This article was downloaded by: [189.122.57.117]
On: 13 April 2014, At: 10:43
Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK

Porn Studies
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rprn20

Finding gender through porn performance

Courtney Trouble[a]
[a] California, USA

Published online: 21 Mar 2014.

To cite this article: Courtney Trouble (2014) Finding gender through porn performance, Porn Studies, 1:1-2, 197-200, DOI: 10.1080/23268743.2014.888254

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2014.888254

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions

Porn Studies, 2014
Vol. 1, Nos. 1–2, 197–200, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2014.888254

Downloaded by [189.122.57.117] at 10:43 13 April 2014

FORUM

Finding gender through porn performance

Queer porn means different things to different people – but to me, it means porn that is out of the box, out of the closet, and shamelessly sex-positive. Queer porn's endless combinations of genders and sexualities allow its performers and its audience to expand and affirm their own identities and desires. It is porn you end up thinking about long after you watch it, occasionally leaving you wondering whether you are more like the performers you saw than you had previously thought. Queer porn is humanizing and connective.

In my words

I am genderqueer. I could say 'gender variant,' but I know what I am: Queer. I do not vary slightly from the standard form – I fuck it all up. I knew I was not a boy or a girl when I was a child, but I did not have the words to explain what that meant to my family and friends. Trans did not fit, but neither did cisgender (self-perception of one's gender matches the sex they were assigned at birth).

While I knew I was queer before I made porn, producing and performing in porn helped me find my gender. Ten years of watching people strap, tuck, shave, paint, bind, glue, and glitter themselves to express their gender in a visual, textural, sexual, and public way has shown me that I did not have to pick something off the rack – I could be, and am, a multifaceted creature that lives in a liminal space.

For me, documenting the sex in my life and my community revealed a personal identity built of seemingly opposite elements having a symbiotic relationship.

I see this body, and this mind, in its truest form – a femmasculine creature that lives in a grey room (literally and metaphorically) full of tits, cock, scars, softness, pain, and pleasure. The words 'bisexual' and 'switch' never felt like home to me – but the words 'both' or 'all' encompass my identity in ways that make my sex life and my fantasies complicated beyond the general understanding of sexual identity.

My exposure to so many versions of gender and sex through making porn has been therapy for me. Without it, I would not be so aware of my genderqueerness. My understanding of my own gender identity evolved while engaging in public and private sex with dozens of people of multiple genders, all of them experimenting, exploring, or evolving – just as I was.

Queer porn gave me words to explain the way I have felt my entire life, by giving me the opportunities to have experimental or explorative queer sex as an embodied, queerly gendered person. In other words, by being allowed to 'be myself,' I found myself.

© 2014 Taylor & Francis

In my performances

I can see, in recent performances, epiphanies of my own gender queerness evolving on screen. The following are a few of those moments.

In a scene with April Flores for the film *Hard Femme*, we begin kissing on a bed. As lesbian porn goes, I take out her breasts and start kissing them. Then she kisses mine. I can see an alarm go off in my head when I watch the footage; something switches. I do not like having my breasts played with in a 'womanly way,' and suddenly I am grabbing my tit and thrusting it into her mouth. I whisper, 'Suck my tit like a cock,' and within seconds I am more present. Finding a way to embody a phallus using my assumed 'female' body made the scene work for me.

A similar thing happened in a scene with Michelle Austin, a mainstream plus-size trans performer. We were making a 'lesbian encounter' style of scene. Michelle is going down on me and even though it feels wonderful, I am having a hard time connecting to the moment. I have built my entire career around being a fully-embodied performer, so when I start to 'lose it' in a scene I have to find a way back. I clearly desired Michelle, a long-time porn crush. It was words. Gender. I could not be a girl for her. This is all very visible to me while analyzing my performance – I can see my eyes open and my face light up when I look down and ask her to stick her tongue out so I can use my clit as a phallus against it. I had to find a way to embody a cock.

I have joked and called it 'psychic dick' before, and without explanation it seems funny – but 'psychic dick' is literally the feeling that a part of my body (my tit, clit, fingers, strap on) have become my actual dick and I am able to embody a more masculine gender within sex.

I have performed as butch for a few scenes in my career. Once, with trans man Charlie Spats, I got to be a cruising leather daddy. I used a strap-on, and while that felt authentic to me and quite satisfying to fuck a boy as a boy myself, the butch presentation itself did not feel at all authentic to me.

Another butch performance was for the film *Valencia: The Movie* (based on Michelle Tea's legendary memoir about being a dyke in the 1990s San Francisco Mission District) in which I play a butch dyke who teaches Michelle how to fist her. Because I was performing a role, my authenticity did not matter so much, but my butchness felt like a bad impression, a comedic role.

These two scenes revealed to me that my physical need for phallus embodiment during sex is not related to a masculine presentation or a male gender identity. I am not a man, but I do have a dick.

Through the trial and error inherent in porn performance, I have found that my feminine presentation and masculine sexuality are connected, and that this is reflected in my non-pornographic identity as well. Were it not for the opportunities granted to me through porn to play different roles, I would not have the understanding that I have now.

In their words: Jacques LeFemme and Hayley Fingersmith

In the short docu-porn I created in 2013, entitled *fuck/talk*, trans* performer Jacques LeFemme stated:

Downloaded by [189.122.57.117] at 10:43 13 April 2014

> I don't believe that I am either male or female. I want to take testosterone and wear lipstick or wear a dress … I like weightlifting, welding, I'm chivalrous, I have a lot of aggression – does this make me butch? People still have gender and sexuality mixed. You can't tell how a person likes to have sex just by looking at their wardrobe or how they move or their mannerisms.

In the same film, Hayley Fingersmith stated:

> The sex I have is really queer, partially just by necessity because being trans introduced nominative gender fuck into everything … Part of my queerness is in how I look … kind of punk, kind of shocking but still pretty … I have a lot of patterns that don't match, but they form a texture … The way I have relationships and the way I fuck is not some mirror of heteronormativity.

Downloaded by [189.122.57.117] at 10:43 13 April 2014

In their words: James Darling

James Darling started performing porn early into his physical transition, and throughout his career has unintentionally documented not only the changes in his body, but the changes in his sexuality as well – providing a clear glimpse into the sexuality of one trans man.

> Performing in porn has really made me take a much more critical look at the way I present myself to the world and be more intentional about the gender I present on and off screen. My masculinity is different than most other male performers in porn and I'm very critical of the kind of man my audience and fans perceive me to be. I've watched my body change over the years through porn and it's incredibly validating to see my transition reflected back to me through an erotic lens. Queer porn has allowed me to express more feminine and queer parts of myself that I can't imagine would be possible in more mainstream porn, and I'm truly grateful for that.[1]

In their words: Jiz Lee

Jiz Lee is becoming one of the most well-known genderqueer people of our time due mostly to their wide-ranging performances in queer, indie, and corporate pornography. They have brought the word 'they' into many people's understanding of gender and have become a role-model for young trans* folks and those who are seeking to create more affirming corporate porn workplaces.

> Making porn had the effect of bringing me out of my shell, and helping me to define – and more importantly, articulate – myself to the world at large. It was through porn that I created my website, and found a voice for writing. Later, it was through porn that I swallowed my fear of public speaking and improved my skills talking in front of other people. I would likely be the same person, in many ways, had I not had the opportunities I've had through being a public figure. The documentation and amplification of my gender expression, however, has certainly had a profound impact on my ability to articulate myself, in addition to building a better understanding of how others see me.
>
> One example of such is coming to use the pronouns they/them. When I first started out, I simply asked that whatever description or biography made public of my gender not use feminine pronouns. However it quickly became apparent that the absence of these pronouns did little to assert my androgynous gender – others needed a more visible marker of my gender status, and thus, I came to use they/them. (It turns out that

singular they is the original gender-neutral pronoun, coined in early English. So it also happens to be grammatically correct.)

In their words: Papi Coxx

Papi Coxx's first porn performance was with their real-life partner Wil for a documentary about their lives as 'trans entities.' Papi has been outspoken about genderqueer identity and sexuality long before they started making porn, but has found porn to be a useful platform for creating visibility.

> Porn, specifically queer porn, absolutely re-affirmed my gender identity and expression. Queer, DIY and Feminist porn have created a space for porn to exist within and outside of the 'sex.' It's delved deeper into identity, endless sexualities, and politics. Queer porn gave me a public and educative avenue to express my gender and have it be visible in the most vulnerable of ways. For many trans people/GNC people, the body is a source of struggle. I've always said that my nudity negated my trans identity because I had not had surgery or taken testosterone. When I am viewed in the nude, I am identified by others as a woman. Queer porn broke that ideology and allowed for dialogue, new desires and visibility to shape a forward era in porn.

Conclusion

It is clear that the intentions behind and implications of queer porn go beyond the generic understanding of pornography. There is a clear political, personal, and creative drive in queer porn that is not common in other genres or subsections of the larger industry. Many of us do other kinds of work that is much more financially rewarding or career-making, but queer porn is our preferred process, and through it we are able to search for something beyond financial gain: knowledge, power, acceptance, visibility, desire, justice, love, to name a few. Each scene is a new opportunity to challenge our own perceptions of self, or to help you challenge yours.

Queer porn transcends the tendency to put our sex in binary boxes, and uses desire as a catalyst to create change within the queer community and the porn industry.

We must wonder what porn could accomplish for society if every adult industry set provided that freedom to question, pervert, personalize, or politicize the individualistic sex positive powers of those making it, and those watching it.

Note

1. The quotes from James Darling, Jiz Lee, and Papi Coxx come from conversations between them and myself, directly from email.

Courtney Trouble
California, USA

Downloaded by [189.122.57.117] at 10:43 13 April 2014