen is still needed to capitalise off any initial success. This includes establishing a brand identity through social media, website design, and working with select companies that have a high visibility, such as current successful companies like *Wicked* or Greg Lansky's companies *Tushy, Blacked*, and *Vixen*. This initial fame must be translated quickly into increasing visibility, as this in turn creates opportunity for winning awards and working with the top rated companies and thus increasing career opportunities (Abbott, 2000, p.30)

Abbott also identifies how having a successful career is linked to networking and having a good agent, who will source additional opportunities and cement the reputation of the performer as positive. Being seen as professional is thus an extra step in prolonging a career and gaining access to the more reputable agents. If a performer develops a reputation for being unstable due to drug use or not turning up to set, this is discussed via networking and gossip circles within the industry- as Amanda states 'This is a big industry, but it's a small industry. Everyone knows everyone and everything. (...) The drama? Everybody knows.'

Hannah explains that there can be a lot of jealousy and competition from colleagues. These experiences can be linked to the precarity of working in an industry that constantly seeks out new talent and where establishing widespread name recognition with erotic capital is rare. Abbott posits that having the right connections is vital to furthering a career, as some opportunities materialise through word of mouth and knowing the right people (2000, p.31), and thus it is not surprising to hear that jealousy may be frequent or widespread.  Therefore, it

is not surprising that performers are keen to distance themselves from unprofessional colleagues and not risk stigma by association and therefore potential damage to their own career. Those who fail to succeed at networking and building relationships drop out of the industry faster (Abbott, 2000, p.31). Their unsuitability for being in the industry in the first place may also play a part in that, if we follow the words of Katie, Sophie, Emma and Amanda. Those looking for fast money and who are not interested in a long-term career do not appear to be granted social capital and are excluded from the ranks of professionals by colleagues and agents.

This infra trade stigma against those who do not act professionally is part of the identity work of self-preservation against the stickiness of stigma applied to those newcomers. Thus infra trade stigma also functions as a panopticon of sorts, with the insider circles monitoring who is a 'good' performer and who is a 'bad' performer. Those who transgress are punished with exclusion from achieving long term careers. As Amanda argues, everyone in the industry knows everything that goes on, so there are no secrets. The panopticon-esque quality of this infra trade stigma also appears to function as one form of identity work, through internal community policing, in order to navigate external stigma. Evans-DeCicco and Cowan's 2001 study shows that those who have an existing negative view of pornography in general are also more likely to believe that performers are dysfunctional, use drugs, and dislike their work. It is thus understandable that performers engage in identity work to protect themselves against these negative stereotypes, and foster resentment and distrust at those who contribute to this stereotype that can have real life impacts for them.

Abbott writes in the introduction to her study on motivations for choosing a career in pornography that previous studies have solely focused on experiences of exploitation, instead

of looking at nuances of choosing pornography as a career. She claims this approach limits 'a broader sociological understanding of the medium' (2000, p.18). We can see in these responses that these performers appear to view their work as a career choice and express disdain for those who tarnish that image and contribute to the stigmatisation of their work. Abbott notes that being seen as professional was also a feature of her respondents' replies, stating '(b)eing labeled a ''flake'' is detrimental to a career' and performers were expected to be professional in regards to timekeeping, having the correct documentation, and engaging in networking (2000, p.24).

### 5.5.3. Concern

Amanda believes that as she entered the industry at an older age, like Katie, she had more life experience and confidence under her belt and was more equipped to defend herself against people trying to take advantage:

> And the thing is that when you're new in the business, there are some people who will take advantage: They're trying to throw in some more scenes, they're trying to have sex with you off camera, before the cameras are even rolling. They'll try to pull whatever they can, you just have to be smart and know that…(..) Sometimes the porn stars, sometimes the place where you're going to do the job, they take advantage of the new girl. But when I first entered the industry, I was 36 years old, so I wasn't dumb. I was just like 'wait a second! Am I working with you today – or this guy? If I'm working with you I need to be paid more.

Amanda emphasises life experience and maturity as tools in self-protection against those who will seek to exploit newcomers, but again outlines that there are people in the industry who are not cut out for the work at all:

> So, for me, I would just like to see people not assume that, just because somebody does this for work, that it's okay to take advantage of girls, because some of these girls who come into the industry, they shouldn't be here. And any reputable talent agency or producer will know that.

Holly also observes that young girls are vulnerable to nefarious agents and agencies:

> I hate to say it, but the new, young girls are definitely preyed upon and there is an element of predatory behaviour towards a naïve, younger type. I'm lucky because I got past that with the right people. But I've heard stories. Mostly it's professional, mostly it's legit, mostly it's positive, but yes, it does exist. It does.

This lends more support to Abbotts' findings that a social network helps enhance a career and introduce newcomers to professional agents. However, Abbott argues that performers have to know that mobility is possible, and that rogue agents can be avoided. This information is connected with finding a support network, something that may not be accessible to all new performers.

Emma expresses empathy and concern for young newcomers and notes that they are vulnerable to coercion, especially to acts they did not initially agree to do:

> But I, again, I try to imagine the poor 18-year-old girl. The thing is that there isn't as much porn being made, so the agencies…they only make, like, 10% per girl, so they're trying to make it up elsewhere. And the thing is that a lot of the girls are also trying to make it up somewhere else. Again, it's one of these things; if everybody was fine, cool, go for it. But if the girl feels pressured or coerced, or told she was going to make $10,000 and then she comes out and she does a shoot for $1,000, but then they are like 'Well, we have all this private work…' That's…that's…I don't want to say it's exploitative, but it's not true of their advertising.

Emma notes that while she recognises people can be targeted, she also feels, like Katie, that people can enter the industry with existing issues and think that they can utilise the industry for fast money.

> Now, it doesn't mean that someone can't come in and have…be there for, like, what those of us who like our jobs, would say they are the wrong reasons like 'I need money today, right now, and I don't care what it takes to get it.' That, to me,

is the wrong reason to be in it. I'm empathetic towards…that's a shitty place to be in. As a person, I empathise with them, but the industry didn't do that to them. They came in with that in mind and if you…it really frustrates me sometimes, because I feel like I do a lot of work to get the models comfortable, to get consent.

Emma's comment here is a reminder of Katie's comment about stigma of the industry lowering the barriers to entry, and how it can be perceived as easy work for easy money. This may attract people with pre-existing issues or a lack of maturity to comprehend the realities of the industry, and the means to protect themselves and access support networks. Emma describes the people she perceives as vulnerable:

Usually girls who are coming from really fucked-up backgrounds, and it's like really hard to watch that. And, sometimes, the girls will come through these guys and they will actually be decent. And if they're decent, they'll be like 'oh this guy is fucked up' and after a few shoots they'll move on to somewhere better.

Emma notes that it is personal experience (often related to age) that can make the difference in succeeding in the industry, and highlights personal awareness and boundary setting as healthy tools to have in order to navigate the industry and avoid unscrupulous agencies.

As a[n American] culture, we don't teach people to be resilient and to own their own shit. So, like, it can lead to problems and I think that's…it can be problematic, but I think the vast majority that care about it, and that care about it, are in the industry for what we would call the right reasons, we don't want people like that in it. We don't like working with people like that. So, it's one of those things that, for me, like, I try to bet out who I'm working with. And if I'm gonna pay someone, and I'm gonna be having sex with you, I want you to be into the sex.

Miller-Young also reports the participants in her study being concerned about young black women entering the industry. Those participants argued that a lack of sex education and equal access to resources meant that they were only beginning to explore their sexuality when they entered the industry, which could leave them exposed

to possibilities of exploitation. Miller-Young reports that some of her participants wanted the age of entry to the industry raised to 21 (2014, p.199). This is echoed by performer Bree Olsen when she discusses her thoughts on improving the industry.

Sophie also displays an empathic approach towards newcomers, having been on the receiving end of negativity when she entered the industry. She provides an example of people who can recognise agents who are unscrupulous and move on to better situations. She describes how when she first started, she found an agent that she later felt was 'sleazy'. She explains how they sent her to do a scene that she was not personally comfortable with:

> And it was a scene that was degrading to women. And I don't… that's not the stuff that I…I don't think that that's okay at all. So, he sent me to do that and it really messed with me and it bothered me and I ended up leaving him, and I went to another agent that didn't really have…we had a completely different mind-set when it came to business, so there was conflict there.

Sophie explained that she experienced a 'backlash' from this scene and states she was unprepared for this. She laments not having guidance when she started: 'I started out just like that, but I also had to – I also didn't have the tools given to me, I had to figure it out on my own', unlike Louise who affirms that she found supportive people quickly. Sophie feels that stigma contributes to abusive people taking advantage of people new to the industry:

> Because it's so taboo, there are all these really shady characters involved in it, and girls are really easily taken advantage of. Whereas, if it was more accepted by society, then you would probably have – it would probably be easier to regulate and you wouldn't have so many bad apples.

Stigma here contributes to the perpetuation of pornography as a 'deviant' industry, and this can make working conditions opaque and this in turn contributes to allowing abuses of power to happen and go unchecked. Performers had mixed reactions about how to address the issue, but some offered options to protecting not only newcomers as individuals, but improving the image of the industry in turn.

### 5.5.4. Protecting newcomers- Unionising

Several performers advocated for a union to support workers in the industry. Sophie stated that she felt a union was a good idea so newcomers could be protected from unscrupulous agents and directors, believing the existing APAC organisation was a good start. APAC describes itself on its website as an Adult Performer Advocacy Committee who consist of performers who endeavor to address working conditions and offer a supportive community approach. Sophie outlined how APAC promote a performers' bill of rights and engage in advocacy work on behalf of performers, but isn't a labour union in the traditional sense. Sophie highlights how a union or support network would have been beneficial to newcomers and to her when she started:

> They advocate for our rights; they make sure that new girls have a performer bill of rights. And that is that everything you need to know coming into it. And I wish that I would have known that when I got in. But the problem with this industry is that so many of these young girls have this lack of knowledge. Just educating people – that's the only way to abolish ignorance – is through education.

Sophie's comment here reiterates the need for community that informs the performer about mobility and support options available, as discussed above. Emma believes a union would be hard to manage given the transitory nature of the work, but Holly believes the power should be with the workers.

> I feel like, the reason why a union has not happened yet, is because it's a male-dominated industry. Although the performers are the foundation; the performers are the power, we have failed to access and use that power. We have just let businesses as usual happen. We've let the men and the conglomerates, I call them the Walmart of Porn take over. And everyone's complacent. We have a level of complacency where we just let things happen. I think it's time, I think it's time for a revolution. It's time for the performers to step up and say 'd'you know what? We deserve better.

Katie primarily expresses a lot of frustration towards newcomers, stating that:

> They are the ones who wash out in three, six months, and have sob stories about how terrible the porn industry is. Because, number one, nobody warned them. And, number two, they really didn't have what it took to begin with.

However, Katie advocated for a union also, believing that it could help address the issues of professionalism and vulnerable young newcomers described above.

> I would be really in favour of putting these girls through a three-month trial and then grand-fathering them into some union, so we know they're…where they have worked, and you have two or three producers vouch for them, because you have a lot of unreliable girls in the industry.

This comment does not appear to be coming from a place of concern for the newcomer, but more as a concern for the industry and professionalism, given that Katie uses the word 'unreliable' rather than 'vulnerable', as some of the other performers choose to use. Katies' comment here can be linked to Abbott's statement that 'sticking around' and 'taking it seriously' are 'observable qualities, and are often translated into ''having what it takes'' '(2000, p.32).

It is interesting to note that when looking at relationships between performers, we can see that colleagues are grouped into a binary of a 'good' or 'bad' performer, and through the expression

of frustration and concern, newcomers are also divided into betrayers or victims. This is a binary also seen within the wider discourse on pornography, with those who work in pornography seen as betrayers of 'good' women', or positioned as 'victims'. In the same way that ex-performers can lessen their stigmatization by confessing to victim status, newcomers can address their betrayer status by adopting a professional approach and staying in the industry and build up social capital.  Like the industry itself, stigma is not monolithic and operates in a multidirectional capacity and can mirror external stigma as the performers engage in identity work in their management of external stigmatisation.

## 5.5.6. Drugs

Many participants stated they did not condone drug taking within the industry. However, this did not appear to stem from any moral objection, but rather from a concern over professionalism and negative stereotypes. Holly admits that there can be drug users in the industry, and part of that is because pornography can provide a relatively high income, stating 'I feel like porn also provides funding for the bad decision-making factory that some people are.' Amanda also stated that drug use can be common in the industry, and appeared to be eager to draw a line of division between her and her colleagues:

> The thing is that I would call myself 'the un-porn porn star'. The regular porn stars, they have the fake boobs; they're drunk a lot, or they're high a lot; or they're not very responsible half the time. They are usually kind of all over the place, or they are kind of a loose cannon. But I like to consider myself the most normal person in the adult industry

Amanda can be seen to engage in the stigma management technique of categorization that Toyoki and Brown (2013) outline, as the individual places themselves in a different category to other performers, emphasising her normalcy as opposed to characteristics she finds 'deviant' such as drug taking. Within this statement Amanda is rejecting the belief that being a performer

is synonymous with substance taking or other 'deviant' behaviour, rejecting the homogenization of stigma. This is a form of identity work called 'legitimacy affirming' (Toyoki and Brown, 2013, p.876), and here Amanda is affirming her own legitimacy while recognising the industry and her colleagues contribute to negative stereotypes. However, through her own legitimacy affirming, she is also asserting the illegitimacy of her drug taking colleagues and continues their stigmatisation.

Katie spoke the most on her feelings about colleagues who used drugs. She argues that while it exists, it is not looked upon favourably and directors who won't hire that person again as they want professional behaviour. Katie argues that this rejection will often cause the person to leave the industry, and then blame the industry for their issues:

> People might tolerate it once or twice. Especially the companies that hire in the younger performers. They'll tolerate it once or twice because they want to shoot her. But after that…they won't do it. And that's the problem, and then they're upset, and then they end up in documentaries like '*Hot Girls Wanted*'.

Katie does not appear to have any empathy or consideration of the possibility of negative experiences that these girls might go through. She dismisses their sharing of their stories as invalid due to their own choice to take drugs. Katie blames stigma for this experience, and argues that stigma contributes to the industry being seen as unprofessional and an 'easy job' with a lack of accountability:

> The perception of the industry is this low barrier to entry, so it brings in these girls who are not educated, who don't know how to behave appropriately, who have drug problems, and that wouldn't happen if people's perception of the industry was higher, ironically.

While Katie is educated to degree level, her colleagues who did not have degrees like Sophie and Holly take a more empathic approach to newer entrants, which is in stark contrast to Katie's

angry tone that was present in the interview. Katie argues that the issue is younger women joining the industry who don't have extensive life skills, and are therefore vulnerable to people who can take advantage, and make the choice to take drugs, or to continue, if they had been doing so before. She appears to adopt a neoliberalism viewpoint, blaming the individual for their experiences rather than looking at industry practices or coping mechanisms performers may adopt. Instead, Katie blames stigma for these girls' negative experiences, stating:

> The stigma has created this idea that it's just, like, this vice industry and we're all rolling in dough…and these girls get in, and if you have a drug habit – if you have a $300 a day drug habit – you burn through your money really quickly.

Katie argues that this is not the industry's fault, and points to other entertainment industries such as the music industry that operates the same: attracting young people who also often develop drug habits and end up leaving it due to rejections and negative experiences.

Indeed, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) found similar experiences across the recording, magazine, and television industries. Their study highlighted workers' experiences of feelings of anxiety and victimisation. Thus, it is important to not solely associate drug use and exploitation with the pornography industry. Therefore, rather than adopting a simplistic approach to the issue of drug use, we must place the industry in context with other industries, and the behavioural habits of young people under a capitalist system that can exploit workers in a multitude of ways. This contextual approach works to avoid objectification through rejecting this simplistic, homogeneous approach, and works to avoid depersonalisation and fungibility. This is also true for other industries such as academia, whose workers have reported substance abuse and exploitation. While being a profession that is afforded more respectability than working in pornography, female academics have also reported being harassed, exploited and working more hours than contracted for (Bagilhole and Woodward, 1995; Fernando and

Prasad, 2018; Granleese and Sayer, 2006). This calls for a more nuanced look at labour conditions as a whole, instead of a focus on the conditions in pornography divorced from the context of general employment under capitalism.

### 5.5.7. Agencies

Several participants singled out agencies as those engaged in exploiting young newcomers, and argued that this contributes to negative stereotypes and stigma. All were clear in drawing boundaries between those agents and ones that were professional and had a good reputation. Sophie reports having a much better experience working in pornography now that she found an agency that she feels is professional:

> But now, I'm with this agent that – this agency – there's two agents, and they hand-pick their girls. So they are very particular and they are very professional. They have high standards and they expect you to meet their expectations. They have high expectations for you and if you don't follow them, then they don't represent you. Because this is a business and that's what people don't understand is that if you don't work this like a business, then you will never…it's not lucrative and you make no money.

This is very different to her earlier reports of feeling disrespected and sent to do scenes she was uncomfortable with, and again links professionalism with a long career. Sophie appears to view those who are not succeeding as not meeting those high expectations, placing the blame on the person themselves rather than looking at structural barriers across the industry. Given how negative she felt her first experience was, this position of blaming the person is a contrast to the earlier displays of empathy as she related to newcomers. If someone is traumatised by their initial experiences, it may be difficult for them to want to stay in the industry, let alone find support networks, but Sophie does not appear to take that into account when

considering business strategies for newcomers. This points to a feeling of individualisation rather than community.

Emma adopted a practical approach: 'People who want to do bad stuff are always going to do bad stuff' but also detailed their practices:

> And some agencies will send you out on a shoot, and tell you it's like a boy/girl, and then they show up and no! It's a threesome, or it's a gangbang. Or they tell the girls 'come out here, you'll make $10,000, and then the girls get here, and they kind of pimp them out. There are some agencies that do that.

Amanda again highlighted life experience as a protective factor against exploitation, and emphasizes personal responsibility again, like Katie:

> It's usually the girls that are naïve that they have a tendency to take advantage of. Like I said, I went into the industry when I was older and I was like 'you can't pull that shit with me'. Don't even try it. Be smart, be wise, don't come off as a dumbass. If you come off as a dumbass, people will just feel your weakness and prey on it. If you come off as a strong person, people will leave you alone.

This distinction between the participants in this research and those they perceive as weak or easy to exploit is a further example of identity work, with the performers here again in 'continuous cognitive engineering' (Toyoki and Brown, 2013, p.877) where they engage in strategies to preserve their identities as professional, strong and different to the stereotypes. Toyoki and Brown argue that this kind of work is an effort 'to inoculate their selves from "contamination"' amongst stigmatised populations (ibid). The performers are fighting against stigma sticking to them and delegitimising the work they engage in. However, in this process they adopt an individualised approach rather than addressing structural issues across the industry that may allow for the exploitation of newcomers. Self-preservation seems to come at the cost of challenging industry practices that may harm colleagues.

### 5.5.8. Issues of race

Despite participants in these interviews being a mix of ethnicities, race was not mentioned in these interviews. However, this dimension must be considered part of a nuanced understanding of entry, exit and stigma within the industry. Mireille Miller-Young interviewed black American performers who state that their primary motivation for entering the industry was money, not necessarily fame. Miller-Young reported that most participants viewed it as a short term way to gain money in order to realise other dreams such as going to college. One performer informed Miller-Young that women enter the industry for 'Money, sex, and fame, all in that order' (2014, p.186), and Miller-Young outlines how black women often experience low rates of mainstream employment so view the industry as a way to support family and pursue education. Miller-Young argues that this suits companies since the industry status quo is not challenged as these performers want to make money and leave, rather than viewing pornography as a long-term career option and thus invest in efforts to change industry practices.

Black performers are often seen as Other and Miller Young argues that black women in pornography have less erotica and social capital, and therefore have to work harder to maintain a successful career, as they are being paid less than white women. Thus black performers often find the industry to not be as lucrative as they thought. Miller-Young explains this succinctly:

> (b)ecause white women are only able to achieve their feminine desirability through the contrast to and supremacy over racial minority women, black women erotic capital is necessarily reduced by comparison. It also means that erotic capital is shaped by markers of racialized beauty and desirability within porn aesthetics (2014, p.193).

Black performers are also subject to racist terminology that their white colleagues do not experience, which can influence their decision to leave; a brief scroll through categorizations on Pornhub brings up terms such as 'ebony' and 'interracial', framing any non-white performers as other. Future research must thus include race as an intersection of performer experiences as it cannot be separated from these experiences.

## 5.8. Societal stigma

Performers may also face stigma within mainstream society. This can manifest itself in many guises, from being fired from jobs due to their involvement in the industry, to stigma at schools when parenting, to issues with sexual assault cases. However, as we have seen previously, resistance to stigma is also viable in these cases, and this section will discuss the presence of societal stigma and how performers navigate this.

### 5.8.1. Consequences

Bree Olsen is a performer who also had a high-profile relationship with Hollywood actor Charlie Sheen in 2011 before he disclosed he was HIV positive. Olsen announced she was leaving the industry shortly after and in 2015 wrote a letter on Twitter urging young women not to enter the industry- not because she was anti-pornography, but that society stigmatised her for doing pornography. In an interview, Olsen stated: "When I go out, I feel as if I'm wearing 'slut' across my forehead," and often did not leave the house as she was anxious about verbal abuse (Kramer Bussel, 2016). Reflecting on societal stigma, Olsen also complained that 'When you do porn you automatically become a segregated part of society that is held to prejudice without the support of activists for your human rights' (Vagianos, 2015). Making the argument that pornography 'isn't bad- how people will treat you for the rest of your life is', Olsen lays the

blame for her pain at the feet of societal stigma (Kutner, 2015). Olsen was resolute in her articulation of this, making a tearful video explaining how hard it was to find alternative employment due to stigma.

In another interview Olsen details an example of societal stigma she has experienced when discussing her struggles bringing a stalker to court. Despite possessing extensive documentation, Olsen stated she felt the judge implied that her career was to blame for her being subject to harassment, with Olsen summarising the judges' statements as: '[y]oung lady, you should've thought about your career, you brought this upon yourself' (Vrangalova, 2015). Olsen reports having to buy a gun because she felt 'the law wouldn't protect me' (*ibid*).This somewhat mirrors the way Katie lays the blame for bad experiences on performers themselves, rather than addressing systemic violence or considering ways to protect performers.

While critical of parts of the industry, Olsen did not adopt a stance of castigation of the industry as a monolith entity. She states that:

> The thing about me is I don't have a sob story. I wasn't treated badly in the industry. I do have quarrels about them not unionizing and taking advantage of women financially, but as far as I was treated on set, it was fine (Vrangalova, 2015).

She also makes the case that eighteen year olds may not have enough life experience or knowledge about unions when entering the industry, and would prefer to see the age of entry be raised. Her response was well received by other industry veterans such as Jessica Drake who thanked Olsen on Twitter for not contributing to universalistic stereotypes.

Olsen's response is unusual as she does not claim victim status from her involvement in pornography, but specifically from societal stigma. However, anti-pornography campaigners such as ex-performer Monica Foster (a.k.a. Alexandra Mayers) staunchly condemned Olsen for her approach. Foster, who had left the industry and self-identified as a victim, also worked as a religious activist against pornography. She created a Youtube video postulating that Olsen was wrong about the source of stigma and her pain. Foster's video opens with the text 'Pornstar Bree Olsen tells young women NOT to enter porn and blames society for her current situation rather than the industry that sold her to Charlie Sheen' (Mayers, 2016) This framing denies any power Olsen had in choosing her relationships and continues to objectify Olsen by removing her agency, dismissing her experiences, and positions her as a victim of the industry despite Olsens' rejection of this label.

Additionally, in this video Foster makes the claim that 'Bree Olsen specifically blames society for her problems (such as lack of work, harassment, stalking and bullying) rather than the truth of how for many years, certain people in the porn industry such as (agent) Mike South have highly criticized and even bullied her' (2016). Foster also argues that Olsen is a victim of sex trafficking because of her work and her relationship with Charlie Sheen. Fosters' use of the word 'truth' here is interesting. This exchange appears to be a battle for the truth, where Olsens' agency is dismissed and her confession treated as untrue, because it is not the *right* sort of confession. If Olsen had condemned the industry as a whole, would she have been awarded the status of a speaker of truth? Fosters' argument is an example of how a simplistic 'pornography is bad' approach misses nuance and shuts down an in-depth discussion that looks at violence and stigma from many sources, such as societal stigma. This approach props up a singular truth rather than allowing for a multiplicity of truths and experiences. Olsen is unrepentant of her time in the industry and thus her criticisms of it and of society are dismissed

as not consisting of the 'truth'. It appears Olsens' stigma is still sticky and thus her testimony is deemed untrustworthy by those who claim to know the 'truth'.

We also see another example of societal stigma in the case of Christy Mack. Mack was an LA based performer who was severely assaulted in 2014 by an ex-partner named War Machine who had also been a performer. After being left with horrific injuries, Mack then had to hear her perpetrators' representative argue in court that because of her work in pornography, the attempted sexual assault on her should be dismissed. His lawyers argued that:

> [Mack had the] desire, the preference, the acceptability towards a particular form of sex activities that were outside of the norm." (...) The jury needs to know the nature of this relationship, and what was customary and consensual (Tyeson, 2015).

The trope of 'sex workers can't be raped' is an insidious one, leading to legal and social implications and furthered by feminist claims that sex workers cannot consent to work in the industry (Murphy, 2016). Mack faced a barrage of abuse from the public as well as having to deal with his defense making these claims:

> Since the day I was able to see the screen on my tablet, I was met with messages and emails detailing what he should have done to me. I was told he should have finished the job and killed me. I was told I was nothing but a whore, and I got what I deserved. It was even implied by the defense team that it wasn't that bad, and I was just doing it for attention. The tweets came in droves of how he should beat and rape me since he hadn't completed his task (Marrocco, 2017).

One respondent, Sophie, addressed this in her interview:

> And they say 'you can't rape a porn star,' is what their defence is. But what a lot of people don't realise is that the way that consent works with us is that there's paperwork, and you do an interview on camera, you say 'nobody's forcing me to be here' they ask you, you have to say 'No, I am not under the influence of any alcohol – drugs or alcohol'. 'No, I'm not being coerced'. So you know what you're

doing when you go into it. Especially in Los Angeles, companies take pride in being professional. (..) So, for me, I would just like to see people not assume that, just because somebody does this for work, that it's okay to take advantage of girls, because some of these girls who come into the industry, they shouldn't be here. And any reputable talent agency or producer will know that.

While the system of pre and post scene interviews on camera is not foolproof, creating space for a nuanced conversation on consent means that these discussions can be heard, and this space allows for people like Mack to refuse to be objectified through dismissal.

While the judge in Mack's case ultimately rejected the defenses' argument, not all current or ex-performers receive the same treatment and benefit from the support of the law. Women's engagement in pornography can have lasting impacts, as seen with Stacie Halas. During a financially difficult time, Halas had a nine-month pornography career with eleven scenes in total, but was fired from her post pornography job as a teacher (CBS, 2013). The management board of the school claimed that her students found her content and downloaded it, called her by her performer name, and wrote 'profanities' in her classroom. Yet no mention is made of disciplining the students- it is Halas who is to pay the price.

When Halas challenged her dismissal, judges ruled against her and stated the ongoing availability of her pornographic materials on the Internet will 'continue to impede (Halas) from being an effective teacher and respected colleague' (*ibid*). This statement firmly places her outside the realm of respectability because of her brief pornography career, and reinforces the binary of 'good/bad' women. None of the blame is laid on students who are accessing adult material while underage and who refuse to show respect to her. District superintendent Jeff Chancer excluded that Halas could be a role model, and argued that her remaining as a teacher 'would present an insurmountable, recurring disruption to our schools should she be allowed to remain as a teacher' (ibid). The judge in the case stated that the existence of this material

meant that Halas could not be an 'effective teacher and respected colleague' (*ibid*). This implies that pornography and respect/competence are mutually exclusive, with no time limit regarding when the past is discarded and one can become respectable again.

Other ex-performers, such as Lisa Ann and Sunny Leone, have experienced mainstream success in the entertainment industry after working in pornography, but are still not immune to stigma or calls for them to lose their jobs. Saul describes how performers like Leone experienced 'major institutional and cultural backlash', with Leone in particular being accused of promoting obscenity and destroying Indian culture during her post-pornography work as a Bollywood star (Saul, 2016). Involvement in pornography is seen as disqualifying any other talents a person may have and the skills learnt dismissed as non-transferred. Given the many skills a performer must have - such as self-branding, social media management, public engagement, relationship building with colleagues and more - it seems that sex industry involvement sabotages the transfer of these skills to mainstream employment.

This discussion is obviously incomplete as ex-performers are heavily missing from the discourse, thus most discourses on their experiences of post industry stigma is mere speculation without supporting data. This situation is a state that Teo argues can lead to epistemological violence, thus it is important to include performer voices in these conversations.

## 5.9. Resistance to Stigma

A discussion on stigma is not complete without examining resistance to stigma. While the theory section outlined some steps to resistance, such as those identified by Carol Queen, this section examines how some performers challenge mainstream stigma in a variety of ways.

Stigma, like power, is not solely a suffocating force but contains within it the potential for resistance, empowerment, and transformation. Toyoki and Brown argue that the micro-processes of stigma allow for 'stigmatized identities [to] be embraced, rejected, appropriated, modified and adapted by reflexive, responsible people concerned' and thus can contain power if a nuanced reading is applied (2014, p.713).

Furthermore, Toyoki and Brown claim that stigma is not always passively accepted, and the stigmatised person can reject systematic and disciplinary power. In doing so, the stigmatised person ''monitored, told and retold the 'truth' about themselves, assuaging the pain associated with stigma by negotiating, transforming and reproducing identities that were a part of, rather than separate from, the moral community of society in general'', which allowed for the creation of new possibilities (2014, p.714). Thus, it is incorrect to assume stigmatised identities are solely passively accepted, as this denies this power. Nor is stigma static or experienced in a universal manner. Butler agrees, arguing that 'the injurious address may appear to fix or paralyse the one it hails, but it may also produce an unexpected and enabling response' (1997, p.2). Stigmatisation may result in individual or collective resistance, and create affirming spaces for people to fight back.

Creating one such space, performer Jiz Lee collected stories of performers disclosing their involvement in pornography for their book 'Coming out like a Porn Star'. Many of those stories touched on stigma, with the loss of employment and relationships featuring in some testimonies. One performer who contributed to Lee's book is Jack HammerXL, who spoke of being fired after his involvement in pornography was discovered. This firing occurred after eighteen years serving as a sheriff's correctional officer, 18 months away from retirement. HammerXL notes 'You can kill someone and not get fired' (2015, p.189), and spoke of how his

firing led to the loss of a seven figure pension. Sex trumps murder as more heinous in his example, and public sex was enough of a transgression for him to be punished financially.

One performer named Nikki Silver documented how coming out about working in pornography is a constant navigation: 'coming out was and is part of figuring out how my relationships are to unfold: How much do I care about you knowing who I really am? How much patience do I have for possibly annoying or offensive questions? And how will revealing this information serve me? (2015, p.257). Silver states that sometimes this can leave her exhausted and vulnerable due to 'policing my boundaries' (2015, p.258). This is a form of labour to be considered when analysing working conditions. Different to physical labour, this is emotional labour that can result in physical and mental impacts, that some performers like Silver seem to identify as harder to navigate than labour such as physically having sex on screen. This could also be applied to the process through which performers have to go when participating in academic research when they assess the researcher's reciprocity and the risk of sharing information.

Lee's book also functions as a rupture of dominant pornography episteme- it is a rare work in pornography discourse as it is a collection of testimonies exclusively from performers, in their own words and thus with no retelling of their stories through another person- the performer firmly occupies the position of expert. Therefore, it not only addresses stigma but discusses and functions as a resistance to stigma. This resistance includes a rejection of the exclusion of performers from expert status, and rejects objectification through outsider discourses.

### 5.9.1. Belle Knox

One example of resistance to stigma can be seen in the case of Belle Knox. Knox is a former performer who was also a Duke University student whose pornography work became public knowledge when shared by classmates. Anti-pornography religious group the Pink Cross Foundation used Knox's case to encourage her to leave the industry, writing tweets such as 'Ex-porn stars want help to write a letter to #BelleKnox before she ends up dead'', and using her legal name as a Twitter hashtag (The Real Porn Wikileaks, 2014).

The group published an open letter to Knox, claiming to write from a place of concern. They outlined how they believed Knox's smile was 'false' and stated that she wasn't 'fooling' anyone. The authors pointed out alleged self-harm scars on Knox's body, and even diagnosed her with PTSD despite not being medical professionals. Knox fired back against this letter and wider societal shaming with an article on xojane.com where she detailed the extent of public shaming she received, to the point of threats against her. Knox wrote: '[y]ou want to see me naked, (...) and then you want to judge me for letting you see me naked' (Gruttadaro, 2014). She framed her participation in the industry as a feminist act and spoke about having control over her body. Performer Kelsey Obsession also noted this hypocrisy, stating: 'many of them point in judgment at the sex industry with the right hand yet in private they masturbate with the left' (email interview with West, 2016). Similar to Queen, these answers reframe the focus onto those perpetuating stigma rather than onto the recipient, and can be seen as identity work consisting of reclaiming an identity for themselves.

### 5.9.2. Jessica Drake

Veteran performer Jessica Drake has also made a stand against stigma, and refuses to allow stigma to prohibit her from doing work outside of pornography. She states:

> We are doing ourselves a tremendous disservice when we are shaming ourselves and when we think that we don't have a place in other areas because of the stigma. I got to a point where I stopped being apologetic for my job. I don't apologise for what I do for a living. I'm not going to let the fact that I have sex on camera inhibit my drive to do other things in other places. I just won't do it (Saul, 2016).

Drakes' identity work consists of a rejection of the internalisation of societal stigma and to feel a sense of shame that would hold her back from other opportunities. Drake refuses to exchange power for stigmatisation and her unapologetic stance does not to accept pornography as a career to be ashamed of.

Long-time prostitution activist Scarlet Harlot a.k.a. Carol Leigh also adopts this approach, describing her identity as the 'Unrepentant Whore', and states: 'we are potentially powerful, but the laws and morality of our civilization curb that power by punishing those who wield it' (2004, p.202). We can see through the examples given that performers speaking out against societal stigma are rejecting this punishment, and un-sticking their stigma. While some performers, such as Amanda are at pains to emphasise their difference to those in the industry, Drake embraces it and does not engage in stratification of herself or the projection of a counter-identity. While Amanda terms herself the 'un-pornstar', Drake appears to be more comfortable with this labelling and refuses to ratify societal stigma. Amanda appears to adopt an individualistic approach while Drakes is more community focused.

### 5.9.3. Stormy Daniels

Of course, the most well-known performer and resistor to stigma at this time is Stormy Daniels. A veteran of the industry, Daniels became infamous after speaking up about having sex with Donald Trump before he became president of the United States. Daniels became a media darling, telling her story in newspapers, talk shows, radio and more, both nationally and internationally. While being lauded by those of the left of politics due to their opposition of

Trump, Daniels faced enormous backlash and attacks on her credibility because she was in the pornography industry. Daniels was subject to abuse online as she was called a liar, whore and many more derogatory names. However, she adopted a fiercely unapologetic attitude and rejected the stigma and shaming efforts of people on social media, writing sarcastic comebacks to people attempting to shame her:

> They'll be like, "Whore." And I'm like, "Yes?" I mean, I guess I feel the most powerful when someone tries to take my power or belittle me or insult me and it doesn't work. I've sort of taken all their power away from *them*  (Stewart, 2018).

In addition to rejecting stigmatisation, Daniels also rejected efforts to position her as a victim. She rejects the victim narrative in relation to her experiences with Trump: 'in the beginning, when people tried to attach the #MeToo movement to me, I was like, "Abso-fucking-lutely not."' (Nuzzi, 2018). Daniels does not pursue a victim status, and has long claimed to enjoy her job, working up from performer to director, stating:

> I'm smart enough that I could go to college and do whatever I want, but there isn't anything in the world I'd rather be doing this. I've found where I belong; I've found my calling. I knew that this is what I wanted to do and I went after it. Im very ambitious and driven. In fact, I'd use the word calculating. People think its a bad word, but I've remained very much in control of what I do, who I do it with, and how I do it, and I haven't let other people take control (2005, p.146).

Daniels appears to present as the physical embodiment of the 'unspeakable thing that will fritter across the lines' that Rubin discusses, and her intellect, stance and strength challenges societal assumptions about women who dance in the outer limits. Unashamed and unabashed at claiming visibility, Daniels is a challenge to the inner circle of respectability, no longer faceless and nameless- or a willing and passive repository for shame. Daniels' visibility and persistence is a subjective step in resisting stratified objection.

### 5.9.4. Counter-Communities

Australian performer Gala Vanting also takes a different approach to stigma and personal stratification. She posits that she follows the concept of coming in rather than coming out; a position she recognises is not available to all engaged in sex work. She focuses on building a sense of community and does not concern herself with 'stigmatic questions' about her occupation (2015, p.168). Vanting argues she has adopted this position after becoming tired of fielding off stereotypes and assumptions, and states 'I put the onus on them: your stigma, your labour' (*ibid*). Vanting frames this as an experiment in exploring personal identity-

> The experiment of refusing to frame my multi-whore identity as peripheral- to insist on its centrality and normality- can be hard to wrap one's head around (2015, p.169).

Through reframing the issue as 'what if I concerned myself more with coming in to me than on how best to come out to you?' (2015, p.169). Vanting reclaims a focus on subjectivity, protecting her personal boundaries and energy similar to Nikki Silver, and thus she rejects societal objectification and the labour demand required to challenge this.

Vanting here promotes the idea of what Berger and Luckmann (1966) theorise as a 'counter community' as resistance, one that is welcoming to people in her occupation, and one that rejects stigmatisation and a need to be part of or receive acceptance from mainstream society. Instead of focusing energy on fighting for an equal 'subject-subject' positioning with society, Vanting creates a new paradigm of 'us for us' and redirects power and control to herself and her chosen community. Silver would appear to agree and follow this focus:

I'm very happy to be socially excluded from a society that breaks individuals down so thoroughly they have to come seek out "criminals" to help them heal their emotional wounds (2015, p.259).

This is another example of refocusing the analysis of stigma on its perpetrators, a rejection of societal norms and demands regarding what she does with her body. Silver writes about the purpose of her work as letting others live vicariously through her, and states: 'I am a respite, and I am so glad to be' (*ibid*). Both Vanting and Silver here create and participate in discursive regimes that allow for their resistance to stigma and to societal norms. They can be said to be engaged in creating 'self-affirming spaces' where they socialise with people who support them and have similar experiences, thus they are using this stigma management tool to maintain positive self-esteem (Toyki and Brown, 2014, p.718).

Hooks may suggest that the 'margin' of society is not necessarily a bad place to be, as choosing the margin may facilitate 'radical openness', and thus the politics of location is also another nuance of power, resistance, and rejection of homogeneity and the need for acceptance on the terms proffered by mainstream society (1989, p.15). Vanting and Silver appear to transform this margin into the centre for them, and in doing so they allow new communities and discourse to grow.

Berger and Luckmann argue that predetermined stigmatised positions in society (such as those that we can see with sex workers) can be maintained once those people remain in small groups, but once a community can be large enough to be established, this can create a 'counter-reality' where the narrative can be changed to a positive one. This counter-community, also termed as a 'plausibility structure for counter-definitions of reality' (1966, p.186), can support members, create new knowledge and new systems of communication. With respect to sex work, the use of social media and establishment of sex worker support and advocacy

groups has offered a counter-reality to anti-sex work theories, and challenged the dominant episteme about the realities of their work.

When performers like Nikki Silver challenge their stigmatisation and position themselves as a respite instead of a negative descriptor, they contribute to what Berger and Luckmann term a 'rupture':

> As the individual accords a privileged status with his consciousness to the colony's definitions of reality and himself, a rupture occurs between his 'visible' conduct in the larger community and his 'invisible' self-identification as someone quite different (1966, p.186).

Berger and Luckmann argue that this rupture is a cleavage 'between appearance and reality in the individual self-apprehension (*ibid*), and thus this rupture can be a tool to navigate stigma, build community, and undertake identity work. This rupture may result in an individual being able to live a life that feels more authentic to them, surrounded by supportive people instead of being stigmatised.

Vanting and Silver here also engage in resistance to becoming a speaking subject in research- preferring to be a speaking subject amongst peers. Earlier, we saw how Dotson argued that pernicious ignorance, testimonial incompetence, and inaccurate intelligibility can affect how testimony is produced and heard, and this should be considered in the choices here. Langtons' concept of illocutionary silencing may be argued to apply here, but a nuanced approach might examine where power lies in refusal to speak in mainstream discourse that has a history of othering and stigmatising. It may not be the case here that Vanting and Silver believe that protest is futile, which Langton argues is part of illocutionary silencing, but instead it could be that they feel the audience does not *deserve* to hear their words. Again, further discussion of this nuance with the performers would contribute to this knowledge strand in pornography

discourse- if, of course, they choose to contribute. The refusal to be positioned as the subaltern or the native knowledge speaker must be examined in the context of power and how discourse treats these choices.

## 5.10. Conclusion

This section documents how stigma can affect performers' personal relationships, encompassing dating and familial relationships. This stigma affected their search for dating partners that did not objectify them, or having to fend off stigma if they were married. In familial relationships it is important to examine the source of stigma, and how the family's existing religious or personal beliefs can influence their projection of stigma. The call for refocusing the direction of stigma as prescribed by Queen was echoed in many respondents' answers, as well as in performers such as Daniels and Drake.

In relation to infra trade stigma, it is apparent that performers fell into the twofold categories of feeling frustration or empathy towards newcomers, particularly younger newcomers. Performers were keen to distance themselves from those who viewed it as easy work, were unprofessional, took drugs to the point where it affects their performance, and who did not have enough life experience to safety navigate their entry into the industry and avoid abusive agencies. This can also be described as 'performative positioning work' (Toyoki and Brown, 2013, p.728). Abbott notes that her participants also looked negatively at newcomers who are not seen to act professional, and stated that they are dismissed as '''fuck bunnies'', ''sluts'', or ''skags'' and are seen as lacking ambition, skills or knowledge (2000, p.32), which can be also been seen in this research. However, the performers who dismissed newcomers as unprofessional laid the blame for their negative experiences mainly on the performer themselves, and did not seem to consider systemic barriers. They preferred to note their own

efforts to navigate abusive agencies, and performers like Katie felt that those that dropped out of the industry rapidly were people who were just not cut out for the industry in the first place.

Power relations contain elements of ritual and confession according to Foucault, and the confessions of the performers who leave quickly are treated differently by career performers and by feminists. The performers here blame the performer for not having the skills to make it in the industry. This in turn leads to a dismissal of their knowledge as not 'true' knowledge by performers. However, in feminist discourse, the performers who exit quickly are viewed as having the correct knowledge as it supports the ideology that the industry is abusive. Therefore, the battle for control of knowledge in the feminist discourse on pornography is also replicated amongst the performers who stay and those who leave.  Dismissal is utilised as a tool in both feminist and performer discourse but the targets are reversed- in feminist discourse it is those who stay who are dismissed as experts, and in performer discourse it is those who leave who are dismissed as experts.

Segal argues that people want gender and stability to be stable, but in fact this isn't the case, positing that this is a 'monstrous problem'- 'the inescapable predicament of modern life is that this is precisely what is so threatening to us' (2015, p.268). She argues that gender and sexuality are so central to our identity and narrative that if 'there are no certainties there, there are no certainties anywhere' (2015, p.269). We can see how fear is an underlying factor here, and thus the demarcation between 'us' and 'them' is strictly enforced. If we can position those engaged in sex work as 'dirty', then we can occupy the opposite status of 'clean'; similar to the binary markers of 'good' and 'bad' woman.  When a target is stigmatised, this comes from the stigmatisers need to distance themselves from the fear that they might be 'one of them', and the fear that their identity created through sexuality might be challenged. Segal's choice of the word *monstrous* is interesting here; this can be linked to Rubin's theory of the fear that

something unspeakable will slither across from the outer limits if boundaries are not maintained. When those who are stigmatised resist the stigma and turn the focus back on to the stigmatiser, this does indeed open the gates to a world of uncertainty if they are forced to examine *why* they are stigmatising.

Pornography and sexuality studies would benefit from examining the source of stigma rather than persisting with a sole focus on the targets of stigma. Through this inversion, academics can ask how discourse contributes to stigma, how projection can affect objectivity and bias, and how the framing of *performer as other* can contribute to objectification. When there is an insistence on absolute truths, it comes at the expense of a nuanced conversation and contributes to stigma development and maintenance. Eschewing absolute approaches works to enhance the understanding of the relationship between stigma, agency, knowledge and power.

The person who experiences stigmatisation is not merely a passive recipient as seen with the performers who actively work to resist stigma, and thus are 'intelligent strategist(s)' (Giddens, 1994, p.7) who create realities more amenable to them and their needs. This chapter has seen the impact of stigma on relationships, and the next section will explore a different kind of relationship that may be tinged with violence- the relationships with fans, protesters and saviours.

**Chapter Six: Sex on the Set: Safety, Sex and Saviours**

Discourse on violence and pornography can be expanded through a reading of on-set working conditions, which is inclusive of violence from outsiders such as fans, protesters, and interactions with self-identified religious saviours.

**6.1. Introduction**

The issue of rough scenes has long been at the forefront of feminist claims about pornography. With Dworkin and MacKinnon defining pornography exclusively as violence against women (see Appendix One) this framing persisted alongside the development of feminist activist groups who campaigned against pornography, as outlined in chapter one. In the early 1990s, Itzin continued this discourse and claimed that practices such as BDSM could never be acceptable to feminism, deeming BDSM to be 'sexualised woman-hatred' (1992, p.16). Itzin rails against the terminology used to describe such acts, believing that usage of terms such as 'rough sex' works to 'obscure and to legitimate practices which are damaging and destructive' (*ibid*). The issue of definitions, power and bias is seen here again, and this topic is discussed in appendix one.

Similar to MacKinnon who argued that pornography impacts not only the woman on screen, but all women, Itzin argues that this kind of content functions as a 'form of sex discrimination to ''pornographise'' women in all aspects of their lives' (1992, p.19). Itzin also suggests that this kind of content forecloses the possibility of egalitarian sex between men and women. Other writers such as Kappeler believe women in pornography occupy the status of 'victim-object' (1992, p.93). She argues that, as women's bodies are perceived as signifiers for sex in society, a woman's representation in pornography results in objectification- thus men are the subject and women are the object. This begs three questions- where do women create a space to find

pleasure in sex with men, how do they achieve subject status, and are these possibilities even an option?

More recently, Dines has differentiated the sex depicted in pornography as disparate to non-pornographic sex, referring to on screen sex as 'porn sex' as:

> A kind of sex that is debased, dehumanised, formulaic, and generic, a kind of sex based not on individual fantasy, play, or imagination, but one that is the result of an industrial product created by those who get excited not by bodily contact but by market penetration and profits (2010, p.x).

This subjective definition makes the distinction again between 'good' sex and 'bad' sex, as per Rubin's charmed circle of sex. 'Porn sex' is also referred to as 'body punishing sex' (2010, p.xi), which is accompanied by hyperbolic anecdotes of 'a never-ending universe of ravaged anuses, distended vaginas, and semen-smeared faces' (2010, p.xvii). Dines goes further and claims that sites such as kink.com, a pornography production company specialising in BDSM, are in violation of the United Nations Convention Against Torture and compares its content to acts of torture reported to have occurred at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq during the US invasion (2013). However, this argument does not take consent into consideration and again firmly situates rough sex in the outer limits of acceptable sexuality.

## 6.2. Rough sex and fear

Conversely, Smith and Attwood examine how rough content is utilised by anti-pornography feminists and operates as a form of knowledge that weaponises fear (2013, p.48). They argue that evidence is not needed for this strategy as it targets emotional knowledge using fear as an agent of transmission. They explore how language is employed to appeal to this knowledge through the tactic of rhetoric: 'It is a type of speech that fits with a particular form of knowing,

one rooted in the bones and a kind of common sense that does not need theory or evidence to support it' (2013, p.55). The work of anti-pornography feminists is examined by Smith and Attwood and they posit that rhetoric is used as a tool to divide sex into 'good' healthy, loving, private sex and 'bad', public, rough 'porn sex'. Thus, this division ensures the continuation of Rubin's charmed circle theory.

This framing minimises variety in sex, while a 'proper purpose for sex is assumed' (Smith and Attwood, 2013, p.51). This examination of language shows us how Rubin's charmed circle is still relevant as this binary approach to sex and repetitive rhetoric is still utilised in contemporary pornography studies. Jane Juffer looks at how this rhetoric operates through: 'pounding, rhythmic, repetitive prose, and their exceptionally sadistic sexual imagery, to produce a type of passion seemingly all their own' (2004, p.59). Similar to Smith and Attwood, Juffer argues that anti-pornography feminists use shock as a weapon to spread their discourse and tap into emotional knowledge, desire, and fear. Juffer suggests this desire to arouse and shock is ironically what pornographers and anti-pornography feminists have in common. It could additionally be argued that power and career building are shared by these groups also, along with a desire to create narratives about women, sex and the depiction of both.

This use of shock can be seen in slideshows first used in the 1980s by anti-pornography feminists and are now revitalised by Dines, Thompson, and Whisnant (2010, pp.17-33). This format uses graphic images to demonstrate the content of pornography, often featuring performers' faces. Dines claims this strategy is 'succinct' in getting the message across for anti-pornography feminists. These slideshows show images from mainstream pornography that Dines claims represent the realities of violence in pornography.

Despite this, its proponents recognise that this format is not without problems. Addressing the issue that the slideshows further 'exploit' performers by using their images, Whisnant acknowledges a 'moral down side'. However, Whisnant states 'we ultimately decided that the slideshow needs to exist and that it cannot work without the images' (2010, p.19). This is problematic as the creators admit they do not know the names of the women and thus, have not tracked them down to ask for consent, or to pay them for the use of the images. Thus, the women featured may have no knowledge that their images are being used in this way. This may also increase safety risks such as the performer being outed to family members who may not watch pornography but may be exposed to these images if they were to attend the showing.

Additionally, this functions as an example of objectification through instrumentality as the women featured are being used as tools to further an anti-pornography agenda, and enables fungibility as the women featured are interchanged with *all* women in pornography. If we are to follow the theory of anti-pornography feminists in that women cannot truly consent to work in pornography, then it follows that they also cannot consent to their images of their work in pornography to be used in this way. This instrumentality can be seen in how Linda Lovelace's testimony was utilised by anti-pornography campaigners, and how performer Stoya's experience of disclosure of sexual assault by a fellow performer was weaponised and used to call for the industry to be shut down (Gira Grant, 2015). Thus, if anti-pornography feminists truly believe that women in pornography are victims, then using their images without their knowledge, consent or compensation to further their agenda is objectifying and risks causing trauma to the women involved.

The use of such graphic content is also designed to weaponise the fear that exists around sex; Rubin claims that this fear is omnipresent and that '[o]ur sexual system contains a vast vague pool of nameless horror' *(*2011, p.110). In the slideshows, the women in the images represent this horror. Yet, by the use of their image, the nameless women are themselves turned into the nameless horror; the literal representation of 'bad' sex and deviant/victim women, monstrously magnified and gazed at as proof of this horror. Horror is wielded as spectacle and recruitment. Here the anti-pornography feminist occupies a twofold position as both saviour and gatekeeper. They self-position as the gatekeeper between the audience and the horror on screen. They also frame themselves as the saviour of both the audience and the women they position as victims on screen. Cornell argues that anti-pornography feminists position themselves as a victim also, albeit one with power: '(..) the anti-porn feminist poses herself as the sacrificial victim, the barrier to a tide of male sexuality that threatens violence' (1995, p.95). Again, if we return to MacKinnons' theory of *Man Fucks Women. Subject. Verb. Object,* (1989, p.124) we see the same positioning- *Feminist Saves Woman. Subject. Verb. Object.* Through this framing the anti-pornography feminist is the good woman, at the expense of the agency and subjectivity of the performer.

The title used for their discussion on the slideshows by Dines, Thompson, and Whisnant (2010) is also an intriguing choice. Entitled '*Arresting Images*', this phasing operates on several levels. Firstly, it can refer to the power of a shocking image, stopping the viewer in their tracks. It also utlisies shock and horror to express anti-pornography ideology and this feeds into fear. However, *arresting* is also associated with criminality and deviance, and thus this title serves to continue the history of othering and stigmatising the featured performers as deviants. This framing cements the performer as a tool for 'corporeal signification', rather than a subjective human with agency and autonomy (McNulty, 2011, p.8). Additionally, it evokes the

objectification through the use of mugshots used by the Pink Cross Foundation, as previously discussed in Chapter Four.

## 6.3. Knowledge

The use of knowledge in relation to rough scenes and graphic content also functions as a tool for the occupation of the gatekeeper/saviour role. However, claims of holding absolute knowledge about the content of modern pornography have been challenged by many (Comella, 2015; McKee, Albury, Lumby, 2008; Strossen,1995; Weitzer, 2015).

Absolute claims also rely on fixed meanings as flexibility and plurality can challenge a universalistic approach. Juffer argues that fixed meanings are an inherent part of anti-pornography feminist theory, as men's intentions in sex and pornography are fixed, and women are always positioned as victims. Segal points to Brown who argues that this framing 'mirrors the straight male pornography it means to criticise' (2004, p.66). This inflexibility in perceiving different experiences, meanings and interpretations simply serves to perpetuate a reduction of women to objects as if their experiences were exclusively victimised. This results in no space for explorations of autonomy and opportunities for alternative meanings and responses to be included in discourse.

This framing positions the anti-pornography feminist as subject and holder of correct knowledge. It also strips women of agency and autonomy as it dismisses their ability to create their own meanings and knowledge which differ from the idealised 'fixed' meaning proposed by anti-pornography feminists. Segal argues that the effect of censorship or insisting on fixed meanings is a foreclosure of sexual possibilities and agency (2004, p.68).

While Rubin argues that the fear around sex creates 'demons and boogiemen' (2011, p.110). Segal posits that power dynamics have allowed for a projection of 'the troubling, 'dirty' aspects of sex onto women's bodies' (2004, p.68). When men and other genders are invisible in pornography discourse and images, women's bodies are the sites for these projections- their bodies function as a canvas for ideological messages. Juffer argues that the power behind this framing means that these bodies on display are seen as inferior, and thus it is possible to argue that slideshows function as 'a measure of the superiority of those who disown and distance themselves from such bodies' (ibid). The dividing line between 'good' and 'bad' women is consolidated further.

## 6.4. Victimisation and agency

Bronstein also looks at this victim framing, and argues that women in pornography were viewed as 'helpless victims of uncontrollable male lust, and the men who used these materials as predators, seething with violent intent' (2015, p.62). Bronstein believes this is the result of stereotypes that arose from the 1970s and the beginnings of feminist activism around pornography.  The aforementioned slideshows can serve to reinforce these stereotypes.

Ronald Weitzer posits that the claim that pornography and the experience of working in it is exclusively a violent, exploitative one- an 'oppression paradigm' (2015, p.257) inherent in sex work. He argues that those who take this approach 'substitute ideology for rigorous empirical analysis' (*ibid*) and that research contradicts claims made in this vein. Additionally, he criticises the lack of definitions of terms such as 'extreme' content and how violence is measured, and the lack of rigorous, scientific evidence to back up theory. Weitzer outlines how some theorists

such as Jensen and Watson disavow the importance of empirical evidence in pornography studies. This applies also to studies that examine violent content in pornography. But it is also important to consider what performers consider to be violence in their work, and how they experience it, navigate it, and utilise their agency and autonomy in these experiences. This inclusion of performer experiences is glaringly absent from discussions on violence in pornography.  In one of the few efforts to address performer experiences, Boyle dismisses the performers' agency and focuses on the toll which she perceives their work to take on their physical and mental health:

> Whatever choices performers make about entering and staying in the industry, we need to ensure that we do not conflate those choices with desire or sexual subjectivity or let such choices (where they do exist) blind us to the physical and psychological toll of industrial sex. Because that is what commercial pornography is: it is industrial sex, and it uses (up) its constituent parts in a ruthlessly efficient way (2010, pp.210-211).

This framing precludes the possibility of choice existing alongside desire and sexual subjectivity, and positions all three as mutually exclusive. Abbotts' study (2010) of motivations for entering the industry documented 'sex and exploring sexuality' as one reason for entering the industry, so this challenges Boyles' argument. Miller-Young's interviewees also reported sex as a reason for entering the industry, although this came after money as a primary motivator (2014, p.186). The choice to engage in sex is part of sexual subjectivity, even if it is sex the person would not engage in off screen. This framing also presumes a universal meaning for all three experiences and precludes any multiplicity of meaning.

Additionally, desire, choice and sexual subjectivity can exist alongside physical harm in this industry and may be navigated differently by different performers, as outlined in this section. Boyle (2010) recognises that content seen on screen that performers choose to engage in does not automatically reflect a performers own desire. However, this would be more clearly

understood if performers were consulted on what they like about their job, which acts they do or do not enjoy, and what desire and choice mean to them.

Boyle makes the astounding claim that listening to performers had a 'damaging' impact on pornography discourse. She argues that allowing performers to share their experiences, be they positive, negative or neutral, resulted in pornography discourse that 'pitted women against women, allowed personal accounts to drown out structural analysis, and let men off the hook' (2010, p.205). Boyle does not explain what letting men 'off the hook' means for her. It is disquieting to claim that listening to women is not as important as listening to theoretical discourse. This positions the performers' experience as less worthy of acceptance into existing discourse than the theories produced by feminist academics. This eradicates the subjectivity of the performer. Here, truth comes from the academic, not the performer. Rather than the performer writing their experiences, the performer is written by the academic.

The subject-object divide here can be analysed through hooks' description of how the relationship of power and knowledge plays out in this approach:

> (There is) no need to hear your voice, when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still (the) colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk (1989, p.22).

Again, this reflects the *Researcher Studies Performer. Subject. Verb. Object.* paradigm. The performer's words are filtered through a veneer of respectability through the acts of the researcher, but never achieve subjectivity as the researcher is still the expert in this dynamic.

The performer is still Other while academics are the experts. This chapter works to avoid committing epistemological violence by centering on the experiences of the performers' when they speak about their on-set interactions, and on how they perceive violence in these experiences.

Discourse around violence in pornography includes analysis of the type of acts engaged in on screen, often with a particular focus on anal sex. Long describes these acts as body punishing, and argues that women outside of the industry are unlikely to engage in them, and posits that choice is not *true* choice when it comes to participating in various acts in pornography:

> If the porn industry did not exist and did not demand the participation of thousands of women in such acts, how likely is it that each one of those thousands of women would 'freely' and autonomously choose to participate in painful, risky and body-punishing acts anyway? (2012, pp.83-4).

Long dismisses the possibility of the acts depicted in pornography consisting of any positive aspects for women, inside and outside of the industry. She argues that individual choice cannot be considered without contextualisation from the social, economic and political realities in which women exist. Similar to early anti-pornography feminists such as MacKinnon, Long argues that the 'everywoman' can be harmed by the choices of an individual woman. She reduces the possibility of women enjoying acts seen in pornography to 'hypothetical women' (2012, p.83). Long also believes the word choice is 'entirely inappropriate' when discussing reasons for entering the industry and for engaging in sexual acts (*ibid*). This erasure of choice functions as epistemological violence as it prioritises the reading of an experience in one way only, despite the possibility for other readings. It also dismisses women's agency and stories that do state that they exercised choice, and utilises symbolic power to prioritise the researcher over the

performer. The simplistic binary of empowerment/exploitation forecloses nuanced explorations of on-set experiences, and as UK performer Blath explains, this binary is not conducive:

> I just think it's not useful because I think it's just not the most important conversation to be having about sex work; we need to be having conversations about safety, about workers' rights, about payment, about diversity. I think empowerment is just way down on the list to be honest. It's great if people do find that, but other workers don't and it's not okay to say 'oh it's okay if you do this work but only if you feel this certain emotion about it'. And it seems to be that only in those types of work that people are asked this question. People don't ask other labourers if they feel empowered by their work (quoted in West, 2019, p.265).

For this reason, this section will focus on experiences on set without a strict binary lens of empowerment/exploitation in order to build a new perspective on knowledge about on-set experiences. Rubin claims 'it is 'difficult to simply discuss the politics of sadomasochism when the politics of sex in general are so depressingly muddled' (2011, p.109), and this research aims to move beyond the approach of deciding of an act is 'good/bad' or 'empowered/exploitative'. This thesis carves out new space for discussion of performers' realities and how they experience power when on set and with fans.

## 6.5. Experiences on set

Participants reported a mixture of interactions on set, ranging from positive to negative. This section will examine these responses and experiences, and will also explore safety mechanisms that performers put in place in order to safeguard their on-set safety.

### 6.5.1. Negative experiences

Amanda outlined having to navigate potentially negative experiences on set. She spoke about how when she first started shooting she had to have firm boundaries and ask the directors to stick to the agreed acts. She stated this can be common for new performers:

> They're trying to throw in some more scenes, they're trying to have sex with you off camera, before the cameras are even rolling. They'll try to pull whatever they can, you just have to be smart and know that.

Amanda opines that 'for the most part' she feels safe on set, and if she does not feel safe, she states:

> I say no. There are times that people make advances that may be unwelcome, and I go 'No thank you, I get paid for that''. It all boils down to that. I've never been in a situation, knock on wood, where I have felt unsafe.(...) As far as physical harm, a lot of it will be that you have to stand your ground and say 'That's not acceptable'.

Amanda continues to demonstrate the viewpoint she has previously held in other answers- that she is aware of the potential for negative experiences, but that it is her responsibility to protect herself and be 'smart' about how she deals with these situations. Similarly, Katie acknowledges that negative experiences happen but emphasises personal responsibility in managing these events and recognising that as the performer there is still personal power:

> Oh, totally. I've heard some girls say they feel unsafe on set. I've never…I don't experience that. I think it's a really…you know, you're getting into a really subjective perception. I don't feel unsafe in many places, to be frank. I am in control of my own environment. If I feel unsafe somewhere, I leave. I've been to a couple of nightclubs where I've been 'I don't feel safe here', and I've left. (..) But you…you always have the right, as talent, to walk off set. And, by the way, you hold the scene in your hand. If you don't do the scene, then they're out of the running, so….

As Katie is older and more experienced than some of the younger newcomers, it is important to note that she can draw on this greater amount of life experience in order to maintain boundaries and protect herself. Her answer does not mention any pressure performers may feel to complete a scene. As discussed previously, performers such as Emma and Sophie expressed concern over young girls with less life experience being able to express their boundaries firmly. It seems here the idea of a union, or community, plays a beneficial role where

performers can support each other and have a network of communication about how to manage similar situations, as women in many industries have.

Emma reports experiences of dealing with the issue of bystanders on the set. She outlined how some police officers came by a set to talk to friends and to the photographer. However, this made her uncomfortable as the police officers were staring at the women. Emma's response was to leave the set, and while this is not an option for everyone, she explains that she was in a privileged position to be able to take this option:

> I have the ability to do that because I have built a brand and a company where I am not relying on that one shoot or my rent doesn't get paid and I'm evicted. Don't get me wrong, I want the money, but I've never been in that position – thankfully – where I've been so desperate. I know what's worth it to me.

Thus Emma can also draw on her experience and position in the industry to protect herself from situations which she does not want to be in, although she has empathy for those who may be 'desperate' for the money, and recognises these pressures, unlike Katie.

Holly discusses having experienced a mixture of different situations on set, some more positive than others:

> There have been some sets where I've been very, very, very worried about my safety. But I would say that's 7, 8% of the time. There have been some sets where I've been worried to make sure you lock the bathroom door, and make sure you're not alone with a certain person. (..) I try to avoid that, at all costs. But I would say 93/94% of the time, I've never feared for my safety but there are the exceptional times I am a little worried.

Deploying tactics such as being aware of who is around you and avoiding an unsafe person is part of a system of safety mechanisms the performers adopt, which will be discussed later in

this section. Holly does not go into details about whether the people she felt unsafe around are performers, camera operators, security, directors, runners, etc. -or their gender- and this would be important to follow up on in further research to gain a more accurate view of the realities of situations like this. Acknowledging that unscrupulous and predatory producers and directors exist in the industry, Holly goes on to outline how the performers' persona may be interpreted by those on set:

> And there is this stereotype where if you are a 'dirty girl' – meaning you go above and beyond for every scene, like I did for a long time – some producer/directors may expect you to go above and beyond off camera. But, again, that's very rare, but it does exist. It does happen. You know, it's disheartening, it goes against everything I have tried to push and it goes like, when you're projecting a personal of happy, fun that can be misconstrued. That can be misinterpreted by certain people. It's a fine line, because you don't want to be stone-cold professional bitch, but you also don't want to be fun-loving slut. So you really have to be careful of the energy you put out, because the energy you put out is the energy you get back.

Here we can see an example of Holly referencing the professionalism needed to be successful in the industry, and distancing herself away from the party girl, the 'fun-loving slut' that other performers also reference, which Abbott also found in her research. There seems to be a precarious line between projecting sex appeal in order to get booked for a shoot, and maintaining personal boundaries. The term 'dirty girl' in this context appears to have simultaneous meanings- on one hand Holly uses it to refer to a professional who goes 'above and beyond', while concurrently using it to refer to women who are not professional and have sex with the production team. This hints at conflicting boundaries in the industry, however Holly still fights for standards that she deems acceptable:

> I mean, just because we have blurred lines, just because our profession provides a grey area of sorts, doesn't mean it's okay to joke about serious, serious, serious things, such as rape.

Additionally, there is much more research needed in this area of experiences on set and it would be important to ethically consider the challenges present in collecting this kind of data, being inclusive of performer contributions, and being cognisant of the high risk for researchers contributing to epistemological violence in this area given how the data may be interpreted.

### 6.5.2. Positive experiences

Several performers also noted positive experiences on set, and some felt this was down to working for certain companies who had professional reputations. Katie emphasised the responsibility of the performer to do their homework and see which companies have a good reputation and to steer clear of the ones that do not:

> I don't know who made up that we get forced to do things. Maybe back, way back in the day. Or if you were like, on a really unprofessional set, that has no one that has a credible name, that if you mentioned Schmoe that no one has heard of, then maybe, yeah, that would happen to you. But if you, if you call any reputable agent…if you…if you go to Google and put in 'Porn Agency' and they all line up, and you call any of them, they will name you reputable companies, and if you call them, they will all name the same ones. Not one of those reputable companies would do any of that. You can call…you can send a girl…any random girl, to any of those companies and not worry about them coming back to you and going 'I didn't feel safe.'

This response links back to Katie's responses in relation to the division between professional and exploitative agencies. She appears to dismiss the potential for negative experiences at these companies, however stories of consent violations by male performers at well-known companies such as Kink.com and Brazzers are public (Clark-Flory, 2019(a); Molloy, 2016). Katie also noted that she as a performer holds a lot of power that often the other people on set do not, and this power can lead to her deciding if she feels like continuing the scene or not:

> I can cut a scene whenever I want. If ever I get uncomfortable on scene, I can just stop. I don't want to do it anymore. And, by the way, I know production teams where that's happened, where the girl gets three-quarters of the way through a shoot and then goes 'you know what? I don't wanna do it anymore.' And guess what? They stop the shoot. I don't know any other industry…. I was never in the position, when I was an engineer, where I could just go 'You know what? I don't want to be in this

meeting anymore.' And we stopped it – nobody did that. Like, it's a job. Every single job, there are going to be moments that you don't want to be there, you don't want to do it. But in porn, we have an opportunity, an option, to say 'I don't want to do this.'

Katie's' comment about how she has power in pornography but did not in her previous employment reminds us that pornography and the experiences of its workers needs to be studied in the context of the experiences of other workers in other industries. Alongside an analysis of Western capitalism and the realities experienced by workers, questions about consent, job satisfaction, and agency can then be considered in context. The freedom and comfort to end a scene may also be dependent on level of experience in the industry and the leverage of a performers' fame and how in demand for work that they are. However, Katie's feelings of being able to stop a scene whenever she wishes may not be analogous with other performers' experiences, who may be newer or unable to speak up for other reasons such as shock at what is happening. Performer August Ames notes an experience on set that 'felt like rape', and her response was to freeze, panic, and go through with the scene in order to 'get it over with' (Clark-Flory, 2019 (b)). This case shows the variety in responses people may have to violent experiences which may prohibit them from speaking up at the time.

Conversely, Emma reports more positive experiences, although she admitted to having prior assumptions about what happens on a pornography set before she met her partner, and was hesitant about going to the set as a result. However, she reports being surprised by what she saw:

And then I went to some of his shoots and I was like 'Wow! This is not what people think it's like.' I was amazed, I was like 'everyone seems relatively happy', 'no one seems mis-treated'. They were communicating about what was going on and it didn't seem like some kind of victim, exploitative situation.

While Katie states she has worked for 'truckloads' of companies, Emma differs from her in terms of length of experience, noting that she has only done less than ten shoots for other companies outside of her own. However, despite this lack of experience, she states she did not feel unsafe working for these companies, claiming that: '[e]very time, I am conscious of the fact that I want to feel good. I have never had a problem with feeling unsafe'.

Sophie follows Emma and Katie in reporting positive experiences around feeling safe on set, and stated that her experiences have been positive:

> There have been several times where I have spoken up and said 'no, I am not comfortable with that', and we have moved on and there was no animosity. Everything was pretty great. Professional.

Sophie notes a difference between her experiences now that she works for an agency she finds reputable, and her experiences when she first entered the industry. Referring back to her first distressing scene, she states:

> I'll keep going back to my first scene. That wasn't worked out ahead of time. And, like I said, no one ever told me that I could say 'no'. I felt that I needed to please and get to the next step. Most girls come into it with the mindset that I had originally: 'I have to do this.' But now, there have been several times that I have said no. And they have worked a compromise with me. It's always talked about ahead of time. And, in any kind of rough scene, there is always what's called a 'safe word', and there are always honoured. 'Always' is a definite statement – for the most part, they are honoured.

Like Emma and Katie, Sophie notes the importance of communication, both before and during the scene, and the feeling of being able to speak up when needed. But this example is also another reminder from Sophie of how vulnerable she was when she first entered the industry and had not formed a strong support network that guided her with communication and boundaries. This provokes questions about the performers who leave the industry after a short space of time- how much support did they have, how effective were they at communicating

their boundaries, how safe did they feel, and would they have stayed in the industry longer had they had the support of other performers or official bodies like unions or advocacy groups. The level of fame the performer has might also influence the ability to communicate and feel confident in stating boundaries, compared to a new performer that has little experience. However, the performers' capabilities of boundary setting and communication prior to entering the industry also needs to be taken in context as this can influence the situation.

Both Sophie and Ava discuss the reactions to saying no, and the issue of being labelled 'difficult'. Sophie claims:

> If someone were to feel that I was difficult to work with, they also have to realise that we're in the business of pleasure, but we're using our bodies. And, so, I don't think that anybody would argue with me standing up for myself.

While Ava notes:

> You know, sometimes people do get labelled as 'difficult' for saying 'no'. But I really don't care. As far as I'm concerned, it's my body, it's my choice and if someone doesn't like that, then I don't need to be working for them anyway.

These nuances of personal agency are important to consider when stereotypes about performers include a lack of agency or are painted as victims; the performers in this section have outlined their beliefs and actions when it comes to maintaining their safety and boundaries, and their response when faced with violations or risks of potential violations.

### 6.5.3. Responses

Similar to the section examining the responses to people leaving the industry and claiming they had negative experiences, reactions to these narratives ranged from empathy to an emphasis

on personal responsibility. Most vocal on this topic were Louise and Katie who appeared to place the blame for negative experiences squarely at the feet of the performers themselves.

Louise argues that it is the performers' responsibility to check out the situation before consenting to engage:

> I mean, it's kind of like 'Why would you go on Craig's List?' It's the same question. 'Why are you going on Craig's List for work?' Why are you going to some stranger's place and doing a porn job? You asking for it? Because no reputable agent would send you somewhere that you would get hurt. Real companies, reputable companies…

Louise believes that if a performer does not have the skill to know what is a good situation "then you just put a bull's-eye right there on your head. You're just a walking target.' However, a new performer might not realise which companies are the reputable ones. Louise's comment about 'asking for it' blames the victim, which is reminiscent of the phrase used to blame rape victims in societal discourse on rape. This is also not inclusive of violations that can happen in reputable companies, similar to Katie's answer.

Katie was even more direct when discussing the personal responsibility of a performer:

> I think if you decide to do something that you're not comfortable with, because you want the money, then you implicitly consent to it. If I am in a situation that I don't like, but the money is more important to me than my own safety, and I do it anyway. Whose fault is that? It's my own fault! I said 'Well, I want the money bad enough to do it'. Then, you know what? You consented. That's what the law is. Silence implies consent. That's what it is. So, you don't get to come back afterwards and say 'I don't feel comfortable with that.' Well, then use your voice on set. But, to make it everybody else's fault that you secretly felt uncomfortable, but wanted the money, so you went along with it anyway; at that moment, you decided the money was more important than your own comfort. If you decide that your comfort is more important than the money, then you call the scene.

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Katie argues here that if the performer does not speak up when they are uncomfortable, they are still giving consent to continue, and makes the choice to continue if they want to get paid for the scene. This analysis does not account for differing reactions to uncomfortable/violating situations, or pressure from a need for money or from colleagues on set, and again adopts an individualist approach. This framing would benefit from further research with performers who have experienced this, and their understandings of consent and reasons for not verbalising consent when they felt their comfort was compromised. Katie goes on to compare her ability to consent in pornography with her ability to consent in her jobs before she began work as a performer:

> So – how many days did I work for corporate and feel miserable? I remember one day I went in, deathly ill with the flu, I was like, walking in and I didn't want to be there. But I had no more sick days. And, quite frankly, that was more slavery than being on a porn set. I've called in sick to porn sets before. Because – guess what? – when you're sick, they don't want you there. So, so, this idea that 'I couldn't say no because of the money.' Well, actually, you chose to say yes, because you wanted the money. Be a big girl. Like, some of these girls are acting like they're fucking kindergarteners. Be a big girl and own up to the choice you made. You made the decision that the money was more important to you, so you did it. I've, I've made decisions about scenes, if I've felt that the money wasn't worth the scene, I didn't do it. We get paid enough that it's not…these girls are not starving if they call a scene.

An understanding of the need for money to pay rent, medical bills or other expenses is missing from Katie's answer. She does not give credibility to any situation outside of her own, and displays no empathy for those in more precarious situations. Additionally, there may be a fear that if they do stop the scene, they may be blacklisted from the company. Given the previous answers about how everyone in the industry networks, this may be a very real concern. Katie's' linking of personal responsibility with consent here is nuanced, and this angle is often missing from discourses around consent and work, and consent and sex work. An in-depth understanding of consent and how this is tied to ethics, labour, the body, capitalism and subjectivity is required to truly situate conversations like Katie's in context. At present this

discourse has not yet occurred in such a way that the voices of those engaging in sex work are present and centred. This gap forecloses a closer reading of situations like this, as currently this is speculation without data as evidence- a stance that could contribute to epistemological violence, as outlined in Chapter Four. This is an area where a multitude of performer contributions and performer analysis would greatly develop discourse.

## 6.6. Safety mechanisms

The performers outlined several safety mechanisms they employed to navigate their safety on set.

### 6.6.1. Personas

Some performers like Amanda were at pains to point out how different they were off set in their personal lives, and Louise outlined how she adopted a persona that was distinct from their normal persona:

> I feel very safe when I'm on set because of that, that thought process. I think 'Oh! The camera's on.' I get to be this person, this persona, you know, I have…I call it split down the middle: I have my home personality and then I have my porn side.

This process of identity work is discussed more in depth throughout Chapter Five when discussing stigma, but it is useful to discuss as a protection mechanism for engaging in labour. This tactic can be seen through the lens of identity work, but can also be framed as emotional labour. Teela Sanders addresses this concept of persona adoption in her work with British sex workers working in prostitution, arguing that:

> sex workers create a manufactured identity specifically for the workplace as a self-protection mechanism to manage the stresses of selling sex as well as crafting the work image as a business strategy to attract and maintain clientele (2005, p.319).

Sanders posits that 'sex workers undergo a reconceptualization of their own sexuality in the workplace that is distinct and purposely separate from the construction of their identity in other spaces such as in their intimate romantic sex lives, or as mothers, daughters, friends and citizens' (2005, p.322). Sex on screen is sex that is performed for an audience, and for other rewards for the performers such as money or fame, if we build on the work of Abbott (2000) and Miller-Young (2014). This persona can play up the 'dirty girl' side that Holly outlined, but it can also be a self-preservation technique to keep some distance from their job. Sex in pornography may be an act, but the character of the 'porn star' is also a performance of identity, developed for an audience and with specific goals in mind. These may be similar to the motivations for entering the industry as outlined by Abbott and Miller-Young: money, sex, fame, or they may be a strategy to secure critical separation from their work.

Sanders notes this emphasis on the performance of femininity can be found in other service jobs such as the hotel, leisure, airline, nursing and retail industries. These industries can often be dominated by women employees, similar to the pornography industry. Perhaps the most famous mainstream media example of persona adoption is the singer Beyoncé's alter ego she dubs 'Sasha Fierce', who she embodies when on stage. Beyoncé explains her alter persona:

> I have someone else that takes over when it's time for me to work and when I'm on stage, this alter ego that I've created that kind of protects me and who I really am,(..) Sasha Fierce is the fun, more sensual, more aggressive, more outspoken side and more glamorous side that comes out when I'm working and when I'm on the stage (Leach, 2008).

Rather than see this tactic solely in a negative framing, the concepts of agency and subjectivity need to be included in an analysis of this mechanism. Sanders advocates for consent to be included in the analysis of business strategies in sex work. Writing about prostitution, Sanders argues that the adoption of a persona is a business decision, one that is not lacking in agency

and is 'not simply conformity or exploitation but as a calculated response made by sex workers to capitalize on their own sexuality and the cultural ideals of the client' (2005, p.323). This can be visible in pornography through seeing performers utilise personas at the AEE/AVN Expo, where for five days they met fans directors, agents and producers and arranged future work opportunities. Additionally, performers can be said to engage in this approach through social media where further opportunities for career enhancement are present. This nuanced form of labour is often missing from studies about the experiences of performers.

### 6.6.2. 'No' Lists

Another safety mechanism is the creation of ''no'' lists', which performers use to compile the names of peers that they are unwilling to work with. These lists are not usually made public and can be updated regularly. While some performers like Louise use these for people she fears are a high STI transmission risk, some like Katie use this method as a consent checklist for acts and partners. Stating that '[w]e also create our own menus', she discusses how levels of fame can influence how closely these lists are adhered to:

> We don't…we don't…have to do anything we don't want to do. I decide who I work with. I pretty much, I'll work with anyone. That's my role. (..) But, eh…Some of the girls have got a yes list, that there are only five male performers on it. They are the only people they'll work with. And you know what? If they're good enough performers, they'll still work. And the companies will get one of those five guys.

Having the element of power and choice over co-stars being linked to status raises questions as to how this mechanism operates for newer performers, or those with less fame or status. For newer performers, are their lists respected as much and are they extensive or short? Further research would be beneficial to assess whether the acceptance of no lists is correlated to choices to exit or remain in the industry.

In the light of incidents such as allegations of consent violations by performer James Deen, Holly praises companies for being strict on their use of these lists:

> I applaud kink.com for what they've done because they were really strict about their 'yes' and 'no' lists. They did not always enforce it, hence, you know, letting certain entities slip through the cracks, but of all the companies, they were the best with their communication – their dos and don'ts. And there has always been good at that, but in light of recent events, they took that as an opportunity to say 'how can we be better?'

If the safety mechanism is not adhered to, as Holly alludes to, it can lose its power to protect the performer. If no lists were not respected, perhaps this led to some women exiting the industry, however this is difficult to establish without talking to ex-performers. Open conversations in the industry can help to reinforce the responsibility for a consistent approach to these mechanisms, and highlight the actions of those who violate these approaches. This can be seen in Hollys' answer when she outlines how companies publicly expressed a willingness to change and increase protection for performers.

### 6.6.3. Whisper networks

Similar to other industries, performers noted they also operate a whisper network where the identities of people who cross various boundaries are shared amongst peers. Amanda highlights how this can operate:

> Every situation is different, but if you cross the line, it will be exposed and career-wise, you'll be screwed. James Deen is screwed. I hate to say it. Poor guy. And that's the thing, once you're fucked in this profession, you're done. We're like one big family. If you're done, find another profession or leave the country. Quit trying to come back, nobody will look at you the same.

However, while Deen's career did appear to suffer after the allegations against him were made public, he is still working in the industry at the time of writing, albeit predominantly for his own

site, and is still nominated for awards. It seems the #metoo movement has not had as much impact on the pornography industry as in Hollywood, and it could be speculated stigmatisation has hindered this process.

While highlighting how people like Deen continuing to perform made Holly feel powerless, Holly notes how her whisper network discussed people who were active drug users with whom she did not wish to engage. She outlined the support she felt from having such a network:

> It's a way of us looking out for each other. It's a way of making a shield for each other. (..) Since we don't have a union, and we don't have advocacy and we don't have somebody who says 'This guy is not allowed to perform', it is our way of claiming our power.'

Holly notes that these safety mechanisms work as '(t)here are known predators and people act accordingly around them'. She appears to describe how her networks feel like a power-giving community, and operate as a space for resistance. Whisper networks have been deployed in industries such as Hollywood where women shared stories of men such as Harvey Weinstein and his alleged consent violations and tried to protect each other. Inclusion in a support network allows a performer to stay in the industry, achieve higher levels of fame and money, and facilitates entry into the ranks of 'professional'. This can provide a different experience than those who enter the industry and do not form this network leave after a short period of time, and report negative experiences.

Holly's experience relates to Sophie's example of how she was unaware of how to navigate her first scene and its negative feedback, but upon finding supportive individuals she regained control of her boundaries and her career path and enjoyed more opportunities. This may be in contrast to a performer who may have had the same experience but left without finding supportive people. As Holly notes that networks are a way to exercise power, this nuance can

be connected to consent, subjectivity, agency, and can be considered in theories of how access to power affects experiences of working in the industry.

## 6.7. Body Punishing

As outlined in Chapter Two, any studies and much of feminist discourse address the topic of violent content, but these studies do not take the performers' opinions into account. In this section aspects of some sex acts such as anal sex will be discussed, while the issue of STI's condoms, and autonomy will also be addressed..

### 6.7.1. Rough scenes

Smith and Attwood claim that the framing of all pornography as violence minimises the potential interpretations of the meanings contained in different sexual activities. They argue that supporters of this framing 'foreclose the possibility of sexuality as plural and in process' (2013, p.51). They posit that this closing down of discourse can therefore deem most representations and expressions of sexuality as unhealthy. The binary of 'healthy'/'unhealthy' sex continues through subjective analysis of scenes in pornography such as anal sex, which will be discussed below. We can see another example of a binary when Dines claims that sex in pornography is more like 'sexual assault than making love' (2010, p.xxvii) and that men in pornography are 'making hate' rather than making love (2010, p.xxiv). Weitzer calls this framing 'astonishing not only for its sweeping nature but also because not a shred of evidence is offered to support it' (2015, p.263). Weitzer asks how Dines knows the intent of the performer. Indeed, this interpretation of performers' intentions without asking them dismisses the performers' subjectivity and places the researcher/writers' knowledge as more important than the actions of the person studied/written about.

Additionally, terms such as 'debased' are subjective and can embody different meanings to different people. Some performers like Hannah argued that rough scenes were subjective, and argues that the word 'degrading' is especially subjective in relation to sexual activity:

> They are just different forms of satisfaction. And what some people see as degrading, some people get satisfaction. It's a very individual feel and view to it. Not everyone likes same forms of enjoyment, same in sex. I personally think, that everyone should free their minds, and should never feel any restrictions, experimenting in sex brings you different satisfaction feelings. They shouldn't be seeing such a thing as degrading! I call it - Sexual Freedom! (emphasis original)

Hannah's response allows for different readings of the sex acts she engages in, and allows for more than one 'truth' and meaning to the scenes depicted. When asked if she felt that pornography was body punishing, Hannah replied: 'Absolutely NO! Quite the opposite, it's a body satisfaction!' (emphasis original). However, as discussed in the following section, this body satisfaction can be mired with STI'S or injuries. While Weeks posits that the erotic is perpetually trapped in a web of subjective value judgements and 'moral agonising' (1995, p.46), Rebecca Hills questions the level of truth that sex is imbued with in Western society. Referring to this framing as a 'sex myth' (2015, p.35), Hills outlines how sex is positioned as powerful, both as a source of pleasure, but also as a site of 'corruption and moral decay' (*ibid*). This insistence on truth through sex means the perpetuation of the idea that 'in sex we will find out truth: not just of who we are as individuals, but of how we are faring as a society' (*ibid*). However, when truth is only permitted to be a singular entity, this forecloses the possibility of finding other truths- despite how unpalatable we might personally find them to be.

Other performers such as Holly stated their side work such as escorting as a dominatrix can be 'overwhelming' so they manage this by taking breaks from it occasionally, although Holly did not explain if this was overwhelming, physically, mentally or both.

In relation to rougher scenes, Katie explained how she felt that working in pornography was akin to a physical sport that requires particular personal attributes to succeed:

> Porn is kind of a tomboy industry. People don't realise that because they see all the 'girly-girly stuff', but really, you've got to be kind of tough to do the job well. The girls who are really delicate? They wash out after a few years. I was a boxer for years, I used to fight. So, I look at porn and – you get into some of these really extreme scenes, and you're physically…it's physically demanding. I kind of love it because it's more…sexier, less harmful form of fighting, in a way. Because you're wearing yourself out (...) and I like that.

This comment appears to support a 'body punishing' narrative, as she outlines how the work can take its toll physically. The extreme scenes she mentions may be difficult not only for those who are 'delicate', but for those who fall between delicate and 'tough'. If Katie, as a trained boxer, finds the scenes strenuous, one can imagine that someone without this experience would find it difficult. Katie states it is a 'less harmful' form of fighting, but it still seems that there is a physical impact on the body, even for her.

While problematic, Katie's preference for and acceptance of scenes that can be physically demanding make a statement about both pleasure and how the body is used in labour. Here a comparison of different labour under capitalism is necessary, given how physically demanding other professions can be. Performer Stoya addressed this via social media, tweeting:

> Performing in porn is work that you use your body for. Maybe upper and upper middle class should also examine their ideas about manual labor? (Stoya 2015).

> My grandpa destroyed his back as a stone mason. A football player might get tackled. Sometimes at work I injure my cunt (Stoya 2015).

What Stoya states in her tweets is that risk of injury through work is not inherent or exclusive to pornography labour, and classist views of what labour consists of impacts this discourse. Heather Berg argues that any analysis of labour under capitialism that does not situate pornography labour in context is problematic, stating that: 'exceptionalizing and pathologizing workers does not a class analysis make' (2014, p.75). Contextualisation of labour is thus key for a holistic analysis of working conditions across industries. Berg makes the point that anti-pornography feminists may argue that sex work is not work, as the concept of sex work does not fit with their stance on 'how work is typically understood'. Berg thus argues for a focus on the working conditions of labour in pornography, rather than a focus on the moral aspect of pornography. A focus on how the body may be damaged in work, and the different meanings attached to different injuries by those in and out of the industry would also be critical.

This approach therefore allows for a nuanced reading of exploitation through labour under capitalism. An analysis of labour and the body needs to be inclusive of contemporary modes of working in the pornography industry, such as camming, self-employment, creating and managing brands and personas, and the impact of labour on the body and mind in context with other forms of labour in other industries.

### 6.7.2. Anal sex

One focus of feminist discourse on pornography is on anal sex. On Rubin's scale of sexual hierarchy, anal sex is languishing at the lower end, far outside the realm of acceptability in the 'good sex'/'bad sex' binary. As previously discussed, those who engage in acts in the outer limits of the charmed circle are subject to speculation on their mental health, their character, and are treated with disgust. Anal sex certainly provokes many conversations of disgust and subjectivity within varying feminist discourse, especially when depicted in pornography. Disgust

and emotional reactions to anal sex reminds of us Rubin's argument that the further an act is from inclusion in 'good sex', the more it is perceived to be repulsive, lacking in nuance, and to be a 'uniformly bad experience' (2011, p.151). This thesis addresses this topic with performers in order to add to the episteme and provide opportunities for nuanced discourse.

Williams argues that anal sex is part of the 'iconography' of pornography (1989, p.128) where certain acts and experiences are expected by the viewers. These tropes include anal sex, however Williams argues that while iconography 'attempts to define the visual specificity of a genre- that which makes it distinct from other genres- it cannot explain why such visuals are employed, except as reflections of reality' (*ibid*). Williams asks if the acts depicted are a true reflection of reality, or if they are a form of myth-making- 'a way of doing something to the world, of acting symbolically upon it' (*ibid*). Dworkin and Dines might argue that this *something* is showing the world that violence against women is acceptable, contributing to narratives about women, sex, and woman's place in society. Pornography that self identifies as feminist pornography can be said to use this *something* to work towards shifting mainstream narratives by changing the context of the depiction of sexual acts and claiming a space of rebellion through discourse. Thus this *something* is subjective and functions as a placeholder for the possibility for a multitude of meanings and readings.

Williams questions the narrative of pornography, and which solutions and problems it offers in relation to sex and its depictions. In relation to pornographic content and the number of times acts are depicted, she argues that narrative informs number, and number then informs narrative. This can be applied to anti-pornography feminist theories on violent content in pornography. If the desire of the producers is to indulge a desire to commit violence against women, then the number of acts deemed violent will increase; in turn, the number of violent acts as a standard pornographic trope informs the narrative that pornography *is* violence

against women. Williams points to Foucault who claims that narratives around sex not only form part of a confessional narrative, but also a reconstruction of the sexual act and its meanings.

Anal sex within pornography can thus be said to be a tool for constructing and reconstructing a narrative around pleasure, violence, knowledge, and truth. The answers below from the performers contribute to this narrative. These contributions reflect that anal sex has negative aspects, but to view it solely in negative terms shuts off nuanced contributions to knowledge. The following section provides an insight into the differing realities behind narratives on anal sex and offers an opportunity for the expansion of knowledge in this regard.

Louise discusses anal prolapses which are a niche area in pornographic films, and not necessarily a feature always seen alongside films depicting anal sex. Louise did not approve of this practice and was not keen to participate in anal sex in general:

> Girls do that on purpose. Yeah. They're pushing it [the intestines] out. Yeah. I view it this way: In..in...intestines..that's the word, right? In. Like they're supposed to be inside. And if there's something touching it, it's probably not supposed to be inside. But that's just my thing. You're not gonna see my stuff (...) It's a job. It really is. Touch my butt-hole, that's like a good couple of weeks. It's a chore. So. I do girl/girl anal, but it's a chore. It really is.

Louise describes how part of her labour for preparation for anal sex scenes involved taking Imodium, which is an anti-diarrhea medication available over the counter in pharmacies.

> Yeah, I mean I have to take...ummm... what's it? Imodium. Yeah. It works, if you wanna dry your butt-hole up. Don't shit for days. Don't eat a lot, though - you'll lose your hair. I found that out, and it is not written on the bottle. It's not. They should write that. (..) Imodium. Drink it. Drink it the day of the scene. Eat it. Like the pills. It tastes like butt. I mean, it's not minty or chocolate flavoured.

Louise stated it was common practice in the industry to prepare for anal sex scenes in this way; however, there is not a body of research describing how performers feel about anal sex and preparations for it. This gap in knowledge highlights the need for further research on this topic, which must be inclusive of different genres and industries, such as gay male performers, to identfy common themes and experiences. Research that includes harms such as hair loss, as Louise identifies, would also build a more accurate picture of the realities of the impact and/or harm of sexual acts such as anal sex in the industry. Consequences such as hair loss and not defecating for days may be considered body punishing, alongside any other medical side effects from consuming medication frequently. While Hannah emphatically dismissed the notion of pornography being body punishing, Louises' answer shows another side to this argument.

In relation to anal sex, Sun notes that some performers she spoke to experienced injuries from anal sex. Sun interviewed a 20-year-old performer who states: 'In porn, they tend to be rougher than in real life, and it tears the capillaries, and it can spread some diseases'' (2011, p.176). Sun goes on to outline how Sharon Mitchell, an ex-performer who also ran a healthcare service for performers, saw numerous anal injuries: 'Mitchell describes her experiences on the set of a movie: 'I sat there everyday and I saw anal tear[s] and anal prolapses. The physical condition people put their body through is getting very far away from the sexuality as we know it' (2011, p.176). Louise outlines that she has experienced this too, and states that she is concerned over her safety when it comes to doing anal sex with a male performer:

> It's just not, not worth it. It's not worth it for me. It's my life. Yeah. You bleed. You bleed when it comes to doing anal and stuff like that. It's just not worth it.

The challenge here is how to interpret this, especially in a way that does not objectify the performer at the expense of the researchers' subjective interpretations. If pure theory is applied,

this misses the nuance that this is an example of a woman stating she is bleeding due to her work in pornography. If we take her experiences and apply it universally, we could argue that working in pornography *is* a violent experience for women. Taking that universality further and building on Dworkin and MacKinnon's arguments, Louise's experiences mean an analogous experience for the everywoman, and Louise provides an example of pornography being violent to all women due to its symbolism and effects.

An emphasis on a singular truth permits only this narrative. But if we were to apply a particularist approach and take Louise's case as a singular case, we can have a nuanced reading of consent in relation to anal sex. Louise states that she has had experiences of bleeding, and thus chooses not to do this type of activity as she deems it 'not worth it'. She has found girl/girl scenes with rare anal penetration works best for her, and has built up her fan base on this basis. Louise has developed the ability to communicate this to employers and secure the kind of work she wishes to do. This analysis allows for a multiplicity of truths- that Louise was indeed hurt, but she also navigates this now by working in scenes that she finds more comfortable. Rather than leave the industry and focus on her negative experiences, Louise has stayed and become an award winning performer with greater autonomy.

Building on the concept of a multiplicity of truths and realities, Holly conversely expressed a very positive reaction to participating in anal sex, and discussed the differences she felt existed between vaginal and anal sex. Like Louise, Holly acknowledges that the preparation can be difficult, but unlike Louise, she feels it is worth this effort:

> Given that my entire career is built on anal sex, I love it. I absolutely love it and I would actually prefer it over vaginal sex. I feel like there is an end to the vagina, but there is no end to the anus. Like, there is no end to the anal cavity, it just keeps going, right. So there is this infinite surrender. So, like I said, there is power in surrender, so if you're going to give that gift to somebody, it's so profound. You

know, the vagina can lie. A woman can have vaginal sex and fake an orgasm. The ass never lies. Some women don't like it, but for me the taboo of it still exists. I've been having anal sex since I was 16, and I'm about to be 34 and it's still my 'no no' place. It's still dirty, like it's still my dirty little hole. Like, it's never stopped being exciting for me.

While some may frame anal sex as a solely degrading activity for women, here Holly states she experiences the opposite of this and finds power in it. Discussing power in surrender Holly points to how power can be multidirectional and be presented in different forms. Kippax and Smith (2001) argue that in relation to anal sex, Foucault's theories on power can be applied through a lens of consent. They argue that for Foucault, power dynamics can be changed if the person acted upon is recognised as being able to make choices, and can also be recognised as a person who acts (1983, cited in 2001, p.416). However, in anti-pornography feminist discourse if a person is solely framed as a victim that cannot make a choice, they are, as a result, not recognised as an actor or an actor who makes choices. Therefore, the performer is violated here not by the act, but by the discourse on the performers' ability to consent to the act.

A discourse that removes the power from the actor to define power on their terms contributes to the objectification of the performer. This objectification takes the form of a denial of subjectivity, denial of autonomy, fungibility, inertness, and violability. If anti-pornography discourse treated Louise's experiences as true and dismisses Holly's experiences as false, Louise is objectified through instrumentality and fungibility. Holly is simultaneously objectified through denial of autonomy. Thus, in order to avoid this epistemological violence from discourse, a multitude of realities and experiences must be respected with one reality not given preferential treatment over another in order to support a singular narrative.

In addition to power dynamics, we can also consider power exchange. Kippax and Smith argue that when two parties consent to anal sex, the exchange is not unilateral domination but a power dynamic where power is exchanged. In this framing, domination and submission are understood as fantasy between consenting partners (2001, p.416). This positioning of power as multidirectional recognises a 'reversibility' (*ibid*), and while in this context may not include penetration by Holly on a male partner, power sharing is present here as Holly takes power and pleasure in 'surrender' while her partner takes pleasure in penetrating.

Holly talks about different forms of power, and how she uses anal sex to achieve power on her terms:

> It's also what we allow them to perceive as a power. So we have this one entity that is male that has more power. I mean, let's face it, especially in adult entertainment mainstream, they have all the power, but if we are willing to give up the illusion of power to this one entity that has more power just to get what we want and to further our goal, how is that not a feminist act. I don't want to say that men are simple and easily tricked, but I do want to say that 'hey! You give a man anal and you let him come inside of your butt, and they will never, ever, stop loving you.

Holly's comments here are interesting in the context of exploring a 'taboo'. Holly expresses that for her this act is a source of power and authenticity in her own personal pleasure, long before she began working in the industry. While Abbott's study participants reported 'feeling naughty' as a reason for entering the industry, for Holly this pleasure in the taboo of anal sex has continued past the initial excitement of rebelling against what a 'good' woman should like. Holly discusses this power in challenging the binary of 'good woman'/ 'bad woman':

> And being born, bred and raised in a puritanical society, that is America, we are very weird about sexuality here and good girls do not do anal. Good girls don't even give blow-jobs, okay? We're trained and we're told that that's something that sluts and whores do and if you want that – seek it out elsewhere, not with your wife, because

you know it's not…but I, I wish more women could experience that joy and that bliss and that pleasure because if more women knew how good it was, more women would do it. Unfortunately, most women have tried it out of curiosity or whatever, and it's been a terrible, awful first experience, and so they will never try it again and that's sad.

Holly's thoughts here are reminiscent of LeMoncheck's work on objectification, which in turn can be linked back to Rubin's charmed circle. LeMoncheck links the perception of objectification to the binary of 'good' sex and 'bad' sex:

> My suggestion is that sex objectification would not be as objectionable for women if there were not two traditional assumptions made about sex generally: (1) that (at least some) sex is dirty, sinful, or evil; and (2) that, because of the distinction made in (1), women fall into two classes, good and bad, virgin and whore, women on pedestals and women in gutters. Moreover, according to one extreme of this tradition, only "bad" women seek, desire, or enjoy sex, while "good" women merely "tolerate" the sexual advances of their husbands and shun completely such advances by those with whom they are on less socially intimate terms (1985, p.48).

The idea of women tolerating sex or rejecting it to preserve a 'good' woman reputation has long existed in Western culture. Anal sex is firmly placed in the gutter category, both in historical societal discourse and anti-pornography feminist discourse, thus continuing a binary framing. Performer Kitty Stryker addresses this controlling binary: 'I am so fucking confused about what kind of sex other feminists think I should have in order to be liberated' (2015). This statement raises questions of who gets to decide what is the correct type of sex, and who is considered an expert in autonomy.

Holly also notes this binary is present for monogamy and there is an equation of the monogamous woman being the 'good' woman. Holly states that she often has women asking her for tips on how to enjoy anal sex and they state they watch her videos and want to enjoy it also, but don't know where to begin. The silencing of narratives other than negative experiences

of anal sex appears to have closed off this option for women who struggle to experience anal sex in a positive manner, if they make the choice to explore it.

### 6.7.3. STIs

Renate Klein notes that organisations such as Adult Industry Medical (AIM) provide information on STI testing and how performers are at risk of up to 25 different STI's (Sexually Transmitted Infections). Klein argues that 'the clear message is that ongoing medical supervision and treatment is part of your life in the porn industry: medicalisation and pornification joined at the hip (pocket)' (2011, p.91). Klein goes on to call the AIM website a 'grooming site' (*ibid*). However, the information is provided so that performers can make an informed decision to continue and accept the health risks, and have the necessary information in order to be able to give consent to performing, despite these risks. Education is empowerment for many and given that some performers may enter the industry with minimal sex education, having a resource explaining the risks may be beneficial.

Klein's analysis also minimises the fact that sex and sexuality have been joined at the hip with the medical field since the Victorian era, so this is not a nuance unique to modern day pornography. Additionally, communities such as LGBT people have also historically been subjected to close medical supervision, with information on LGBT sexualities decried as 'grooming' or 'propaganda' (Reilly, 2013). Smith and Attwood also outline how terms such as 'grooming' are used by organisations such as Stop Porn Culture (now rebranded as Culture Reframed). They posit that this framing paints a picture of sex 'as inherently dangerous with fears about child abuse, commercial sex, and casual sex, as though these were all not only related but also uniformly problematic and all with their origins in ''porn culture'' (2013, p.50). This discourse continues the linkage of pornography with fear and disgust, and fear and disgust thus are also connected to STI's.

Louise alleged that the main source of STI transmission in the industry was from people working

as escorts as a side job, or not using protection in their personal sexual encounters. While she

stated that she had never had an STI in eight years of working in the industry, Louise believed

that this was due to not working as an escort. She also linked this to not performing with what

she termed 'dirty talent'- those who are known to engage in escorting as a side job and who

may be at higher risk of STI transmission. Louise stated she was meticulous in maintaining her

sexual health:

> I have a notable standing clean record. And I will knock on wood again cuz I am working this week and next week. And I don't want anyone messing that up. I have a noble clean record, so...my thing is I don't... I don't want to work with any Talent that does not have 4 years of clean tests. If you have had something within a year I would rather not be booked with you.  No one don't (sic) have a longer run as I do being clean. One of my friends actually said 'Well the only reason why you say that...that you would overreact because of a small call like that, is because you've never had anything.' And I'm like 'Well, that's because it's *gross.* <giggles> But, yeah, yeah. If I get a call over something like gonorrhoea or chlamydia, yeah. I would, I would be outside - lighting a match. I would burn someone's ass.

Louise stated she has experienced some backlash for her stance and has been called 'difficult'

for requesting same-day test results for boy/girl scenes, but argues that she does not care as

her health is more important. Louise communicates this in a humorous way and laughs, but it

is clear this is a serious subject for her. Katie also identified STI transmission risks as one of

the negative aspects of the industry and, similarly to Louise, she did not approve of escorting

due to the increased risk. She blamed younger women coming into the industry for increased

risks:

> There are health risks. I mean, no more so than if you're just….really, we're getting tested every 12-14 days, but y'know; you're exposed to STDs sometimes – chlamydia, gonorrhoea, are in the industry. That's why the industry is very closed. They really frown upon escorting. Not because they care about escorting, but it's the STDs. And so, if you end up…I mean, first time in my life I had an STD was in

the industry. So that's and that's – but we're tested every 12 days, so they catch it right away. But that's one of those things where they go… 'Great! And now I have to be exposed to antibiotics, and that's an issue.

Frequent exposure to antibiotics can be considered body punishing, due to the side effects and to their potential interactions with other medications. Katie also raises an important point here. If STI transmission happens, it is picked up quickly and treated, and a line of transmission from patient zero can be identified. However, in the general population STI testing is lower than it is in the pornography industry and STI transmission is on the rise. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), rates of gonorrhea, chlamydia and syphilis infection and diagnosis increased drastically in 2017 in the US (2018). In Ireland, a similar picture emerges with increased rates of transmission and diagnosis and shockingly, Ireland has a HIV diagnosis rate of one every 18 hours (HSE, 2019). However, the straight mainstream pornography industry in LA has not had an on-set HIV infection since 2000, and an industry shutdown operates when a positive result is produced.  Compared to Ireland, the pornography industry's response to tackling HIV infections appears to be faster, thorough, and more comprehensive (Act Up Dublin, 2019).


### 6.7.4. Measure B

While some production companies use condoms and some don't, the testing system is generally every 12-14 days with rapid results. In 2012, efforts to force performers to wear protective measures such as condoms but also rumoured to include mandatory eye goggles and more, was introduced in LA (Miles, 2012). This was known as Measure B, or Prop 60. The main public proponent of this legislation was Michael Weinstein of AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF) who argued that this bill was needed to protect performers. Some performers publicly supported the bill, such as Jenna Jameson and Aurora Snow. Snow argued that while condoms are not foolproof and can make shooting scenes take longer due to frequent changes, she advocated for mandatory condom use on a safety basis (2012). Director Nica Noelle also wrote

about changing her mind and favouring condom use in the hope of preventing more common

STIs such as gonorrhea. Noelle argued that while these STIs were treatable, there were still

consequences from exposure such as infertility and increased risk of contracting HIV (2015).

Sophie also described the impact on the realities on set as a result of this measure, arguing

that she often used 15-20 condoms in a scene due to the different changes in positions. She

outlined different impacts for male and female performers:

> So if you could just imagine being a guy and having to take that on and off, it actually
> hurts them, it rubs them completely raw. And, as a female, it doesn't feel as great,
> and it enhances your chances of, you know, getting things like UTIs because of the
> lube on the condom. It causes problems because of the way that we have performer
> sex what we call opening up to the camera, the bodies are turned a little, so it's more
> hitting the vaginal wall, than actually the way you would do it in your personal life.
> So you have a higher chance of it popping, so it defeats the whole entire purpose of
> the problem.

Sophie is supported by Amanda who outlines how she is susceptible to UTIs from condom use,

and would prefer not to use them. Injuries and harm from condom use is a nuance of on-set

sexual practices that also needs to be included in labour analyses. This is another example of

the work in pornography being body punishing- performers can get injured through both using

and not using condoms.

Both Sophie and Emma argued that Measure B was a violation of First Amendment rights, and

that their work in pornography is a form of artistic expression in which they chose to engage.

Emma felt it violated her agency:

> I think that you absolutely can make a First Amendment argument about that. I think
> that you could because what I do on camera is artistic. It is a form of personal
> expression, and condoms are not a form of my personal expression. And they have
> not been, for many years. So to insert that in the name of my health and safety,

when I am aware of the risks that I'm taking and I'm choosing to take those risks, as an adult, then that is my choice.

Performer Tasha Reign also spoke publicly against the measure, and believed it was a question of agency and choice: 'I want to be able to say: I'm a sex worker. I have a choice in the way that I protect my genitals. This is a huge issue for me' (La Ganga, 2016). Measures like this appear to negate the efforts the industry has put in place by themselves, for themselves. Sophie notes that the testing system they rely on was introduced voluntarily within the industry. This denial of sex worker's agency and subjectivity is problematic in how sex workers are viewed as capable of making their own informed choices about what is best for their own health. Katie expanded on this further, believing that this action was designed to shut down the industry and like her peers, suggested that this impacted on her agency:

> But the bigger issue to me is that the government thinks they can legislate us as pieces of equipment. They are basically trying to say that porn performers are not human performers. Because, really, pornography is protected under free speech and art, right? So, basically, we should be allowed to make Art however we want as long as we're all consenting; we're all of the age of majority, right? By them saying 'We're going to legislate you, and we're going to tell you what you can do to your body, it's a terrible, terrible precedent, because…and I don't think people realise this, the smut industries are always the litmus of freedom in a society, and it's always…every single, major fascist government, the first thing they do is shut down smut industries.

Similar to Sophie, Emma asked if there was an ulterior agenda of money or politics behind the AHF campaign. However, Holly appeared to be more in favour of the bill and argued that it would be good for viewers to see condoms on screen and argues that the current system isn't working for the majority of STIs:

> Not only is it good to teach people, it's good for the PH balance, the vaginal health, I mean, it's also good for – it's good for – that level of extra protection. I mean, even though we're getting tested every two weeks, we still get STIs, we still have these things, and one year I took antibiotics like eight times. Do you know how bad that is for you? If we were all wearing condoms, that wouldn't have happened.

It does appear that the measure perpetuates and mirrors objectification through discourse and the wider feminist debates on pornography. Despite hearing mixed responses to the bill, proponents such as AHF ignored performers who advocated for their own system, and denied the ability of performers to protect themselves- or even speak for themselves. Prop 60 was notable as many performers participated in public protests and events to communicate their position to Californian voters. It was an opportunity for performers to speak about their own experiences rather than have an outsider speak over them about the realities of pornography.

Critically, the bill also allowed for any Californian resident to sue a performer if they witnessed a scene that did not show condom use- thus learning the performers' real name and address. This could open up the performer to real life violence that has the potential to impact marginalised performers (such as queer or ethnic minority performers who are at increased risk of violence in general society already) disproportionately. Ava outlines below how her family was targeted by viewers who stalked her; thus the threat of real world violence is not imaginary. There is a notable lack of discourse within feminist circles about this aspect of the bill; a conspicuous silence that simultaneously speaks bluntly. If the women in pornography are perceived to be victims by anti-pornography feminists, one would imagine a threat to their safety would be worthy of speech. The objectification through instrumentality and fungibility of the performers appears to have been placed at a higher value than their safety and subjectivity.

It is also important to note here that the power dynamic of expert vs lived experience is at play here too, as outlined in Chapter Four. In this case the alleged expertise of an external group is given more credibility than the performers with the lived experience, and performers have to fight to be heard.

### 6.8. Fans, Protesters and Saviours

Performers interact with fans and protesters as part of their public lives, both online and at conventions, and performers discussed how violence appears to be present in part of these experiences.

### 6.8.1. Introduction

The performers reported mixed experiences in relation to interactions with fans. Some also detailed their encounters with anti-pornography protesters and religious groups. Responses showed a range of violence inflicted on performers from fans and protestors alike. It is important to include as a facet of violence when looking at the nuanced realities of violence and the experiences of performers in the pornography industry.

### 6.9. Positive experiences with Fans

Performers described many different positive aspects to meeting fans. Some reported that it reaffirmed their decision to work in the industry, such as Sophie who felt that meeting fans allowed her to realise many people were sex positive:

> I live by a very 'to each their own policy' and sometimes I think that this industry helped me do that. So, because it made me more open-minded. I came from this really closed-minded place, and this close-minded community, back home, growing up. Then I come out here and I realise that the way I used to think was so, you know, backwards.

Sophie reported growing up in a religious environment that had strict gender roles for men and women, and her work in the industry gave her a form of freedom and opportunities for new experiences and conversations around sex. Emma described a similar positive experience where she felt her choices to stay in the industry were right due to the responses she received.

She stated that she found fans gave her a perspective on how to be empathic with people who might struggle with their desires:

> Because a lot of what I do is in the fetish world, there's often a level of appreciation to it, because they simply aren't finding it anywhere else. And so, a lot of the times, they would ask me questions like 'How can I talk to my girlfriend about this?' or 'Is there something wrong with me?' or 'Why do I feel so bad about myself?' 'Can I change this about myself?' And so, I started to really empathise with the guys who are watching this, I was like 'Oh shit! These are human beings and I started putting myself in their shoes.

Emma notes that her interest in this aspect of her work and the responses she received led her to making sexuality related educational material. This in turn led to more positive feedback from fans who would tell her she had helped them explore their desire on their own or with a partner, and accept themselves. Emma appears to enjoy the level of appreciation and interaction with her fans, and demonstrates empathy with them. Emma outlines the power and satisfaction that she gained from this:

> It's these moments where it's like it's so powerful and it's so important for them. To be able to make that impact in their lives and to take everything that I've studied and learned and that can actually help another human being with their pain and shame – that, to me, is why I do this. I love performing, and it's fun, but without all that richness of that part of it, I probably wouldn't have stuck around.

Discourse on the experiences of performers sometimes focuses on the authenticity of performers' pleasure. Here, Emma's answer adds a nuance to this body of knowledge in looking at the psychological pleasure to be found, in addition to on screen physical pleasure. This psychological pleasure can be on or off screen as Emma demonstrates, and can be considered a motivating factor for continued involvement in the industry in addition to the motivating factors for continuation that Abbotts' study outlines.

Louise reported that she had fans travel just to see her, and she described positive experiences with fans during the event:

> Every single fan that I've met today has greeted me with a smile, I mean, they were so excited to meet me. I mean vibrant smile. Just big hugs and just like, so ecstatic to see me. And there's actually a girl – she flew all the way from St Louis to meet me, and I didn't see her today. And I'm going to invite her to drinks. (..) So, you know, I just…I don't ever want to feel like I'm afraid of them. I enjoy my fans. It's fun. They make me feel like I'm a rockstar, they do, they really do. They make me feel like I'm somebody. Least, even if it's just for five minutes.

Louise's throwaway comment about feeling like 'somebody' for just five minutes may be a hint of how fame can give a person the feeling of self-worth, but she seems to recognise the fleeting nature of this. Being perceived as a 'rockstar' may provide excitement and validation. This self-esteem boost may be a motivator for a performer's continued engagement in the industry, and maintaining an online presence may supplement this feeling in between real life meetings with fans.

Hannah reported a similar experience with fans travelling to see her, and felt the event was a good way to meet fans:

> I think this is the best opportunity for the fans and their stars to meet each other in a safe and sound environment! I had fans flying across the ocean all the way from Europe just to meet me for 5 min time and have a picture together, that's amazing!

This level of access for fans has changed since the early days of the industry, and has transformed the nature of performer/ fan relationships. Kerry O. Ferris posits that when fans meet their celebrity idols 'worlds collide and dichotomies collapse' (2001, 26). This blurring of realities contains what Ferris refers to as an 'interactional moment' (ibid) where fan and celebrity meet in person and have an effect on each other. In the two examples above, this is a positive interactional moment, but it also has the potential to be a negative interaction, as

documented further in this section. Louise's interactional moment gives her a positive self-esteem boost, and the fans get the potential of special treatment such as going for a drink with her, also giving them a satisfactory interactional moment.

## 6.9. Negative experiences with fans

In relation to negative experiences, performers reported physical violence from fans, along with feeling tired and overwhelmed at having to be 'on' for the whole conference. Some performers also reported negative interactions with fans via social media.

Several different conventions of varying capacities occur across the US where fans can meet performers in person. The biggest one of these is the five-day Adult Entertainment Expo (AEE) in Las Vegas, which culminates in the AVN award show. This expo is also where the interviews for this research project also took place. Chauntelle Tibbals, an academic who has also volunteered at the AVNs, has documented her observations of fans at these events. Arguing that fan and performer interactions became 'the strangest mix of human adoration and disgust'- she describes this as an 'intoxicating yet toxic cocktail' (2015, 108). Given that sex straddles boundaries of pleasure and disgust on a frequently oscillating basis, it is not surprising that such an environment can produce this cocktail of energy.

The conventions are an unusual event- It is a restructuring of the interaction with the performer from the imagined to the real. The fan usually watches the performer in private and this is now transformed into a public interaction. As most fans will never get to meet their celebrity idols, in whichever industry they exist, this meeting marks a pivoting from fantasy to reality; at least in terms of being able to speak to or touch the idol in question.

In relation to the AEE/AVNs, this opportunity occurs in an environment where sex is loudly uttered- it is displayed in screens and spoken about by fellow attendees, exhibitors, and the performers. Sex is in the air- tangible to some, perceived to be dizzyingly within reach to others. Sexual shame also takes a backseat to public proclamations of pleasure. This is not a usual occurrence for many people who experience sex as a private activity that is often silent or stigmatised in the public discourse they may be exposed to. Thus, while Tibbals writes that she observed some attendees to be 'hypnotised by lust or joy or fascination' (2015, p.108), we can see how stupefaction can happen in such an environment. But this unsettlement of the boundaries between real and imagined fantasy worlds can result in negative consequences for the performer, one of which can be physical violence.

### 6.9.2. Physical violence from fans

Several performers reported being physically assaulted on conventions by fans. Louise spoke about how fans 'try and cop a feel', and Holly reported a serious assault:

> Fans, sometimes they think that you're not human, really. They treat you like you're an object. Really There was one year, I was smacked so severely on my bottom that I couldn't work for two weeks because a fan just walked up to me and smacked my ass.

Holly explained that this occurred at a convention, and felt it was a result of being objectified by the fans:

> But, here's the thing; all they know is what they see, and we appear to be these sub-human type of y'know sex-crazed, sub-human, not your typical woman. So they think they can treat you however they want.

This objectification links back to the issues raised in Chapter Five where the performers discussed how industry outsiders can see them solely as their performer persona. This objectification may contribute to a feeling of assaults like this being acceptable by the perpetrator. Drawing further on Ferris' work on fan and celebrity interactions, the meeting between fan and celebrity is a locus where 'the ordinary and the extraordinary meet, reality and fantasy merge, and character and actor occupy one body' (ibid). Fans who have maladaptive attachment to celebrities may struggle to see the performer as a distinct person from their pornography persona. An environment such as the expo may add to that enmeshment, given the sexually charged atmosphere and the fan seeing the performer when they are utilising their pornography persona to interact with fans and employers. Thus it may be possible that power dynamics between fan and performer may also be affected by this interactional moment, and may be skewed in favour of the fan due to this objectification.

The expos can operate as an unequal power dynamic interaction in many ways. The fan has intimate knowledge of the performers' naked body engaged in sexual activity- the performer does not generally have this knowledge of the fan. Ferris refers to this power imbalance as the 'fundamental asymmetry of knowledge' (2011, p.28) in mainstream fan/celebrity studies and this can be applied to this context also. The performer may also be in varying outfits or varying degrees of nudity, while the fan is generally fully clothed. The fan is generally there just for their own personal pleasure, whereas the performer is there for primarily networking, securing future employment, selling products and so on. Ava and Sophie spoke about being exhausted and feeling 'on' all the time for cameras and fans, and Tibbals notes the interactions with fans left performers 'at least a little tender' (2015, p.109). This points to a huge use of energy needed to navigate this process; however, the fan does not experience this drain on energy. While the performer does have power by exchanging signatures, photos or products for money, they also experience having to navigate this power imbalance and protecting themselves from fans who

overstep the mark. Emma outlined how she navigates this through setting limits to the interaction:

> Usually, you put down a boundary, which is another thing I have learned about, through doing all this, is to learn to put up a boundary, and say 'thank you, but no thank you.' So, most of them are fine.

The accessibility of the performers proved to be an issue with fans who refused to respect boundaries. Ava outlined how performers engaged in public events during the convention and then had nightclub parties to attend, and how tiring she found this process. Holly documents how this accessibility made it easy for harassment to happen:

> It's great until you get a fan who will not leave you alone. An obsessive fan. We had one guy, he followed me around. How many hours? All day, he probably followed me around all day, and then showed up at the nightclub that I was at, and then, he just….a kind of over-enthusiastic fan. And he makes me worry, he makes me worry because those are the kind of dangerous ones. I've also had fans that are, they create these relationships. They think that we're an item somehow. And that's been a little hard. So I always try to greet everyone with a little sort of…arm's length but at the same time, I try to make everyone feel special. So it's hard – it's a hard balance.

Ferris utilises the work of Horton and Wohl to note how the relationship between celebrity and fan can form a 'para-social relationship' which leads to an 'illusion of intimacy' (1956, cited in Ferris, 2011, p.27). Holly's answer references this framing from fans who have blurred this boundary and are enmeshed in this illusion. Given that the fan sees the performer in 'intimate' moments on screen, this illusion could potentially be stronger than for mainstream celebrities, but this is an area of research that is glaringly absent in current pornography research. Extensive rigorous research would be needed to examine this speculation and explore this intersection of violence and pornography.

One way that performers have attempted to offset the asymmetry of the performer-fan relationship is through monetisation. Riley Reid operates a premium Snapchat account where fans can pay her to send naked photos of themselves or a written message. This disrupts the power dynamic of the fan seeing the performer naked while they remain clothed, and the performer can retain power by charging for this experience. However, this may blur the lines for some fans who feel this is a way to get unhealthily close to the performer. As this is a new phenomenon, it will be interesting to see how this plays out in future interactions between fans and performers.

Amanda reveals that she experiences fans who feel they can compete with her co-stars and tell her: 'Oh man! I have the biggest dick – I could give you so many orgasms', which Amanda states she rolls her eyes at. This exchange highlights the illusion of intimacy- that the fan thinks the performer would be receptive to this 'offer', and that it is acceptable to make it in the first place. Given that such an offer would be considered unacceptable by a lot of women by an unknown man, this illusion of intimacy mixed with objectification as outlined by Holly, leads a fan like this to leapfrog general societal norms and make such a statement.

Describing the motivations of fans further, Ferris argues that many are trophy seeking (2011 p.28). While the positive side of this is an autograph or a story about the meeting, there may be individuals that see a negative interaction as a trophy. For these fans, an assault could also be considered a trophy- it provides a story, functions as a trophy of a physical interaction- but also a psychological trophy: the thrill of power. For those that Amanda describes above, giving a performer 'so many orgasms' would also function as a trophy on many levels for a fan, and the performers' negative reaction to such a statement can also function as a physiological trophy of sorts for those who seek a negative response from the performer. Dangerous fans, that performers like Holly fear, may seek more solid trophies of more violent assaults or worse.

While rare, murders of celebrities by fans do exist and cannot be discounted as possibilities by the performer when assessing a risk from a fan.

Meloy, Mohandie, and Green (2008) note that while research on stalking is relatively new, starting in the 2000's, many questions about the motivations behind those who stalk or go on to attack a public figure remain unanswered. Studies on stalking would benefit from the inclusion of data on attacks on pornography performers, and this focus may unearth links between stalking and sex. Nuances in this area may include looking at the stalker/attackers personal sexual history or beliefs, and if any intersections such as race, gender, age are significant for both the demographic of the stalker and the victim. This is critical in order to look at risk management for performers and expand upon the episteme of violence and pornography. Amanda was cognisant of the effect of sex on the relationship between celebrity and fans:

> Because fans can be crazy sometimes. I would say, porn fans in general are crazier than most fans. Like I said, they think differently. They think things about you. They think you're this crazy nymphomaniac that's up for anything. And that's not the case.

Tibbals distinguishes the obsessive fan from a more mundane fan and describes seeing this kind of obsession up close:

> And then there were the super fans. Rarer than the assholes, some of these folks were genuinely nice sorts who has just slipped a little too far into the fantasy. They knew intimate details and personal information, they remembered birthdays, they were pleasant and polite, but just beneath the surface they were also slightly unhinged. It was subtle and unsettling. Some super fans were openly raw and completely over the edge, the kind of people who made a woman's spine freeze when she saw them inching their way to the front of the line. The kind of people who sincerely believed they *knew* their favourite performer, and one day she would be theirs, no matter what (pp.109-110).

In relation to pornography, given that the performer is ''present'' in the fans' experience mainly at times of sexual arousal, this would point to a need for sex to be included as a factor in studies on stalking and obsessive fans. The intimate/graphic depiction of the labouring pornographic body may be translated to intimate 'knowledge' of the performer as a person. Currently, as with much in pornography research, this data is missing and speculation takes the place of scientific data. This area has a high potential for epistemological violence to be committed due to this speculation over science and thus rigorous, reflexive research is required.

### 6.9.3. Interactions over Social Media

While social media has been beneficial for performers in building fan bases and securing employment opportunities, both for self-employment and for working with existing companies, it also comes with a variety of experiences of fan interactions. Performers can post wish lists where fans can buy items for the performer and often receive a personalised photo of the performer wearing the item. While this may be financially beneficial to the performer, it may blur the boundaries for the fan who feels an illusion of intimacy as referenced above.

Although performers such as Stormy Daniels utilise their Twitter account to fight stigmatisation, some participants in this thesis reported that social media was a source of violence for them due to threats from fans and protesters.

Louise reported receiving death threats via Twitter:

> I've had fans that have threatened my life. I have fans that have written me – gotten really angry because I haven't answered back in time, or it has not gotten the response they want.

Louise reports that the result of this is a lack of willingness to engage with fans on social media, which may have the effect of affecting her career or financial opportunities if a social media presence is not maintained. Additionally, Louise notes that one fan had threatened suicide and blamed her for this feeling. Louise describes her management of this is to report threats to Twitter, and to encourage her other fans not to engage:

> Like if I even see anyone being mean to anyone else, on my feed, I say 'I'm out. Like, you guys need to stop and I'm leaving the conversation, and everyone else should, too.' I don't allow it, and the rest of the people who are on my Twitter feed, they know to protect the person who is being bullied, and to leave the conversation. Everyone should block that person, and that is it. And it's basically – that's how it is. You should never feed into anyone who is being negative and bullying a person.

Louise utilises blocking on social media as boundary setting, and the validation of fans supporting her to enforce her boundaries. She states that she receives more harassment online than in real life, but claims some of these are hypocrites:

> But it's also been the case that the one guy who was harassing me the most was also the biggest hypocrite. Like one second he's preaching to me about God. The next second, he's talking to me about sex.

Tibbals outlines the issues around power and social media and how performers navigate it:

> They respond to the insults, the kindnesses, and the requests for birthday shout-outs. Not always and not perfectly but far more frequently than their mainstream counterparts. This is because, in the current age of porn production, proof of a large fan base, as evidenced by a considerable social media following, provides an independent performer with bargaining power and creative control. Career negotiations aren't similarity impacted or improved for mainstream celebrities (2015, p.112)

Thus, the visibility of performers online appears to be a double edged sword. Fans may seek a trophy in the form of online interaction, but some may be more interested in provoking a negative interaction than a positive one. The online accessibility of performers can build on the

illusion of intimacy and the para-social relationship and can thus function as a site for potential violence through negative trophy collecting. This in turn can mean further labour for the performer in responding to negative interactions, or managing their behaviour as Louise outlines, which can have a potential for an impact on the mental health of the performer and their feelings of safety.

Like Louise, Ava also blocked fans who get abusive on social media. However, she describes a disturbing incident when a fan violated her boundaries between her professional and private life:

> I did have a fan send a package with my movies, once, to my ex-fiancé's house, so that his mom would see it. That's happened to a lot of adult actresses, actually, a lot. It's pretty normal. Pretty much everyone I know has a story about something like that happening. (...) I mean it's terrible. Like, I try to tell my family if they could make themselves as least trackable as possible on the Internet, it's in their own best interests.

This experience differs from fans being frustrated at not having the response the want from the celebrity, but veer into *punishing* the performer. The issue of misogyny cannot be discounted and warrants special consideration here. Ava states this has happened to *actresses*, and doesn't mention male performers. Her framing of this as 'normal' implies that this is a common occurrence that has been discussed amongst performers. In-depth research into this would be essential to examine this nuance of violence and if its disproportionately impacts female performers, and if the gender of the perpetrator also plays a role. Meloy, Mohandie and Green point to a Dutch study that examined Dutch public figures experiences with stalking, and they note the majority of victims were male (2008, p.196). It would be interesting to see if this gendered experience plays out in the experiences of pornography performers.

Future research should also examine whether perpetrators of stalking were influenced by stereotypes of performers which are partly fuelled by stigmatisation. Situating this nuance in context with the rest of the perpetrators experiences may build a bigger picture of the perpetrators and their behaviour towards women in their lives, or towards mainstream celebrities. Motivation, means, manner and material content of threats are considered critical by Meloy, Mohnadie, and Green (2008, p.7) in the examination of communicated threats, and in regards to pornography it would be interesting to see where misogyny does or does not fit into this criterion. Additionally, a comparison of these concerns with the experiences of those in other industries would be constructive for contextual analysis of the issue. Tibbals argues that sex is a 'special case' (2015, p.112) when looking at blurred boundaries with celebrities and social media, and pornography studies certainly allow for a deeper analysis of these boundaries.

## 6.10. Protesters

Performers also report negative interactions with anti-pornography protesters, both online and at expo events. Hannah reported that she had seen protesters at events and award shows, and stated she found this 'upsetting', but had not been targeted directly. Holly reported a disturbing experience at an event in Texas:

> Walking into the building, these crazy religious anti-porn activists, they were throwing things, spitting…

Spitting can be perceived to be a particularly violent act in society. It is linked to disgust, which is also closely related to a strict moral/social code for acceptable behaviour. Miller argues that disgust is also linked to danger, stating: 'disgust must be accompanied by ideas of a particular kind of danger, the danger inherent in pollution and contamination, the danger of defilement'

(1997, p.8). This follows Rubin's ideas that the line dividing good sex and bad sex protects us from danger and the fear that if the boundary is not maintained, danger will breach the boundary. Danger is also part of anti-pornography discourse, with pornography framed as a danger to women and children, and to male consumers who are deemed to be groomed by it. Similarly, disgust at the images on screen or at the presence of bodily fluids is also a part of pornography discourse. In Holly's example, spitting is weaponised to express that the person being spat at is less than- an object worthy of a visual display of disgust. Here the women surely cannot be perceived as victims, but as deviants, something worthy of violence being inflicted on them.

Daniel Kelly argues that disgust is also a response to the perceived violating of traditional social norms, and sex that is considered to be deviant is also perceived to be a 'disgust elicitor' (2011, p.31). The people spitting at Holly can be argued to view the performer as the disgust elicitor rather than focusing on the act itself as they express violence through spitting and throwing items at the person. The protesters came to violently tell the performers to keep away from them and the rest of society. Their actions frame the performer as Other, and worthy of violence, and they attempt to reinforce the boundaries of 'good' and bad, both in relation to sex and the people engaged in 'bad' sex.

With regards to online protesting, Katie outlined how she experienced interactions on social media with those opposed to pornography and how she used her platform to argue her case:

> But, for me, the anti-porn activists and the feminists, I have really gotten into it with them. What they don't realise is that they are aiding and abetting real patriarchy – they don't even realise that they are doing it. They don't realise that they are doing it. They are so insane, that they don't realise they are shutting down other women's work and societal freedom because it makes them uncomfortable. They say that they are fighting the patriarchy. And I say 'No you are agents of the patriarchy. You don't get how this works.' You may not like my decisions, but it's not your right to tell

me that I can't do that. Look, these gals want to sit in universities, have conniptions over the patriarchy – I don't care. But when they are actively trying to shut down my industry? Then we have a problem.

Katie's use of social media to defend her work and autonomy is not uncommon amongst performers. Social media functions as a source of discourse for her that she utilises to challenge discourse that comes from other sources such as universities. This can have implications for looking at discourse that is perceived to be respected and acceptable, as outlined in Chapter Four. The unequal power between discourse from universities/traditional knowledge sources, and discourse from lived experiences shared via new knowledge sources such as social media also needs to be included in research.

Additionally, while fans may gain pleasure and power from seeking trophies that may result from negative interactions, protesters may also seek the same trophy of a performer 'getting into it' as Katie does. Again, research in this area is sorely needed, to examine what satisfactions protesters receive from arguing with performers online, what their motivations are, and how these motivations are expressed. Research that examines this approach would also benefit from exploring if such interactions are organised socially through private messaging or private social media groups, and thus how the sense of a collective trophy of a negative interaction functions for the group that is protesting.

## 6.11. Saviours

In addition to negative interactions with fans and protesters, performers also reported interactions with religious groups who preached about rescue and salvation and placed an emphasis on performers leaving the industry to avail of said salvation. Reactions to these

groups varied, with Ava stating she does not 'bother with it', and Sophie stating that she tries to 'let things roll off my back, because that is the only way you're ever going to make it.' Ava believed newer performers were targeted, and Louise builds on this, while outlining her response to it:

> For me, I kind of laugh at it. I kind of giggle. But, then, I'm used to it. For girls that are just kind of getting in to the industry, they kind of…I think they find it offensive. You know; 'You don't support me in my job, you don't support me in porn'. They find it offensive. For me, I find it funny. You know, it never bothered me. It's…it's their job, too. They feel like they're doing a public service.

Louise's length of experience in the pornography industry appears to have given her the tools to utilise humour as a coping mechanism in relation dealing with these interactions, but recognises that newer performers may have a different experience. Louise describes her experiences with religious groups, giving an example of her use of humour:

> Oh yeah! Oh yeah! Jesus has been trying to save me a long time. That little baby Jesus, he's not gone. Heck! Older Jesus – he's been trying to save me.

Louise stated that the religious groups wanted to 'save' performers, and when asked what she thought the process of saving would entail, she outlines:

> Get us out of the line of work we're doing. Bring us to a better lifestyle. Cleanse us, you know, help us get a better life, get us better knowledge of life, once we get out and learn how we were 'brainwashed' to get us into this way of living. We can, basically, cleanse our life, find God and get better, you know? We're sick, right now, very sick, obviously, and we ought to be able to have a normal job. That's number one; have a normal job, have a healthy life, you know, everything that we're doing is wrong; it's wrong.

Louise believed that these groups offered financial assistance to those who wanted to return to education but this came with the caveat of also leaving the industry. Again here we see the agency of performers being dismissed and the performers are framed as unhealthy and

abnormal. They are positioned as in need of rescue to be brought back to being on the right side of the boundary between 'good' and 'bad'. Clearly this is also an unequal relationship where power rests with the rescuer. Returning again to MacKinnon's analysis of *Man Fucks Woman. Subject. Verb. Object.* (1989, p.124), we can see this objectification at play here too: *Rescuer Saves Performer. Subject. Verb. Object.*

Sophie mentioned a group called Jesus Loves Porn Stars, and this group were present also at the convention at the time of these interviews. This group handed out religious pamphlets and t-shirts to attendees, and had a booth and a photo area on the convention floor. Ava mentions that another religious group would hand out bags of makeup to performers:

> And they'd walk around and give you these cheap-ass, like, dollar-store make-up. And it was the weirdest thing and I didn't know…I didn't know anything about it at the time, and I was like 'thank you', and they were like 'Oh we have a booth over there' and I'm like 'Oh cool!' and just in wandering around I'm like 'oh hi! What are you guys all about?' and it's like 'oh you shouldn't be doing…what are you doing in porn? Don't you know you're at risk of STDs and herpes and this and this…?' and I'm like… 'Why are you people here?' And I don't know why they let them in, but that's AVNs, they just want to make money. But that to me was, it's just bizarre that they are allowed in the space. But it wasn't offensive or anything, it was just…ugh!...stupid.

Louise went into more detail about the bags contents:

> Make up. Like, you'll get a little lip-gloss; the card – obviously – for contact info, to call; a little rubber bracelet that says 'Beloved – Beautiful – Acceptance'. It's the words that are annoying. Or sometimes, they'll say 'Saved – Beloved – Wanted' – you know.

These slogans imply that the performer is not accepted or wanted as they are, and must abide by the rescuers demands in order to receive this acceptance. The items contained within are also societal markers of femininity -makeup and jewellery- accoutrements which women often have to wear to meet societal beauty standards.

Sophie describes an interaction with one of these groups as a negative and upsetting one. She gave an interview to a person who did not disclose their position at the start of the interview:

> I had that interview where she ended the interview with the terms 'love yourself, and be safe'. And I just took that as a major stab because – do you know what? – I've never loved myself more than I do now. And it's like I said, because I don't feel ashamed.

When asked how this felt, Sophie stated:

> I left the convention yesterday after it happened because I felt so degraded. Now, I have a very strong sense of self-worth and I value myself and I am happy and I don't like when somebody kind of comes and kind of ambushes me and tries to take that away from me, you know?

This experience is one that treats the performers' boundaries as involatile, and that their experiences are a universal negative experience, and thus the performer is objectified through fungibility. This experience is also a violent one since she caused emotional trauma to the Sophie. Given that she had to take time out of work to feel better, this can also affect the performer professionally and financially. The asymmetry of this experience strips the performer of power and exposes them to a risk of trauma the interviewer did not experience.

**6.12. Conclusion**

This section provides a nuanced look at violence and how it operates on set, through sex acts, and from interactions with fans and protestors. These nuances are often missing from discourse on pornography and violence and thus this particularist knowledge allows for the development of discourse in this area. Performers appeared to defend pornography against accusations of it being body punishing, but also revealed several examples of this. These examples ranged

from hair loss, delayed defecation, anal prolapse, physical exhaustion, mental exhaustion, STI transmission, side effects from frequent exposure to antibiotics, and injuries from both using condoms and not using them. While performers such as Stoya argue that injury is a part of work in general, some of these injuries may be more frequent in the pornography industry than in other industries.

Interactions with fans could be divided into pleasant or distressing experiences, from death threats to exhaustion at multi day expos and maintaining a persona for this length of time. Research into fan relationships would benefit from incorporating data on stalking and applying a gender analysis. The issue of gaining positive or negative trophies from performers is one that needs to be considered from fans, protests and saviours, both online and in real life. Performers also gain trophies from fan interactions, in the form of self-esteem boosts and fans supporting their career through social media engagement. The performer-fan relationship is often asymmetrical in terms of risk, labour, and visibility. However, performers are now using social media to address this imbalance.

Additionally, the labour needed to be deployed by the performer to deal with risks must also be considered when looking at discourse on labour and pornography. Rojek argues that the public persona of a celebrity is a 'staged act', where a persona is presented and a significant proportion of real self is held back (2004, p.11). The labour involved in this process must also be included in any analysis of labor and pornography.

Similar to Queen's ideas on erotophilia and erotophobia outlined in Chapter Five, Rodgerson and Wilson ask for an examination of the subjective values underlying feminist anti-pornography claims around rough sex. They postulate that perhaps the reason for the focus on

sexual images rather than other images depiction women in non-sexual but still 'degrading' situations is either political or personal:

> Is the underlying reason that they themselves feel revulsion at the more sexually explicit images, or is it that they believe that a campaign against pornography can gain wider support in a way that no other recent feminist cause has done? (1991, p.28).

This method of weaponising disgust to build on this power in order to captivate audiences and advance political causes. Given that disgust is closely tied to fear, and sex is fraught with fear, shame and stigma, the possibility that pornography can be used as a personal or political tool for power is not inconceivable.  When universalistic perspectives facilitate the 'equation of the sexually arousing with the sexually degrading' (Rodgerson and Wilson, 1991, p.29) nuanced, calm conversations can be rare. These fears mean that disgust can obscure conversations of consent, labour and the body. Therefore, contemporary pornography research must be wary of research lead by fear and disgust and examine how these twin factors influence or stifle discourse.

**Chapter Seven: Conclusion**

**7.1. Introduction**

This PhD research set out to explore female performers' experiences in the American mainstream pornography industry, in the context of feminist discourses on these experiences. This topic was chosen as upon reviewing the literature on the experiences of female pornography performers, it was observable that performers' voices were glaringly absent from this discourse. This paucity of information from those with firsthand experience means that ethical and inclusive conversations about the realities of life in the industries are foreclosed. Since the research in this area was first developed in the 1970s, there have been four studies which directly speak to performers (Abbott, 2000; Miller-Young, 2014; Griffith et al., 2012; Griffith et al., 2013). As discussed in Chapter Two, these studies primarily focus on motivations for entering and remaining in the industry, and the issue of childhood sexual abuse. Only Miller-Young's work focuses exclusively on the experiences of black performers.

This gap in knowledge is at high risk of perpetuating epistemological violence, given that any theories on the performers would be thus be predominantly speculation without data, as Teo argues (2008). This research project set out to explore various aspects of the actual experiences of performers such as the realities of being on set, the possible impact of their job on their bodies, and their interactions with fans. This information was then compared with feminist discourse on these topics.

The possibility of asking more personal questions such as asking about experiences of abuse was considered. However, as outlined in Chapter Four, it was decided that this was unethical to ask. Much of feminist discourse on pornography focuses on violence in the industry, but it became clear throughout this process that violence is also perpetuated by discourse. This

violence manifested through the contribution to stigma, and objectification through epistemological violence, which was explored in Chapter Two and Chapter Four.

## 7.2. Research Findings

Through the use of semi-structured interviews conducted at the AEE/AVN expo and award show in Las Vegas in January 2016, this research set out to explore performers' experiences. It became clear through a reading of the data from performers and the existing literature that the dominant theme that emerged was violence. This theme presented itself in a multitude of nuanced ways.

Firstly, violence was revealed to be a central motif of feminist discourse on pornography. Violence in pornography has been discussed since the work of Dworkin and MacKinnon in the 1980s- and has continued into contemporary anti-pornography feminist discourse. Research in earlier pornography studies focused on the effects of pornography which were viewed as connected to violence. As discussed in Chapter Two, more recent studies have looked at the issue of violent content within pornography, and consumers' reviews of this content. No studies have looked at how performers view their work in relation to violence. In light of forty years of feminist discourse on pornography, this is not merely a gap; it is a vast chasm in knowledge. The purpose of the current research project was not to build a bridge to cover the entirety of this chasm, but to provide foundational bricks for the construction of the bridge. Much more research is needed to continue this process.

Chapter Two provided a short history of feminist discourses on pornography, and explored some existing research on the topic of violence and pornography, outlining some methodological issues. This chapter also explored the concept of celebrity in relation to the

performer, and how the trope of the 'porn star' has changed since the industry's Golden Age. This section explained the use of social media in this change, and the manner in which performers have harnessed the power of building their brand and translated this into longevity in their careers.

This chapter also introduced epistemological violence to objectification theory. Through this lens an analysis of power dynamics in academic research was explored. Chapters Two and Three outlined how the research process can be problematic and unethical, and can contribute to violence through objectification. These chapters called for an analysis of the power dynamics present in the research process, and outlined how claims of objectivity are problematic. The researcher must actively work to avoid contributing to harm for research participants. Ethics must also be at the centre of the research process, and this PhD calls for an emphasis on research ethics to be of critical importance in future research on pornography and its workers. These ethics should lay the emphasis on the reflexivity of the researcher, and include an examination of personal biases and motivations for conducting research in this area, a close reading and understanding of the terminology used, and an analysis of the impact of these terms on the researched population.

Therefore, an understanding of how power operates through language is crucial for ethical research that does not contribute to harm or epistemological violence. Research on pornography could benefit from a prioritisation of participatory research methodology. The inclusion of performers in all stages of research, from design to analysis, should be considered as this counteracts the objectification of the performer through the research process. Taking this approach ensures the subjectivity of the performers is respected and allows for them to be considered experts in their own lived experiences.

Chapter Four outlined how discourse can contribute to violence. This process consists of an asymmetrical power balance which can impact both access to knowledge and access to contributing to knowledge. This violence can consist of a refusal to recognise the performer as an expert, and dismisses their knowledge as incorrect. Examples of this are the dismissal of Annie Sprinkles' depth of experience, or Carol Leigh's contribution to language. Violence can be committed in this process by refusing to allow the performer to name themselves or contribute to knowledge, and thus, outsider knowledge is deemed the true knowledge at the expense of the person with lived experience. This is considered a form of objectification through epistemological violence and othering, and can also manifest itself in the dehumanisation of the researched subject. This violence can surface even if the intentions are good, by placing oneself as the 'voice of the voiceless', thus continuing to deny the performer the status of speaking subject. The division of 'good knowledge' and 'bad knowledge' was also summed up in a table.

Violence is also manifested in the discourse through contributions to stigma. Chapter Five outlined the differences between primary stigma and a secondary, courtesy stigma that affects those who write about pornography, a classically 'dirty' subject. This chapter also outlined how performers experienced stigma in a variety of ways, as identified by them through their interviews. They felt stigmatised by potential dating partners, who would often view them solely as their performer persona, or approach them with a Madonna/Whore lens. This stigma would result in objectification and in attracting partners that could be abusive. Married performers reported stigma and a disbelief that anyone would marry a pornography performer. This was also experienced by the worlds' first 'porn star' Linda Lovelace in the 1970s until her death; which shows this stigma is durable and consistent in its manifestation.

Participants also reported losing jobs due to stigma, and this impact appears to be common, with multiple public media examples from current and ex-performers sharing their stories. Performers also described their experiences of being stigmatised by families, which in some cases resulted in access to children being restricted. Some performers reported some estrangement from family members. However, others redirected the focus of stigma to the source, and explained how their families' religious or conservative beliefs were the motive for this stigma. This is part of the identity work that performers undertake to navigate stigma in order to reclaim power and agency.

This redirection from performers also demonstrated that they are not mere passive recipients of stigma from outsider groups. They challenged the source of stigma, and engaged in a multitude of stigma management techniques. Performers also created counter communities where they focused their energy on supporting each other and rejecting attempts to assimilate into outsider groups or acquiesce to outsider stereotypes. They did so publicly through the media and within their personal relationships and communities.

The experience of being a speaking subject had varying effects. Performer testimonies are subjected to testimonial quietening and testimonial smothering, and they carry out labour in weighing up the trustworthiness of the research and how their words will be used. This is considered to be asymmetrical labour and risk given that the interviewer is not subject to having to carry out the same process or be exposed to the same risk. This work is a nuanced form of labour and should be included in further analyses of labour in the industry.

Stigma also impacted on performers' relationships with their peers. Relationships with colleagues were split into frustration and concern. Those who entered the industry and stayed only a short time were viewed with frustration by some performers as they felt these performers brought in STI's, stigma, drug use, and a lack of professionalism. These performers also blamed the newcomers for a lack of personal responsibility. Performers who placed a high value on professionalism adopted an individualist view where any negative events were blamed on the person who experienced them, instead of incorporating a systematic analysis of the industry itself.

Other performers expressed concerns and recognised that these performers were vulnerable and at risk of exploitation, especially the younger newcomers. They advocated for a union in order to protect these performers and recognised that some agents and agencies would exploit those new to the industry.

Experiences with agents and agencies were also divided. Some performers detailed experiences with agents that exploited them; others again placed the blame onto the performer themselves for not having boundaries in place or not saying no to agents. Performers such as Sophie would have benefitted from having access to a support network that guided her through agent selection. Some participants believed that life experience is a strong factor in helping the performer adjust to the industry and navigate potential exploitative situations.

The 'good' sex/'bad' sex binary as outlined by Rubin is reflected in these differing approaches. The 'good' performers were described by participants as those that did not take drugs, were professional, supported each other, did not transmit STI's and were able to speak up for

themselves if something went wrong. 'Bad' performers were viewed as dumb, 'asking for it', immature, irresponsible, worked as escorts, transmitted STIs, and were blamed for negative experiences that happened to them. The quality of their onscreen performance was not mentioned; instead, the focus was on their off-screen behaviour. This binary was also reflected in the reception given to performer testimonies- those that reported positive experiences are dismissed by anti-pornography feminists, and ex-performers who report negative experiences are dismissed by those still working in the industry.

Chapter Six discussed the experiences of violence on-set and with fans and protestors. Much of anti-pornography feminist discourse on pornography centres on the issue of the sex depicted as being rough. The participants reported a mixed experience. Some, like Louise chose not to do anal sex after she experienced injury, but some like Hannah and Holly reported that they loved this activity, finding it powerful. Katie also stated she found power in rough sex and likened it to sport. However, many examples of injuries were reported, from hair loss to physical exhaustion, and sexual assault was acknowledged. Those who mentioned sexual assault also blamed the person themselves for not speaking up or not being able to protect themselves, displaying a strong lack of empathy towards those colleagues. Others wished to build supportive communities to protect newcomers, such as establishing unions and utilising supportive measures such as whisper networks and 'no' lists. These performers displayed empathy and related to the newcomers and shared their experiences of being vulnerable when they first entered the industry.

In relation to fans, performers reported a mixture of experiences. Some stated they had overwhelmingly positive interactions, with fans travelling just to see them, or being supportive of them on social media. The self-esteem boost from fan interactions served as motivation to

stay in the industry. Others were assaulted, stalked and harassed. Much more research is needed in this area in relation to stalking, and the motivations of those who conduct harassment of performers needs to be analysed

This thesis utilises celebrity studies to apply the concept of trophy-hunting in order to understand power dynamics between fans and performers, both in real life and online. The power dynamics between performers and protesters can also be understood using this concept. Some performers reported interactions with protesters who were violent towards the performers, spitting and throwing things at them. This physical demonstration of disgust mirrors the use of disgust in feminist discourse that frames pornography and its workers as other.

Performers also utilised social media to build their brand, diversify revenue streams, and interact with fans. This appears crucial if they are to reach the level of 'porn star', and take advantage of rapidly developing areas of the industry such as camming to develop and maintain their career. The performer as a stigmatised celebrity means that their skills from their work is often not transferable to other industries after their involvement in the industry ends. This stigma also occurs when the performer is not a celebrity, as in the case of Stacy Halas who lost her teaching job.

Performers also experienced attempts from religious organisations to rescue them and this produces a range of reactions. Some performers ignored this, and some were upset with these interactions and experienced emotional trauma as a result. Organisations such as the Pink Cross Foundation used the deaths and criminal convictions of performers to raise money, contributing to the objectification and stigmatisation of performers as deviants.

Adopting a postmodern approach that recognises a multiplicity of meanings and experiences which are shaped by race, gender, class and other intersections means that a multitude of voices can be heard. While research might seem chaotic at first given these sometimes competing and confusing perspectives can more accurately reflect the breadth of experience within the industry. This approach avoids the search for a single 'answer' to a research question, but instead opens up discourse to many perspectives that are inclusive of mixed demographics.

## 7.3. Limitations of the research

As is the case with much of pornography studies, this study has several limitations.

The demographic of the study was women who predominantly self-identified as white, with some performers being Asian or mixed race. While they were approached to take part, no black women took part in the study. Therefore, this study is not wholly inclusive of the experiences of non-white performers. Further research may be beneficial to understand why black performers did not want to take part, and the extent to which the race of the researcher may play a part. This approach means that an emphasis on reflexivity in the research process must be included in future studies with performers. Awareness of race - especially in America- is critical given the history of racism in academic studies (Dennis, 1995; Tucker, 2002). The issue of testimonial incompetence as outlined by Dotson is also crucial to consider here (2011, p.246). To build up a more inclusive image of the realities of being a female pornography performer, a wide demographic must be accounted for. Miller-Young identifies different realities for black performers that white performers do not experience, and these differences are important to consider to avoid taking the white performers' experience as 'the norm' (2014). Future research needs to be inclusive of Trans performers, as well as of increased research

on men, gay performers and so on to ensure a wider demographic and a wider depth of experiences is included.

This research was also a small-scale study, and therefore cannot be said to be representative of the multitude of experiences of performers in the industry. However, adopting a postmodern approach to research means recognising that any sole research study is not definitive, but is merely one of many contributions to the overall story of the researched subject. A small-scale study allows for a nuanced study, in a way that a larger study would not have in this instance. Questions should be asked over how generalisable individual experiences can truly be, given an individual's personality, mental health, race, gender, class, life experiences, education, support networks, and so on. Humans are not homogeneous beings, and any universalistic approach would erase these nuances.

Similar to other research on pornography, due to a high turnover of performers and changes in working conditions, pornography research can be outdated quickly. The performers in this study may no longer be in the industry, or may have very different working conditions. They may have joined unions and found this to be a positive or negative experience, or changed agents and had differing experiences. One approach to this may involve conducting longitudinal studies, or shorter research projects that can be produced quickly and ethically.

As discussed in Chapter Three, ethics in pornography research are critical. This study did not have the performers take part in the analysis of the data due to time and geographical constraints. Further research in this field can be more ethical by engaging in participatory research where the researched subject is included at all levels of the study. This approach

works to offset the object/- subject paradigm between researcher as subject and researched person as object. This approach thus works to reduce objectification through epistemological violence and the exclusion of the researched person from being considered an expert in their own experiences.

## 7.4. Contribution to Existing Literature

This research contributes to the body of knowledge not just by the above findings, but through its exploration of ethics and methodology in pornography studies. An open and reflective discussion of ethics and methodology is critical for advancing this academic field. Given that research on pornography performers is limited, and focuses mainly on performer motivations for entering and staying, and on experiences of childhood sexual abuse and drug use, this research builds on this limited knowledge. In doing so, it contributes to an evidence based approach rather than facilitating speculation without supporting data.

While it has been noted by Foucault that power is multifaceted, this research has shown that violence is also multifaceted. In this research violence is explored fourfold: (1) violence through agents and on-set experiences, inclusive of violence from protestors and saviours, (2) violence through stigma from family and potential dating partners, (3) violence that results from discourse, and (4) violence within the research process. This research has shown this violence to be asymmetrical, and with an impact on how the performer views themselves and their peers.

This research contributes to the broader academic conversation on objectification through the addition of objectification through epistemological violence. Objectification within pornography

has been frequently discussed by feminists, but rarely have these discussions involved the performers and their opinions on their alleged objectification. This research proposes the concept of epistemological violence as a facet of objectification that occurs from discourse. This close reading of objectification builds on the work of Cahill (2012), LeMoncheck (1985), Nussbaum (1995), and Langton (2009) to make this contribution. Examples of this form of objectification can be seen in the dismissal of performer experiences and knowledge, their exclusion from expert status, the dismissal of language created by sex workers to describe their labour, and the use of their testimonies to further an anti-pornography agenda.

This research makes the call that a stricter focus should be applied to research ethics in sex work research. In centering the importance of ethical, reflexive research, contemporary pornography studies can remodel existing methodologies and revamp the process of conducting qualitative research in the humanities. This research also stresses the importance of incorporating a postmodern or post-structuralist approach that accounts for the multitude of meanings and realities. This approach would allow for a turning away from universalistic approaches that may silence discourse or contribute to objectification. Instead, a particularist approach that recognises the fluidity of experience of both researcher and interviewee will work towards more methodologically and ethically sound research in the future. This approach allows for a space in existing discourse to be carved out to include performers in discussions on their lives. Future research must also ethically recognise the asymmetrical power relations in the research power in relation to knowledge, violence and labour.

The concept of celebrity and the trope of the 'porn star' was also covered, and ways that performers utilise tools such as social media to build their brand were explored. How the performer interacts with fans and the scope for violence within this asymmetrical relationship is

important to consider, especially as the accessibility of performers has increased drastically within the last decade thanks to the internet, and easier access to expos for national and international fans.

Finally, this research contributes to a more nuanced examination of labour in the industry. This process includes a recognition of the work that incorporates networking, meeting fans, labour in the research process, the labour in maintaining health and fighting for autonomy in this process, and the work involved in managing stigma. The labour of managing stigma comes in four forms: (1) managing stigma from potential romantic partners, (2) managing stigma from families, (3) managing stigma from peers, and (4) managing stigma from society. This process can take the form of identity work, the creation of counter communities and engaging in actively and publicly resisting stigma. This research calls for these forms of work to be analysed in context with labour in other entertainment industries such as film or music industries, or other industries with precarious employment, or where the body is used as part of work.

## 7.5. Implications for Future Research

This project has multiple implications for future research.

The silence of performer voices in discourse needs to be explored further. This silence may be accidental or deliberate, or may arise from the prioritisation of the researchers' voice over the performers' voice. Testimonial silencing and testimonial smothering are also a part of this silence and must be included in future research. Given the large number of theories and speculation over performer experiences, evidence to confirm or challenge these assumptions must be encouraged. Future research might include larger numbers of women, but should also be inclusive of a spectrum of different demographics, such as gender, race, class, and levels

of experience within the industry. The experiences of performers who have left the industry would add vital information to this body of knowledge; however, this may be difficult given the logistics of locating ex-performers who may not wish to discuss their experiences.

This research also calls for further research on the sources of stigma. Research on who projects stigma, and what their own biases and assumptions are is important to build up an accurate picture of how stigma operates within anti-pornography feminist discourse on pornography. The prioritisation of theory over evidence must also be examined in this discourse, alongside the lack of inclusivity of performers, and the question of if and how stigma influences this process must be asked. This stigma also needs to be situated with the relationship between power, knowledge, disgust, and fear, and the effect of this relationship on areas such as sex or pornography.

Further research on power dynamics between researcher and research subject must be conducted. This process may cause harm to the research subject but not the researcher, and thus is an asymmetrical process. This harm may also be magnified due to intersections of race, age and gender etc., and it is critical to account for these concerns if research is to be considered ethical. The entitlement to know and the issue of the researched subject being confessed for, as documented in section 4.4.6, is a nuance of power that is essential to consider especially in heated areas of discourse.

Further research is also needed that reflects the differences in working conditions in the pornography industry, such as labour undertaken by cam girls, women setting up their own sites and wishlists, and other aspects of pornography such as feminist pornography, and how race gender and class impact on these. The work involved in managing stigma, using the body

as a tool, and the labour involved in navigating the research process and emotional labour also needs to be included in future research. Queer pornography is also predominantly absent from discourse and given that this appears to be a growing field alongside feminist pornography; it is important to be inclusive of this area. Inclusion can mean a comparison with mainstream content and working experiences can be made possible. This inclusion can also mean the incorporation of a more diverse demographic that includes diverse sexual orientations, body types, and differing sexual practices.

I would like to end by thanking the performers for trusting me with their stories and agreeing to take part in this research. Their kindness in doing so is greatly appreciated and I hope I have been faithful to their testimonies and represented them in a balanced way. Performer Emma states that for her:

> Doing (pornography) virtually, and mentally, and through the camera, it's kind of helped me learn a lot about myself. It is one of the best things I have ever done for myself.

The performers in this research have helped me learn a lot about pornography, the human experience, feminism, and about myself, and this PhD is also one of the best things I have done for myself. I wish to extend my eternal gratitude to the performers for enabling this process, and wish them well in their future endeavours.

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*Journal Entries from attending the AEE/AVN expo*

The AEE/AVN expo is an annual event in Las Vegas, USA. Running since 1984, they are sponsored by *Adult Video News (AVN)*, an industry magazine that reviews pornography films. The AEE section is the multi-day Adult Entertainment Expo, which showcases adult sex toys, DVDS and booths that are rented by companies and performers themselves. The AVN component refers mostly to the awards which occur on the Saturday night after the AEE. The award show features titles such as Best Male Performer, and Most Outrageous Sex Scene, and fans can vote for awards such as Most Epic Ass. With over 100 categories, the show is long but it is condensed to 90 minutes and aired on the TV channel Showtime. The awards are dubbed as the 'Oscars of Porn'. Leading up to the expo many advertisements for the event can be seen in locations across Vegas such as on billboards and on taxis. The following is a write-up of my journal entries from when I attended the expo in 2016.

**AEE**

I spoke to some attendees over the course of the expo, and some stated they were on a stag (bachelor party), some were couples there to buy sex toys or meet their favourite performers, and some women came on their own. One woman I spoke to explained that she was in Vegas already and decided on a whim to attend; another stated she had traveled to the expo to see her favourite performer. There appeared to be a definite higher ratio of single men, but there were plenty of groups, male-female couples, and women on their own.

I queued up for performers to sign a notebook, both to experience the process and to ask performers to take part in my research. Most performers were smiley, smelt of perfume, and chatted for a few seconds before gently moving the person on. They thanked attendees for

their sentiments, usually 'you're my favourite' or 'I loved you in that scene', or 'will you work with x performer in the future', from what I could overhear. Some performers gave hugs, some kept their distance. If the attendees stayed too long, a security guard was often on hand to move the person on. Many performers had free photos for signing, and some would sign DVDs or photos that could be bought at the booth with cash.

One bizarre experience in the expo was seeing veteran performer Ron Jeremy around the expo. Everywhere he went it seemed he was followed by fans vying for a minute of his time or a photo. At one point he stood at a booth for fans to take photos. However, this was surreal as he stood still, apart from eating nuts, while fans jumped in next to him for a photo; he did not interact with fans or smile for photos while he ate. He looked blankly at people who tried to talk to him. On the night of the AVN awards I overheard two performers loudly complaining that he had walked the red carpet while wearing Crocs and a dirty shirt.

Booths that were also very popular were camming companies, such as My Free Cams. These booths had several people live camming, sharing their experiences of the expo with their viewers. I spoke to a couple of women working at the booths. They stated that they loved the flexibility of their job, as they dropped their children off to school, cammed, then picked them back up from school. They explained that they felt they could spend more time with their children, earned more money than a part time job would give them, and they found it to be work that they enjoyed.

The expo also featured booths with religious organisations. One booth gave out free copies of an autobiography of a woman who had left pornography and now worked as a pastor. Another religious group, the Triple X church, had a booth where visitors could have a t-shirt featuring an image of a 1970s style mustachioed man in the centre and the slogan 'Jesus Loves Porn

Stars' underneath. The t-shirt was free on the condition that the wearer took a photo with it next to a backdrop with the Triple X church logo on it. One young man, while making me a t-shirt, gave me a miniature bible and stated that they were here to tell sex workers that Jesus loved them.

**AVN**

The night of the AVN award show started with a red carpet procession. Weaving its way around the casino, the red carpet started with a photo op area for press. Some performers went for a risqué look, wearing very revealing clothes, while others went for a glamourous look that would not have been out of place on a Hollywood red carpet.

The approach of the Triple X church certainly did feel different to the few angry looking protestors at the red carpet, or to the man who came up to me as I watched the red carpet procession. He asked me if I agreed with 'what was going on', I replied that I was just watching what was happening. He proclaimed 'well you will go to hell with the rest of them' and walked off muttering. The close proximity of him and the sense of rage I detected in him felt unnerving and I was relieved when he walked away.

My seat was high up in the back of the theatre. I found myself sitting behind what looked like a group of eight businessmen. They were drinking, and were very loud, and it was easy to overhear their conversations. When categories that included performer Riley Reid were announced, they cheered extra loud and talked about how much they loved particular scenes. What was notable was how respectfully they spoke of her- there was a clear tone of admiration in their voices.

Noticeable crowd reactions occurred when the name of performer James Deen was called out in award categories. Nominated for work he did before numerous rape allegations were made against him in 2015, he appeared in several categories. For other nominees the crowd cheered loudly, but for Deen the cheers were minimal or non-existent, and he did not turn up on stage to collect the awards he did win.

The main winners of the night were performers who shot scenes for Greg Lanksy, and Lanksky himself won Director of the Year.  Parodies of Hollywood superhero blockbusters also did well, with *Batman v Superman XXX: An Axel Braun Parody* winning five awards. Performer Riley Reid was the standout winner of the night, winning many awards such as Female Performer of the Year, and Best Social Media Star, as voted for by fans.

**Appendix Two:**

**Plain Language Statement**

The research title for this project is: '*An Exploration of the Experiences of Female Pornography Performers and Feminist Discourses on Their Experiences'.* I am undertaking this doctoral research project through the School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies (SALIS) at Dublin City University, Ireland. I am the principal researcher, and the primary supervisor is Jean-Philippe Imbert (SALIS), with the secondary supervisor being Dr. Debbie Ging from the School of Communications. This research project will ask questions on areas such as working conditions, personal histories, and attitudes towards feminism, amongst others.

This research project requires participants to anonymously participate in an interview. These interviews will be audio recorded for the purposes of transcription. These interviews will last a maximum of one hour.

Involvement in this research study will be beneficial to participants for the following reasons: first it will allow you to reflect on their profession; in so doing, you will generate a discourse on sexual literacy which you can then share within the industry. Furthermore, your participation will allow your story to contribute to the many debates on pornography in an informed and articulate fashion. There is no risk to the participant as they can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

All data gathered will be anonymous, and will be kept in a secure location, with restricted access and be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Data obtained will be stored securely and kept for no longer than necessary for its purposes. The information remains confidential (except with the express written authorisation of the participant or should information be disclosed that concerns child protection issues, as there will be a legal obligation to report this to the relevant authorities.)  Names will be changed to protect anonymity and identity markers will be utilised. Data will be destroyed after it is no longer necessary to retain it.

Participation is voluntary and the interviewee may withdraw from the Research Study at any point without any negative consequences.

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9., Ireland.   Tel +353-1-7008000

**Appendix Three**

**<u>Informed Consent Form</u>**

The research title for this project is: 'An Exploration of the Experiences of Female Pornography Performers and Feminist Discourses on Their Experiences'. I am undertaking this doctoral research project through the School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies (SALIS) at Dublin City University, Ireland. I am the principal researcher, and the primary supervisor is Jean-Philippe Imbert (SALIS), with the secondary supervisor being Dr. Debbie Ging from the School of Communications.

This research project aims to uncover the realities of women working in the American adult entertainment industry. If you choose to take part in this interview, your experience will help to present a real life account of what working in the pornography industry is like, and your account will be correlated to the feminist discussions on pornography. Your interview will cover areas such as working conditions, how your job affects other aspects of your life, and how you feel about feminist approaches to pornography. This project will situate your voice at the heart of the debate, which is crucial in developing an accurate analysis of the industry and the real lives of its female employees.

Participation in this research project will involve taking part in an interview, which will be audio recorded, and this will last a maximum of one hour.

<u>Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)</u>

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)                Yes/No

I understand the information provided                                        Yes/No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study                Yes/No

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions                        Yes/No

I am aware that my interview will be audiotaped                                     Yes/No

This research project may contain sensitive information and will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Data obtained will be stored securely and kept for no longer than necessary for its purposes. The information remains confidential (except with your express written agreement) or where information is disclosed that concerns child protection issues, as there will be a legal obligation to report this to the relevant authorities.

I understand my participation in this research project will be anonymous and my name will not be used; however I recognise that some elements of my story may be recognisable to others but that the researcher will do the utmost to safeguard my anonymity.

I have read and understood the information in this form.  I understand that my participation in this research project is voluntary and I may withdraw from the Research Study at any point without negative consequences.  My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form.  Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

   Participant's Signature:

   Name in Block Capitals:

   Witness:

   Date:

Caroline Ryan
School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies

15th January 2016

**REC Reference:** **DCUREC/2015/239**

**Proposal Title:** **Dancing in the Shadows of the Outer Limits: An Exploration of the Subjective Realities of Female Actresses Working in the American Pornography Industry**

**Applicant(s):** **Caroline Ryan, Jean-Philippe Imbert, Dr Debbie Ging**

Dear Caroline,

Further to expedited review, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal.

Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee.

Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further amendment submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

**Dr Dónal O'Mathúna**
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee