

IMAGING “INTERRACIAL”

MEGAN CHRISTIANSEN

Performing Racialized Desire In “Interracial”
Heterosexual Hardcore Pornography

Declaration

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Photography in the Department of Photography of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island, 2021

Approved by the Master's Examination Committee:

Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa
Assistant Professor, Graduate Program Director
Department of Photography, Rhode Island School of Design
Thesis Chair

Shaka McGlotten
Professor
Departments of Anthropology & Media Studies,
Purchase College-SUNY
Thesis Advisor

Laine Rettmer
Critic
Department of Sculpture, Rhode Island School of Design
Thesis Advisor

“Interracial” is a term that implicitly categorizes sex between Black cis men and white cis women within contemporary hardcore pornographic video. The artistic and research practice described in this paper is located in, influenced, and driven by pornography itself as an important entry point for thinking about racialized desire.

Looking with care and criticality at the pornographic representation of sex between Black men and white women can allow us to think about how issues of gender and race are key in constructing notions of desire and taboo in America. Through this work I begin to consider how racism and misogyny both infiltrate and structure the pornographic media landscape – constantly being performed/re-performed, re-articulated, and re-imagined within this circulated visual economy. I waded into the internalized feelings of shame and anxiety particularly for white folks in confronting notions of racialized desire, while sitting with the messiness that any project that deals with desire will ultimately encounter.

I approach porn tube sites like Pornhub, X-videos, etc as complex cultural sites, as living consumer-driven archives deserving of intense and nuanced critical exploration through artmaking. Reappropriating, recontextualizing, and manipulating found footage within my work has become an important tool in questioning agency and subjectivity within this space, as well as embracing the multiplicity that exists within any form of representational visual media.

As I consider some of these critical theoretical concerns, I begin placing them in dialogue with my desires, consumption, and relationships through a multidisciplinary art practice that traverses video, photography, sound, and performance. In sharing my own pornographic engagement, I hope to suspend viewers in a space where they can reflect upon their desires and become more active and analytical consumers themselves. This writing and the artmaking it discusses only scratches the surface of what will likely be a lifelong practice and process of examining sexuality, race, and gender within this space and beyond.

Table of Contents

07	[Intro] Sex Ed
09	What do I mean by “Interracial”?
11	The Evolution of “Interracial” Pornographic Video
15	The Language of Tube Sites
23	Hierarchies of Looking, Hierarchies of Labor
31	Conclusion
33	An Incomplete Porn / American Civil Rights Timeline
36	Bibliography

This work is located in, influenced, and driven by pornography itself as an important entry point for thinking about racialized desire, intended to complicate the conversation beyond simply whether “interracial” porn is racist or not (it is). Looking at how the representation of sex between Black men and white women is fashioned in hardcore pornography can allow us to think about how issues of gender and race are key elements in the construction of desire and taboo in America. I don’t set out to explain the complex social, historical, and psychological constructions that undergird “interracial” pornography. I do endeavor, however, to provide some context. I am interested in exploring how racism and misogyny infiltrate and structure the pornographic media landscape – questioning how these power systems are performed, re-performed, re-articulated, and re-imagined within this circulated visual economy. As I tease out some of these critical concerns through my artmaking, I also begin placing them in dialogue with my own desires, consumption, and relationships. I often use my own body to better understand my subject matter, with the intent of building a visual structure that engages the audience in conversations about pornography that are nuanced and rooted in questioning power.

This project begins in pornography, on Pornhub specifically, in my bedroom, in the dark, while I masturbate. It comes from thinking about the kind of porn I consume, what my partners are consuming, and what we consume together as part of our sexual practice. It turns out, “interracial” pornography, a term that implicitly denotes sex between Black men and white women, is at the heart of all three – a category that “looks like” my partners and me. Even though my personal porn viewing tastes are rather diverse; I enjoy gay porn, trans performers, women of color, BDSM, and many other categories (I basically enjoy things that don’t have white straight men in them) – “interracial” has been for at least the past 5-10 years the category that I consume the most as the foundation for my masturbatory practices as well as part of a partnered sexual practice. Before I began making this work in late 2019, I had never thought too deeply or critically about this pornographic classification -- much less about how it functions, how it affects and reflects my relationships. Which is, honestly, embarrassing. Since beginning this project, all I do is think about it. Currently in 2021, having made this work through a pandemic, a white supremacist insurrection, a summer of protests against anti-black violence, and the national conversations that followed – thinking critically

about how I engage in and consume racialized pornographic imagery is on my mind now more than ever.

I am enthusiastically pro-porn. However, to be pro-anything does not mean to blindly consume or hold up that thing as perfect. For me, it is to look at it with care, to critique it when need be, to question it, to imagine the possibilities within and outside of it. My artmaking is rooted in experimental video installation, photography, and performance. I approach porn tube sites like Pornhub, X-videos, etc as complex cultural sites, as living consumer-driven archives deserving of intense and nuanced critical exploration through artmaking. My practice is not one of linear creation, but rather one of reaction to and digestion of pornographic material as I move through these online spaces.

I live on these sites, constantly consuming pornography, searching for something I can't name. I tease out portions of the pornographic visual landscape and rub them up against the "real world" - a world of mainstream media, of continual stimulation, of normative sexuality, of shame, and of whiteness/anti-blackness. Reappropriating, recontextualizing, and manipulating found footage within my work has become an important tool in questioning agency and subjectivity within this space, as well as embracing the multiplicity that exists within this and many other forms of representational visual media.

This work is exploratory and experimental. In it, my perspective surrounding the ethics of my own engagement often shifts; the more I unpeel, the more I am destabilized within this pornographic space. This work lingers, it sits in the discomfort of the problematics of this subject matter, in the conversations associated with it - because to react simply to the (subjective) bodily sensations that this content provokes means to ignore the complexities it veils. As a white (ostensibly straight) female, this project is as much about sitting in feelings of ambivalence as anything else - working through feelings, material, and sensations that are often at odds with each other. Desire is messy, and like sexuality, it is not linear.

This work explores what makes me "tick," as much of the work I've made throughout my life has done. Beyond that, this work is for everyday people who watch porn and simply don't think too hard about what they are watching. It is for non-Black people who have little idea about where what they are watching comes from, or have never bothered to

think about it. Asking people to talk and think about a "shameful" and stigmatized subject like porn is a difficult enough task, all the more charged when the deeply intertwined complexities of race and gender are added to the conversation. There is an anxiety that comes along with these conversations for many, including myself.

Like many, I learned about sex through pornography. Even though I had comprehensive sex education in school, I was already sexually curious long before these interventions. Growing up in suburban New Zealand in the 1990s without access to internet porn, I knew exactly where my dad had a couple of old Playboy magazines: on the top shelf, right-hand side of his wardrobe, underneath some folders. My parents had separate wardrobes, directly opposite each other in a little hallway. I would peel back the sliding door and silently flick through them when I got home from school. In the early 2000s, there was my oldest brother's room. His collection of magazines -- and later, some DVDs -- overflowed from a ginormous cardboard box, tucked inside the bottom of a gaudy veneer entertainment unit. This was an upgrade from the smaller cardboard box that fit neatly under his bed. I was mesmerized by the scores of thin, white women with completely hairless pussies and stick-thin eyebrows. This was one of the places where I learned about beauty, desire, and whiteness; where I learned that I might be desirable within this economy, because of the whiteness I shared with these models. New Zealand didn't and still doesn't have a big local porn scene, so this content was usually imported from the United States or Europe. Then, there were the videotapes of Hollywood movies recorded from television that sat on my parent's dresser. I knew which ones had sex scenes in them, and even the timecodes in which they appeared. I would watch these in my parent's bedroom while they were in the next room, on mute of course, because even then I knew I was doing something illicit.

These early experiences are all part of my growing pornographic archive that is simultaneously digital, physical, and embodied in memory. In sharing my own pornographic engagement, I am asking others to engage with these illicit impulses with me. Rather than saying 'don't look,' I am asking people to look in a different way.

What Do I Mean By “Interracial?”

It is important to clarify what I mean when I say “interracial” within the context of this writing and in my practice. The term interracial in a broader sense refers to something “involving, or designed for members of different races.”¹ Within pornography, however, you simply have to take a scroll through the “interracial” tag on any porn tube site to realize that it implicitly refers to Black cisgender men having sex with white cisgender women. From what I have been told by performers, this word is not necessarily explicitly defined as such within the industry, but is widely understood to refer to this specific subgenre. There is a tension between the specificity of the visual content linked to this word and the level of ambiguity the industry maintains around its very definition.



“Interracial” Category Thumbnail Image, Pornhub, 2021

The difference between and function of these terms both within and outside of the industry was a major catalyst for my interest in this particular category of pornography. Throughout this writing I will wrap the term “interracial” in quotation marks when I speak about it in a pornographic sense. This gesture both denotes the specificity of this term within the adult landscape and acknowledges that when I speak about this term I am engaging in an act of exclusion of all bodies and relationships that fall outside of the Black cis man/white cis woman boundary described. I think it is important to reckon with this term’s implicit and explicit meaning in this writing rather than deny its specificity and power within this space.

The Evolution of “Interracial” Pornographic Video

Through my research, I have identified three relevant phases of “interracial” pornographic video evolution: the Illegal Stag Film (1915-1968), the Golden Age of Porn (1969-1984), and Internet Pornography (1994-present). Rather than a comprehensive history, these phases are used as an entry point for readers to begin to understand that this category and its dynamics are not new, though they have varied over the past century.

Illegal Stag Films (1915-1968)

The term “stag” refers to illegally and anonymously produced pornographic films. Unlike contemporary “interracial” porn, stag films featured Black women with white men more often than the reverse. They were often situated within the domesticity of the white home, and denigrated Black sexuality while simultaneously presenting it as “exotic” and pleasurable. These films were generally produced by white men with the needed capital to purchase photographic equipment, and were then also consumed communally by white men in gentleman’s clubs, brothels, fraternities, or clandestine theatres. Made following the Reconstruction era, these films, alongside more mainstream Jim Crow legislation, worked to reinscribe racist notions of the separate -- and superior -- power of white sexuality. The “imperial gaze,” which instills Black bodies with sexual meanings that are reiterated in wider media, is functionally separate from the specificity of representation in race porn, which intends to illicit arousal for profit. As Feminist studies professor and writer Mirielle Miller-Young explains that “both types of spectacle – the imperial gaze and the spectacle of black bodies in stag film – are intertwined. If the function of slavery was to guarantee the use of enslaved black bodies for the needs of the master, part of the power of the master’s imperial gaze was the assurance of visual pleasure, and of owning the right to look.”² White men’s control over the production, distribution, and consumptive conditions of illicit stag films ensured that this group retained the ownership of looking.

In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Brown v. the Board of Education*, establishing that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional (since “separate but equal” is inherently unequal). As schools began to

² Miller-Young, Mireille. *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography*. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2014, p27.

desegregate, the fear of integrated classrooms led to the fear of integrated bedrooms.³ In the 1960s, during the Civil Rights movement, there was an increase in demand for films that featured Black men with white women; the demand for stag films with this racial makeup “increased by over four times, from under 1 percent in the 1920s to 4.4 percent during the 1960s.”⁴ While not a huge percentage, the fact that demand was beginning to increase for representations of Black/white sex during a time where anti-miscegenation laws played a key role in not only reinforcing racial hierarchy but also gender hierarchy is telling. Law professor Melissa Murray explains, “White women who are found to violate these laws are punished much more severely than white men. And again, all of this is sort of laying the foundation for what, after the Civil War, will become a kind of trope of pure southern white womanhood that also gets reinvigorated and reinforced not only through miscegenation laws, but also through the practice of lynching.”⁵ Films that featured Black men during the 1960s often showed them entering white domestic spaces as laborers (*Leaky Sink*, 1966) or as criminals (*The Black Bandit*, 1962). Notably, these cuckolding⁶ fantasies do not end in violence, scenarios that as Miller-Young points out would have been met in real life by life-threatening violence.⁷

The Kinsey Institute approximates around 2000 Stag films were produced between 1915 and 1968⁸, most of which were destroyed by censors, or lost unintentionally – making for an incomplete archive today.

The Golden Age of Porn (1969-1984)

The Golden Age of Porn describes a 15-year period from 1969 to 1984 during which sexually explicit films were embraced by mainstream theatres and audiences. It is said to begin with Andy Warhol's 1969

³ ACLU. “Marriage as a Tool of White Supremacy (EP.71).” *ACLU Podcast*, 31 October 2019, <https://www.aclu.org/podcast/marriage-tool-white-supremacy-ep71>.

⁴ Miller-Young, Mireille. *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography*. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2014, p51.

⁵ ACLU. “Marriage as a Tool of White Supremacy (EP.71).” *ACLU Podcast*, 31 October 2019, <https://www.aclu.org/podcast/marriage-tool-white-supremacy-ep71>.

⁶ Cuckold - a man with an unfaithful wife. Within kink, a cuckold is a man who derives sexual pleasure from his partner having sex with other men. There is a spectrum of cuckolding from humiliation to encouraging, to watching or participating. Interracial cuckolding involves a Black man (or “bull”) having sex with a white man's wife or partner.

⁷ Miller-Young, Mireille. *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography*. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2014, p58.

⁸ Stag Film, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stag_film. Accessed 11 November, 2020.

*Blue Movie*⁹, and continue with films like the 1972 run-away hit *Deep Throat*. During this period, the fantasy of Black men and white women moved onto the mainstream screen with pornographic films like *Behind the Green Door* (1972) and *Let Me Tell Ya Bout White Chicks* (1984). The representation of these relationships was particularly controversial during this time with directors drawing on post-Jim Crow white anxiety about Black social mobility, specifically the social mobility of Black men. Films during this period enjoyed large budgets for production, shooting on film, paying talent well, and investing large sums of money in sets and costuming.



Megan Christiansen, “Behind The Green Door Door Door”, 2020, films stills from “Behind The Green Door” (1972) layered in real-time

A watershed moment for “interracial” pornography came with the release of the Mitchell brother's 1972 film *Behind the Green Door*, which was the first US mainstream porn film to feature sex between a Black man and white woman – grossing \$50 million at the box office. In the film, actress Marilyn Chambers portrays a rich San Francisco socialite Gloria Saunders, who is kidnapped and taken to a sex club, where a group of six white women engages in lesbian sex with her in front of a large crowd, before engaging in “interracial” sex. The “African Stud”, played by boxer Johnnie Keyes, is like a checklist for the racist tropes of a Black Buck stereotype. A trope popularized after the Reconstruction era which labeled Black men as physically imposing, violent, sexually aggressive, unintelligent, and as destructive forces to white respectability and will, especially in regards to white women. Keyes appears from behind a green door, dressed in white tights cut out at the crotch to reveal his erection, a tribal necklace, and tribal face paint. Even the way in which he is “unleashed” from the holding area seems to make animalistic references. The sex ends when Chambers' character orgasms, Jonny Keyes character does

⁹ Warhol's *Blue Movie* however was not a traditional pornographic film, it was a “pornographic art film.”

not, reinforcing the power dynamic that he is there in service of the white female figure, not for his own pleasure.

The audience descends into group sex -- an audience that is actually very queer and very diverse; we see drag queens, trans folks, fat women, people of color, etc engaging in pleasure -- as Chamber's character performs a gangbang sequence on a trapeze with Keyes and two other men. The film ends with its only ejaculation scene (believed to be the longest in a porn film at almost seven minutes) in which the white male protagonist's physical release is prioritized and showcased as art. The queered bookends to the main "interracial" sex scene further complicate the narrative. The racist tropes and misogyny vibrate against the queerness of the performed crowd, captured through the lens of two straight white male directors.

This film embodies the fear/desire paradox, a conflict at the heart of "interracial" porn and its designation as taboo. Chambers' character does not have a single line in the film, and yet, through her facial expressions and body language, still seems to play to the stereotype of a helpless victim. We never see Chambers' character consent to the sex acts, and it is unclear whether Keyes' character is engaging out of his own free will.

Internet Porn (1994-present)

Porn tube sites are now the main way people access porn. Gone are the days of pre-internet pornography, where the porn industry dictated to consumers what they should be turned on by; now, production is mainly driven by online consumption and analytics - the more clicks something receives, the more of that content gets made. Sex.com, widely believed to be the first porn website, was registered just 3 years after the first-ever websites launched in 1991. In 2005, tube site giant Pornhub launched, two years after the launch of aggregate streaming site YouTube. Porn tube sites aggregate content through a similar model, housing videos from mainstream porn studios, independent performers, amateur content creators, and pirated material in one place.

"Interracial" through the '90s and early 2000s was treated as low budget, low production value, gritty content filled with stereotypes of Black men as "thugs", "drug dealers", "gangbangers", etc. In 2014, white French entrepreneur Greg Lansky founded Blacked, an "interracial" porn production company. Lansky entered into the industry betting his money

on "interracial," which was a niche market at the time. He was not only convinced that people would watch "interracial" porn that was produced with a high-end production aesthetic, but that people would *actually* pay for it. He was right: Blacked is the #2 channel on Pornhub, raking up 1.6 billion views. Its sister channel, Blacked Raw, sits ranked at #19.

Lansky's productions generally present traditionally beautiful white women¹⁰ and extremely athletic Black men without the use of "overtly problematic" stereotypes. This is a low bar. While Lansky may not rely on using the overtly racist visual stereotyping described above, or having his white female performers refer to their co-stars as the n-word¹¹, racist tropes are not absent from this content. The term "Blacked" means to make something black, to blacken, to defame, or sully someone's reputation. By placing his content within this framework, Lansky reinforces the taboo of "interracial" sex; he tells the audience that there is an exchange of power occurring, with the implicit purity of white women at stake. Much of the stereotyping occurs visually, as seen in the way Blacked promotes its content through its still advertisements, presenting an updated Mandingo (Black Buck) fantasy, this time in HD.



Blacked.com Promotional Image

In 2016¹², "interracial" pornography saw an increase in production following the launch of Blacked.com. It wasn't until 2018 that data began to reflect this increase, when the statistics on sites like Pornhub reflect a 36% rise in popularity of "interracial"

¹⁰ The company has started shooting Black women in the past 8 months following the BLM protests that occurred over the Summer of 2020, after previously excluding Black women completely from its business model.

¹¹ BuzzFeed News. "A Black Male Porn Star Is Suing After His White Female Costar Called Him The N-Word During Filming," 17 May 2018, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/amberjamieson/black-male-porn-star-sue-white-female-n-word-moe-monster>. Accessed 04 April 2021.

¹² A year that saw the election of Donald Trump and Black Lives Matter demonstrations in reaction to the murders of Philando Castile, Alton Sterling, Joseph Mann, and countless other Black men by the police.

content.¹³ By 2019, consumers in the United States were viewing “interracial” pornography at a rate of 76% over other countries worldwide.¹⁴ In 2021, 13-20% of web searches are for porn despite only about 4% of websites being porn sites.¹⁵ Pornhub had 42 billion visits in 2019 alone (the company did not release their 2020 analytics, which had been a yearly tradition since 2013).

As you can see through the evolution described above, consumers have historically had to physically engage in the consumption of pornography by either going to illegal viewing spaces, engaging in its social consumption through mainstream cinema, or by visiting in-person retail locations to purchase pornographic material for consumption at home. Technology has had a huge effect on the porn industry through continually embracing the use of new production equipment, and has affected technological advancements as well by creating increased demand for home consumption devices like VCRs and DVD players. Internet porn has now allowed consumers to engage with racist or problematic pornography underneath a veil of anonymity like never before - the screen acting as the veil, the hood, the distance.

¹³ Pornhub. “2018 Year In Review.” *Pornhub*, 11 December 2018, <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2018-year-in-review>. Accessed 04 April 2021.

¹⁴ Pornhub. “2019 Year In Review.” *Pornhub*, 11 December 2019, <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2019-year-in-review>. Accessed 04 April 2021.

¹⁵ Buchholz, Katharina. “How Much of the Internet Consists of Porn?” Statista, 11 Feb 2019, <https://www.statista.com/chart/16959/share-of-the-internet-that-is-porn/>. Accessed 08 April 2021.

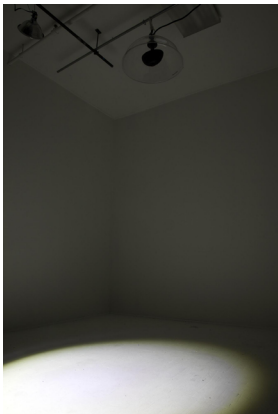
“Pornography offers a generative site to explore the representation and potential enactments of racial fantasy. It is a genre of the body, an economy of visible flesh, designed for the specific purpose of titillation and arousal. And it is a genre that makes visible the proof of the Mandingos threat, in that pornography actually allows the viewer to see the black male penis in explicit detail disallowed by other forms of media. Pornography has historically drawn on racial fetishization to construct its fantasies.” - Adrienne Davis¹⁶

I can trace my interest in “interracial” pornography as a subject back to a specific moment in 2019. One of my partners and I were in bed together, fucking, and he said he “liked my tight white pussy,” which on its face seems like a ridiculous and pretty unsexy thing to say, however, I found myself telling him “I loved his big Black cock.” I remember thinking that I knew what he wanted me to say and that I recognized we were both performing what we had learned from porn – a erotic colonialist language, not created by porn, but one that pornography perpetuates. The identification and acknowledgment of this infiltration of coded pornographic language into my own sex life was an unsettling, but perhaps not surprising, realization for me as someone that has always watched a lot of porn. I knew that this partner and I both consumed “interracial” pornography and we’d had conversations about why: each of us could see someone who looked like ourselves fucking someone who looked like the other. However, in that moment we had both consumed a very specific pornographic representation; we had both bought into a fantasy on some level, re-performing this dialogue in my bedroom. The exchange revealed the extent to which we fetishize each other (even subconsciously), and exemplified the sexualized conditioning of white supremacy that persists both on and off screen. I think much of my anxiety around this exchange comes from not even really *knowing* if either of us *want* to talk like this, and then, questioning if it is even hot in the first place.

It wasn’t until a year into making this work that I confronted this private exchange in an audio piece called *MF, TWP, BBC*. This acronym stands for *Male/Female, Tight White Pussy, Big Black Cock*; referencing the naming and tagging conventions utilized by pornographic tube sites like Pornhub.

¹⁶ Davis, Adrienne D. *Black Sexual Economies: Race and Sex in a Culture of Capital*. University of Illinois Press, 2019, p43.

These terms function in two ways, the first being that they allow users to find the content that they desire through the use of search terms and categorization, often using the names of specific sex acts or partner combinations e.g. M/F/F to denote a threesome with two women and one man. The other way they function is to categorize and therefore flatten our conception of entire racial, ethnic or sexual identities within the pornographic landscape. To categorize and generalize when it comes to the body means to create distance between us (the viewer) and the subject/object (the performer.) Categories like “interracial” rely on language’s ability to flatten our conception of entire populations. American artist and writer Gordon Hall speaks to this in discussing their decision not to refer to “the body” anymore, writing, “When we talk about ‘the black body,’ we inhabit a gaze that understands one black body to be effectively indistinguishable from another. This way of speaking positions us as outsiders looking in to see only the most visible markers of difference, loading them with significance that eclipses the particularity and diversity of the individuals within an identity category.”¹⁷



Megan Christiansen, “MF, TWP, BBC”, 2020, Installation View

The term BBC (Big Black Cock) within pornography denotes a category (any videos that feature Black men with large penises would fall in this category), but it is also a spoken phrase that is performed constantly within “interracial” pornography by white women. In *MF, TWP, BBC* I confront the performance of this word and express the ways in which this circulation of language is normalized. The audience enters a dark space, where a spotlight illuminates the floor below a sound tube speaker which emits

a 4 minute and 42-second audio performance. I re-perform the real-life exchange of “I love your tight white pussy/I love your big Black cock,” playing both the roles of my Black male partner and myself, a white woman. The exchange is repeated, the cadence and emphasis change slightly each time. Every minute or two, I “try on” a different character - the aggressive and possessive man, the whispering seductress, the monotonous stand-in, the woman in ecstasy, etc. Each time, different words are muted to produce a different spoken combination, with the words “pussy” and “cock” always being omitted to activate the listener’s desire through imagination. Eventually, almost the entire phrase is muted until just the words “Black” and “white” are repeated over and over. This muting does not occur during the performance but in the editing process: a simultaneous critique of both the language used and the act of re-performance itself. I refuse to complete the circulation of this language. This process of redacting, this practice of refusing the racialized erotics of these phrases in their respective states of completion suspends the audience in a space of tension, of anticipation. They stand in an otherwise dark space where these words become their partner.



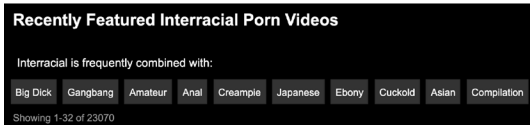
Patty Chang, “Hand To Mouth”, 2001, Video still

This exploration of the language of pornography is something that I see in dialogue with visual artist Patty Chang, particularly her 2001 video work *Hand to Mouth*. In this single-channel video piece, Chang wears a series of different wigs as she is fed water from a helium balloon by an unidentified figure off-camera, each time performing language that would traditionally be associated with exaggerated performances of female “pleasure” in pornography. Phrases like “more, more, more gimme more, in my face, etc” are exclaimed with a helium-shifted tone in her voice as water is sprayed all over her face, mimicking the pornographic “cum shot.” Her performance recontextualizes often misogynistic language within pornography, and reveals the unsexiness of many of the conventions we are

¹⁷ Hall, Gordon. “Why I Don’t Talk About ‘The Body’: A Polemic.” *Monday Journal*, <https://monday-journal.com/why-i-dont-talk-about-the-body-a-polemic/>. Accessed 08 January 2021

conditioned to find arousing, a recontextualization that I engage in *MF,TWP, BBC*.

The term “interracial” can be combined with other search terms to find content that is more representative of what the term means outside of the porn world, e.g. something involving different races. To achieve this, a search term almost needs to override the implicit meaning of “interracial” to find this content efficiently. While the term “Ebony” can mean any Black performer, in straight porn it generally refers to Black female performers. So, for instance, to find scenes that feature Black women and white men, or Black women with white women (girl/girl) on a site like Pornhub you would search “interracial ebony.” The same goes for those wanting to find interracial scenes with other women of color. Within straight porn, which prioritizes the male viewer as its audience, the female performer is more explicitly referenced; if one were to click on the “Asian” category, Asian women will be featured with men of all races.



Suggested additional tags when the “interracial” category is selected (screenshot), Pornhub, 2021

“Interracial” is intimately intertwined with the category BBC or Big Black Cock. Mainstream porn generally presents us with one version of the cis Black male body - large, muscular, attractive, with a giant penis. Tube sites utilize animalistic language like “monster,” “python,” or “buck” to describe Black men in terms of their bodies, penises, and supposed aggression - simultaneously. This language reinforces the stereotypes often associated with Black men as having larger penises and less sexual restraint; yet this age-old myth has been repeatedly debunked by studies that find no correlation between penis size and race¹⁸. So, if there is no basis in truth for this stereotype then why is it not only repeated but celebrated with its own porn category? It is because these myths are foundational to our understanding of desire and the white supremacist patriarchal structure into which each of us regardless of race, identity or sexual orientation are organized. For example, the degeneracy and perversion of Black women’s hypersexuality, the submissive and docile nature of Asian women, trans women being seen

as predators, etc. The perpetuation of these myths serves to organize the value of different desires (and shame) within the sexual economy, in relation to whiteness. The language and categorical structure of porn tube sites has been created and normalized by white men. They are the simultaneous gatekeepers and consumers of porn, they have historically had the capital to produce pornography and distribute it, been the talent agents, and now the biggest porn sites are run by large media companies owned by white men. Misogyny and racism has been baked into this structure from the beginning, so there is a vested interest in maintaining power within this structure.

I approached one of my favorite adult performers Mickey Mod, someone whose work is a sustaining part of my sex life, to provide some clarity from within the industry about the tension created by these power dynamics in a phone interview. He explains,

“I’ve used the term BBC myself, I don’t want to use it but I understand the value of it coming up in search results and search engine optimization - having that in the title and seeing the differences in it being clicked on. Which is this larger systemic issue with not just race and oppression but shame in sexual expression. If our sexual expression is so deeply rooted in our shame, then other things that we are shamed about, like race and misogyny, float up to the top; especially if you’re able to have this dark little space where you can indulge in these dark little fantasies (which I do think is important) but I do feel like needs to be recognized as a symptom of larger issues and a character of larger systemic issues rather than the cause of it.”¹⁹

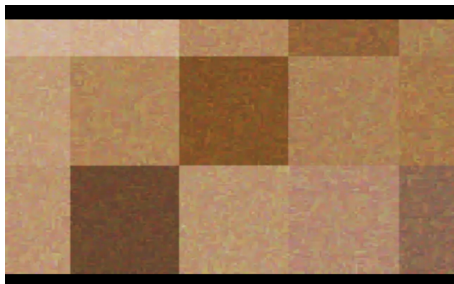
Is it possible for consumers and performers to separate out and engage in forms of racialized desire without reinforcing larger systems of racism? Writer and Professor Kristen Warner warns against the assumptions that racial fantasy merely reproduces internalized cultural orders, explaining that this “disavows a more complicated discussion about how that desire might actually operate. In short, it is possible for racial fantasy to produce pleasure as much as feelings of shame, anger, and helplessness.”²⁰ To assume racial fantasy merely

¹⁹ Mod, Mickey, Phone Interview with Megan Christiansen, Conducted on December 19th 2020.

²⁰ Warner, Kristin J. “If Loving Olitz is Wrong, I Don’t Wanna Be Right.” *The Black Scholar*, vol. 45, no. 1: Scandalous, 2015, pp. 16-20. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2014.997599>, p18

¹⁸ Wylie, Kevan R., and Ian Eardley. “Penile size and the ‘small penis syndrome.’” *British Journal of Urology (BJU) International*, vol. 99, no. 6, 2007, pp. 1449-1455.

reproduces cultural order also disregards the subjectivity of performers of color to use racialized desire as a means of subverting or transforming power dynamics within their performances, or to choose not to. I also wonder, if desire also produces feelings of shame, anger, and helplessness, are these emotions consistent depending on the racial makeup of the coupling? It often seems “interracial” pornography relies on the intense re-articulation and repetition of stereotypes and language that is designed to prioritize the activation of feelings of shame and helplessness. As film critic Linda Williams writes, “Genres thrive, after all, on the persistence of the problems they address; but genres thrive also in their ability to recast the nature of these problems.”²¹ Pornography is nothing if not masterful in its ability to recast problematics for viewing pleasure. Imagine a space within porn which, instead of rearticulating the racialized tropes and language that reinforce society’s shame around sex and pleasure, becomes a space for exploring and working through hang-ups in an open and nuanced way – in a way that acknowledges that desire is messy, complex and beautiful. If the space in which these representational bodies that are at odds eventually come together is the space in which taboo is engaged, perhaps this is the space in which the taboo can also be undone. As I move forward and continue to make work that addresses these issues, I will strive to make space for this type of conversation.



Megan Christiansen, "We're Not Fuckin' Anymore", 2019, single-channel projected video, stereo audio

In my video piece, *We're Not Fuckin' Anymore*, I interrogate how “interracial” content functions and how this language is translated by consumers. One of my ex-partners agreed to describe in as much detail as possible everything he was seeing in a porn scene of his choice (he chose an “interracial” scene) from the performers to the sex acts, the language to

the setting. This exercise was performed remotely, him in New York, me in Providence. This voice-over is broadcast in the gallery, as a full-wall projection shows the scene he is watching. The scene is magnified to the point where the performers and the sex acts become abstract, oscillating color fields, edited to mirror the breath and pace of the narrator.

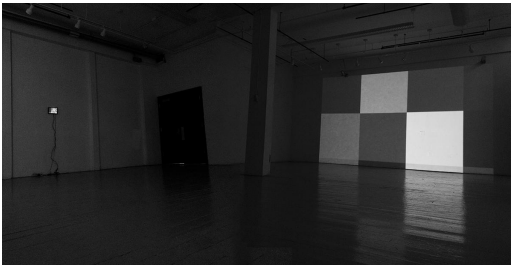
This exercise explores listening as seeing. Highlighting details the narrator chooses to describe reveals his own preferences in terms of the visual stimuli, and clarifies how the visual content itself is structured. The language he chooses to engage and the priorities he makes are essential to building the audience’s understanding of the content. For instance, he identifies the white women as “Valentina” and “August” respectively, even musing about where in California he thinks one of the women is from based on her accent, however, he refers to the Black male performer as “homeboy.” This highlights the fact that the porn scene doesn’t name him (the women’s “character development” is prioritized) which flattens and dis-individuals the performer and collapses the space between the body of the performer and the voice of the narrator - both Black men. In this piece, however, it is a Black male narrator whose voice is privileged, who controls the flow of information, and shapes our experience.

We're Not Fuckin' Anymore also exists as a two-channel installation, where the full-wall projection is placed in conversation with a second channel which is presented on a small 10-inch LCD monitor at the opposite side of the space. In this second channel, I opened up the invitation to friends of varied gender, sexual, and racial identities to select the porn scene of their choice and describe it to me in as much detail as possible. This time, I had a non-binary voice narrating gay porn, a straight white woman narrating a gangbang scene, a queer Black voice narrating a “straight” threesome, and so on. This second channel is much longer, currently sitting at approximately 42 minutes compared to the first at approximately 11 minutes, so that each time the main narration of my ex-partner loops, it becomes placed in conversation with a different voice at the opposite end of the space. I plan on continually adding to this second channel so that it runs for multiple hours against the loop of the first channel. Each time a viewer enters the space, they will encounter a slightly different conversation between the two voices.

The audio of the main channel is presented on high-quality speakers, enhancing the rhythm and tone of the male voice as the main guide to the

²¹ Williams, Linda. “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess.” *Film Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4 (Summer), 1991, pp. 2-13. *Jstor*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1212758>, p12.

work, while the audio on the second channel plays directly off the monitor, requiring the viewer to move closer to the screen to listen. I intend this audio treatment to encourage the audience to move around the entire space, their position between the two speakers changing their auditory experience of the conversation. This series of narrators is accompanied by obscured videos of myself watching along with them in the dark, zoomed in to obscure all but a small portion of my body, shifting with every new voice. Each narrator exists not just in collaboration with me and my visual performance, but also in anonymous collaboration with each other. Through this embodied practice of active listening I hope that the audience's imagination is engaged, that they slow down and bathe in the narrator's words, that they sit with the bodily sensations that may or may not reveal themselves during their subjective experience.



Megan Christiansen, "We're Not Fuckin Anymore (Two)", 2021, two-channel video, two-channel stereo audio, installation view

"Because the black-white binary is so fundamental to our way of thinking in America, it creates something of a trap both for those who attempt to construct less stereotypical representations of blackness and for those who consume these representations."

- Darnell Hunt²²

If I think of an imagined schematic of pornography, in which "interracial" sits in the middle, I can see the ways in which the fantasies and shame associated with "interracial" desire radiate outwards and saturate the categories beyond it. Categories like BBC, Cuckold, Big Dick, and Small Penis Humiliation²³ are steeped in these fantasies, and "universal" categories

²² Hunt, Darnell M. *Channeling Blackness: Studies on Television and Race in America*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2005, p4

²³ Small penis humiliation (SPH) - a type of consensual verbal erotic humiliation where a dominant person degrades a submissive person's penis. SPH can involve sex acts or purely verbal humiliation.

such as Double Penetration²⁴ and Gangbang²⁵ become completely animated by these tropes to continue the "fantasy"²⁶ that Black men denigrating white women is the ultimate threat. If I were to take a 'traditional,' meaning all-white, gangbang scene and replace all of the male players with Black men, it completely shifts and heightens the power play and potential for violence in the audience's mind. This is often not done subtly, as gangbang scenes that feature casts of "convicts", "burglars", "drug dealers", or groups of Black men that suddenly cannot control their "animalistic" urges are standard fare.



Teen gets BBC gangbanged, Screenshot, X-Videos, Uploaded by KimmieJ27²⁷

Stereotype analysis only gets us so far in terms of categorizing positive and negative representations of entire populations. I keep returning to Tessa Perkins's distinction between knowing and believing racist stereotypes, where she explains that "the excitement of interracial lust - for both blacks and whites - depends on the basic knowledge of the white racist scenario of the white virgin/black beast but the pleasure generated by the scenario does not necessarily need to *believe* in the scenario. Rather, we might say that there is a kind of knowing flirtation with the archaic beliefs of racial stereotypes."²⁸ It is this knowing flirtation that I am fascinated with in thinking about the consumption of racialized pornographic imagery, as fantasy can be a means of affirming beliefs or working through conflicts with those same beliefs.

I think this knowing flirtation plays out most strongly in two main stereotypes within "interracial"

²⁴ Double Penetration (DP) - a sex act that involves two penises, toys, or a combo inside someone at the same time. It is most commonly used to refer to simultaneous anal and vaginal sex.

²⁵ Gangbang - three or more performers having sex with a single willing partner.

²⁶ Meant simultaneously as an erotic fantasy or imaginary but also in its definition as being an idea that holds no basis in reality.

²⁷ KimmieJ27. "Teen gets BBC gangbanged." X-Videos, https://www.xvideos.com/video29279019/teen_gets_bbc_gangbanged. Accessed 24 January 2021.

²⁸ Williams, Linda. "Skin Flicks on the Racial Border: Pornography, Exploitation, and Interracial Lust." *Porn Studies*, edited by Linda Williams, Duke University Press, 2004, p302.

pornography - the hypersexualized Black Buck (Mandingo) figure and the oversexed white woman. Each of these stereotypes usually works in concert with a complementary stereotype of the opposite sex, for instance, the Black Buck and virginal white girl; the oversexed white woman and the “powerless” Black man. We don’t necessarily need to believe these stereotypes to get off; however, we must knowingly flirt with the fact that their portrayal represents real history and a reperformance of power dynamics that, historically, were deadly. Speaking about “interracial” films of the 1960s (which showed Black men forcing themselves on white women in rape fantasies), writer Mirielle Miller-Young explains, “these films expose white male anxiety about being cuckolded by sexually superior black men, whom they fear their wives secretly prefer. The charged fantasy of these interracial films relied on upon the knowledge that sex across specific racial and gender lines was in real life violently guarded.”²⁹ This Mandingo fantasy comes from slavery, and the fear of the enslaved male breaking free and ravaging white women who “belonged” to white men. For a Black Buck figure to denigrate³⁰ a pure white woman would theoretically diminish her social standing. On the contrary, the oversexed white woman who seduces, truly desires, or simply prefers Black men over those of their own race represents a threat to the entire social system. Both of these stereotypes create a space in which white men can engage in a practice of simultaneous fear and idolization – and perhaps, unresolved and internalized homosexual desire. Is it the Black male form (and size tropes) they are envious of and the performance of masculinity that they wish to replicate, or is there a real unresolved desire for Black men themselves that drives some of the shame associated with “interracial” desire?

In my piece *No Dialogue, Just Reactions*, I explore the introductory space within the pornographic structure that often does much of the heavy lifting in terms of shaping the racialized stereotypes that are subsequently performed, while simultaneously attempting to inscribe some sort of reason/meaning for these stereotypes’ existence within the narrative

²⁹ Miller-Young, Mirielle. *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography*. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2014, p58.

³⁰ “If you “denigrate” someone, you attempt to blacken their reputation. It makes sense, therefore, that “denigrate” can be traced back to the Latin verb denigrate, meaning “to blacken.” When “denigrate” was first used in English in the 16th century, it meant to cast aspersions on someone’s character or reputation. Eventually, it developed a second sense of “to make black” (“factory smoke denigrated the sky”), but this sense is somewhat rare in modern usage. Nowadays, of course, “denigrate” can also refer to belittling the worth or importance of someone or something.” - Merriam Webster. “Denigrate.” Merriam Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/denigrate>. Accessed 15 May 2021.

structure. I reference a popular YouTube series by creator Bill Smith³¹ where television shows like *Dr. Phil* were edited to only show the reactions of the characters by removing all dialogue, resulting in an awkward and often ridiculous sequence of silence. I wanted to engage this approach in regards to the opening sequences of numerous “interracial” porn scenes that engage in the Black Buck, oversexed white female, and virginal white female stereotypes. Most of these scenes are located in domestic space, with Black men entering the home often as tutors, workers, etc. This centering of white domesticity as the stage on which these tropes play out referencing the Stag films during Jim Crow which prioritized the white home as a space of employment and danger. In contemporary “interracial”, there is now the addition of Black men entering these spaces as step-fathers/step-brothers, etc – a layering of taboo upon taboo. The popularity of this faux-incest category perhaps further highlights the importance of fantasy as a space for people to work through their issues.

Oftentimes these opening sequences, the “set-up” in porn scenes, are skipped over by eager viewers in favor of the hardcore sexual visuals. As a consumer, there are times where I need to get off quickly and others where I can luxuriate in my own pleasure, these needs often determine how much time I spend with these portions of the pornographic structure. As an artist, however, I am fascinated with the beginning of porn films: the writing, the often-stilted acting, the costuming, the set, the narrative set-up. Film critic Linda Williams groups the genres of pornography, horror, and melodrama into what she refers to as “Body Genres” due to these films’ ability to illicit visceral physical sensation. She argues that by comparing these three modes of representation, we might be able to get beyond thinking about pure sensation to analyze the actual structure of these representations as well as their affect on the spectral body.³²

In *No Dialogue, Just Reactions* I suspend the viewer in this space by stripping away the structure to reveal some of the subtleties that are usually concealed. By removing all of the scripted language that acts as the foundation for us to understand what is at stake in the eventual sexual exchange of these two bodies, as well as removing many of the visual indicators of porn itself (namely the foreplay or

³¹ Smith, Bill, “*Dr Phil with no dialogue, just reactions...*.” YouTube, 10 Feb 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4F0Mer4kDDY&t=70s>.

³² Williams, Linda. “*Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess.*” *Film Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4 (Summer), 1991, pp. 2-13. *Jstor*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1212758>. Accessed 28 November 2020.

physical seduction) I allow the viewer to consider fantasy beyond “wish-fulfilling linear narratives of mastery and control leading to closure and the attainment of desire.” Rather, these fantasies are “marked...by the prolongation of desire, and by the lack of fixed position with respect to the objects and events fantasized.”³³ I also engage this strategy to explore the potency of the problematics within the “interracial” visual landscape. When the indicators of power by way of language are removed, do the stereotypes hold up, do the power dynamics still carry weight, or does the pornographic structure become less a feedback loop than a place of possibility?



Megan Christiansen, “No Dialogue, Just Reactions”, 2021, installation view

I present these scenes in dark space, on three small 10-inch monitors fixed in-line on the wall. A red semi-transparent plastic welding curtain is stretched between a 6-foot by 6-foot black steel frame, which sits approximately 3 feet out, parallel to the wall. I move between the three channels, hoping to further interrupt a linear reading. This gesture of multiplicity points to the repetition and limited representations of “interracial” encounters within porn, while simultaneously allowing the viewer to compare similar representations. The same performers, characters and visual cues appear and reappear - this echo chamber of “interracial” representation begins to reveal itself. The audience can view the work with the curtain acting as a filter to the content beyond, or, the curious viewer can wander behind the curtain and view the channels unobstructed. Choosing to

³³ Williams, Linda. “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess.” *Film Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4 (Summer), 1991, pp. 2-13. Jstor, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1212758>, p10. Accessed 28 November 2020.

move between the screens and the curtain forces the viewer to become part of the spectacle, their body on view to the audience, mediated in the same manner as the content.

The red artificial plastic tautly stretched across the steel frame also becomes a metaphor for the artifice of the pornographic “set-up” itself. The plastic welding sheet, which is used to block harmful UV rays, comes from an active foundry. There is a visible build-up of oil/grime and marks from where people have tried to clean the surface. These markers of physical labor sit on top of the artificial surface, and mirror the veiling that the narrative set-up in pornography does to justify the tropes the content engages. The audio channel is located below the red barrier, however, pointing away from the monitors towards the opposite side of the room. This channel plays a single-channel compression of the soundtracks from all three video feeds. The audio is a mixture of ambient sound and breath from the source videos, along with dubbing over and sound effects that I produced. Through this process, I imitate and re-perform the actions of many of the white women in the source films, quite literally adding my voice into this composition of problematics.



Adrian Piper, “What It’s Like, What It Is #3”, 1991, installation view

American conceptual artist and philosopher Adrian Piper’s work *What It’s Like, What It Is #3* (1991) became a source of provocation in my thinking around methods of addressing racist stereotypes through performance, spectatorship, and repetition. Piper’s work features four simultaneous views of a single Black male figure on the central podium as he addresses the spectator, declaring to us that he does not represent a series of racist stereotypes e.g. “I’m not dirty, I’m not horny, I’m not selfish, I’m not evil...”³⁴ The brilliantly clinical white light activates the spectral performance space of the amphitheater.

³⁴ James, Jamillah. “Adrian Piper *What It’s Like, What It Is #3*.” *The ICA LA*, 16 July 2019, <https://www.theicala.org/en/exhibitions/62-adrian-piper-br-what-its-like-what-it-is-3>. Accessed 10 November 2020.

The viewer is now implicated -- we are no longer passive spectators, but must reflect upon our own biases and/or roles in upholding these gendered and racialized stereotypes. In thinking through this inherently problematic “interracial” content spatially in my own practice, I am inviting the audience to critically reflect on what they are looking at, and think through where this stuff *actually* comes from through encouraging active spectatorship.

– but do most consumers actually *know* what that content looks or feels like? Are we just too used to being told what turns us on?

Even though you can clearly still see the pervasiveness of these stereotypes in contemporary pornography, the rise of “ethical”³⁵ porn begs the question of how we deal with stereotyping in porn more generally. The embedded structural racism and oppression that both allow and rely on the Black/white binary to exist presents a challenge, not only for porn producers, but media as a whole. Does mainstream porn simply need to re-brand this content, to stop calling it “interracial”, or stop using racist terms in its tags and titling, as female focused “ethical” porn sites like Bellesa.co have tried? (Notably, Bellesa is still aggregating content from a producer like Blacked.com, and simply categorizing it as “Big Cock.”) The convenience and power of porn tube sites have conditioned me as a consumer to demand that all of my favorite performers and all of the fantasies I could ever want to indulge in be at my fingertips at all times. The introduction of platforms like Onlyfans³⁶, Snapchat, etc, have allowed consumers to engage with their favorite performers and compensate them directly, allowing for what feels like a much more “ethical” experience, however, that demand for constant access to mass fantasy is a difficult one to unlearn.

As consumers, we hold an immense amount of power in the pornographic space. It stands to reason that if we just demanded more diverse pornography, more would be made. The problem arises in the “right” type of content being produced. If consumers demand more of the same stereotype-ridden or derogatory content that already exists, then more roles would be given to performers of color, but the same limited opportunities to perform demeaning roles would proliferate. As an audience we would need to want and demand non-racist, non-misogynistic content

³⁵ “Ethical porn can be defined as that which is made legally, respects the rights of performers, has good working conditions, shows both fantasy and real-world sex and celebrates sexual diversity – just to name a few.” - Scott, Kellie, “*Ethical Porn — Does It Exist and Who Makes It?*” ABC News, 20 Dec 2016, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-12-21/ethical-porn-does-it-exist-and-where-do-you-find-it/8091266#:~:text=Ethical%20porn%20can%20be%20defined,problem%20in%20the%20porn%20industry>. Accessed 15 May 2021.

³⁶ OnlyFans is a content subscription service that many adult performers and independent content creators have been using to share and monetize their own content, as well as to connect with their fans.

Hierarchies Of Looking, Hierarchies Of Labour

Boy/Girl White
Girl/Girl White
Girl/Girl Anal
Boy/Girl Anal
Boy/Girl Creampie
Boy/Girl Anal Creampie
Group Scenes

Gang Bang
Gangbang Creampie
Fuck Machines
Bondage
Bachelor Parties
Double Vag
Double Anal
Prostitution!
Interracial

The adult performer and self-proclaimed “interracial expert” Lisa Ann visualizes the hierarchy of taboo (listed above) that exists within pornography in a clip from *The Daily Show With Trevor Noah* entitled *Is the Porn Industry Racist?*³⁷ She sets about listing everything cis white women would historically do in their careers before “interracial”, including but not limited to gangbangs, double penetration, and curiously - prostitution. While this exchange appears within the framework of Roy Wood Jr.’s comic reporting on the porn industry, what Lisa Ann lays out for us is in line with what is more widely known about the hierarchy of financial compensation and labor within the industry. This is also in line with the social constructions upon which selling this racialized desire is built: that the denigration, the “blackening” of the “pure white woman,” both within porn and outside of it must come at a huge cost - whether in the form of financial compensation or as perceived threats to the white supremacist patriarchal structure.

The porn industry itself, and the function of racialized desire as a concept, each rely on the preservation and performance of both a hierarchy (or ownership) of looking and a hierarchy of labor. Porn is an industry where discrimination and compensation of labor based on race or ethnicity not only occurs, but is incentivized. There is a practice of white cis women charging more money for their “firsts”, such as their first gangbang or first anal scene, in which their “first interracial” scene is treated as the last point in a long line of taboos. This premium pricing does not apply to their Black female counterparts or other women of color. African American adult performer Isiah Maxwell, speaking to Rolling Stone, says: “IR is a smokescreen for what you’re really trying to say, it doesn’t mean Asian or Latino. It means, ‘Are you

³⁷ Wood Jr., Roy. “Is the Porn Industry Racist?” *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, 16 February 2016, <https://www.cc.com/video/didt5n/the-daily-show-with-trevor-noah-is-the-porn-industry-racist>. Accessed 11 September 2020.

willing to have sex with a Black guy?”³⁸ White women holding out from “interracial” scenes for as long as possible in the hopes of preserving the longevity of their careers is a practice that can be traced back to female performers historically making the majority of their money from tour dancing according to performer Mickey Mod.³⁹ Performers would wait to do “interracial” scenes for as long as possible, so that when they finally did, they already had enough of a following that they could still tour through the south without fear of death threats or being banned from certain clubs in response to their “interracial” scenes.

While porn is one of the only industries where women are generally paid more than men, the range of compensation varies widely, and there are many factors involved in pricing. Two of the main factors concern the particular sex act being performed and whether it is the first time that act is being performed by the (white) actress. Male performers do not enjoy the same sort of premium payment based on the performance, and rather are compensated with a fixed fee per shoot, which stands at about one third of the pay of women, according to data journalist John Millward⁴⁰ (this data does not include queer performers). White women’s currency within the adult economy becomes increasingly clear, and with it, the immense amount of power and influence white female performers have to change the way these hierarchies of labor and compensation function within the industry. I think it will take a radical redistribution of compensation by white female performers who need to demand equal compensation for their male scene partners, but most importantly, for their female counterparts of color. In the current hierarchy, the agents and production companies play a key role in the perpetuation of this structure, putting the longevity of white women’s careers above the advancement of all others. An acknowledgment and rejection of these oppressive labor structures by white women need not only apply to the adult industry, since, as white women, we need to reveal, actively disrupt, and reject the ways in which our proximity to power furthers the white supremacist patriarchal cause in our everyday lives.

In my own work, I have been grappling with what it

³⁸ Dickson, E.J. “Racism in Porn Industry Under Scrutiny Amid Nationwide Protests.” *Rolling Stone*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/racism-porn-industry-protest-1010853/>. Accessed 06 April 2021.

³⁹ Mod, Mickey, Phone Interview with Megan Christiansen, Conducted on December 19th 2020.

⁴⁰ Millward, John, “Deep Inside a Study of 10000 Porn Stars”, 14 Feb 2013, <https://jonmillward.com/blog/studies/deep-inside-a-study-of-10000-porn-stars/>. Accessed 21 January 2021.

means as a white woman to have these Black men “perform” for me; either through collecting and editing found footage, or by creating my own with the men in my life. What pleasure (and potential profit) do I gain as both an artist and a woman in this practice? What effect does this practice have on these hierarchies of labor and looking?

I begin to work through some of these questions in *Mixed Doubles*. In this piece, I draw the connection between “interracial” pornography and sports, both through spectatorship, and the hierarchical nature of labor and looking within American sports. The comparison feels apt for me, given that porn performers are highly athletic. There are clear structures that organize looking, consumption, and exhibition within these two spaces; and these structures are both gendered and racialized. The tracking and surveillance of bodies, movement, and performance is constant through the sports camera’s lens, info-graphics, social media, sports reporting, and the crowd.



Megan Christiansen, “Mixed Doubles”, 2020, Three-channel looped video, stereo audio, 2 minutes 42 seconds

This link between interracial sex and sports is not new. After Jim Crow, there was a major fear on white college campuses in the United States of integrated same-sex bedrooms as a threat to the social structure, especially as schools began desegregating their sports teams. Interracial dating was strongly discouraged and scare tactics were used against Black athletes and white female students, with professors and administrators telling women they would get a “bad name” and threatening athletes with disciplinary action if interracial dating continued. Professors and writers Charles F. Springwood and Richard C. King note, “this policing was not limited to a single individual but was pervasive”⁴¹ and not

⁴¹ King, C. Richard, and Charles F. Springwood. “Body and Soul: Physicality, Disciplinary, and the Overdetermination of Blackness.” *Beyond the Cheers: Race as Spectacle in College Sport*, State University of New York Press, 2001, pp. 185-206.

limited to a singular university. They note as well that schools would recruit Black female students specifically to provide “appropriate companionship” to Black athletes. Still, white fans would cheer on the same Black athletes on the field who they wished to be punished for fraternizing with white women. This paranoia still did not outweigh the athlete’s potential for commodification and so surveillance, restriction, and academic punishment were deployed to manage Black male bodies on campus.

Mixed Doubles is a three-channel video work presented on three 32-inch LCD television screens, installed approximately 9-feet up on the wall and tilted down to replicate the physical and aesthetic sensation of watching a game at a sports bar. The work shows alternating views of three popular Black male adult performers on the left and right screens. A central screen shows a sports crowd whose heads move left to right which dictates the timing of the images on the left and right screens. The audio of a hollow-sounding tennis ball traveling from left to right is heard as the crowd tracks the bodies.

An ultra-close-up crop is used to refocus on the performer, denying the visual completion of the explicit sex act and focusing on the physical labor of the performers. The crop serves to emphasize that the “main event” in both sports and “interracial” pornography is a Black male body, rather than a Black male face -- which is often concealed by protective gear in sports or cropped out of the frame in heterosexual pornography. In *Mixed Doubles*, the cropping also refers to advertising media, appropriating visual language often used to sell desire, beauty, and whiteness to speak to the commercial commodification and consumption of the Black male body – within both porn and sports. The white female porn performers’ bodies are removed from the frame, opening the sexual imaginary up rather than coding it specifically as “interracial.” However, the white women’s participation in this cycle of looking and labor is represented in the multiplicity of women portrayed in the sports crowd. To complicate this cropping further, I blur the men’s images directionally toward the crowd. An intentional and perhaps seemingly ridiculous choice – to zoom in on the performer, to focus on their labor, and then re-broadcast this image back to the audience unfocused. Does the audience desire a clear image, and what happens when that desire goes unfulfilled?

The white-only crowd in the center channel is a performed crowd, taken from Alfred Hitchcock’s 1951 film *Strangers on a Train*. The back-and-forth gesture

of the head performed by Hitchcock’s crowd is mimicked by the spectator in the gallery as they track the Black bodies that appear and disappear. The white male protagonist in Hitchcock’s crowd returns our gaze, representing a haunting power. This middle screen begins to glitch and unsync from the screens on the left and right, eventually imploding its gaze inwards, towards itself. The crowd become surveillers of each other as the male performers flank either side. A cycle of looking is created and disrupted within the piece, and as the spectator, we either disrupt or continue that cycle depending on how we are looking. Each audience member’s subjectivity is key - their individual sexual, gender, racial, or ethnic identity shifts the meaning of the circular act of watching that is created in the space.



Paul Pfeiffer, “Race Riot”, 2001, installation view

Paul Pfeiffer’s practice, in terms of his treatment of the sporting spectacle and the racialized body, is of particular influence in this work, especially his installation methods, which activate the boundaries of public vs private spaces to create physically active viewing experiences within the gallery space. *Race Riot* (2001) presents a looped portion of footage showing Michael Jordan falling to the floor hugging the ball as his teammates pile on him in celebration after winning the 1996 NBA championship. Pfeiffer meticulously edits out any identifying reference to the bodies within the clip, removing jersey numbers and names. This gesture, along with the activation of the work’s title, *Race Riot*, creates ambiguity around what we are witnessing. We no longer know if we are seeing a friendly scrimmage between teams or a fight; we cannot tell if the players are falling, jumping, or being pulled off of each other – the visual representation of celebration is turned on its head. This work is presented on the screen of a camcorder,

encased in glass, acting as a proxy for a trophy. Pfeiffer's gesture of anonymizing the basketball players is echoed in the blurring and abstraction of the porn performers in *Mixed Doubles*, as well as the eventual breakdown of Hitchcock's crowd.

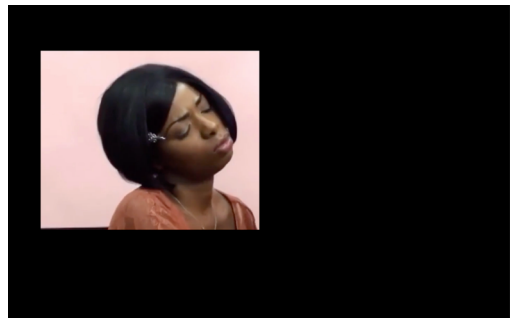


Stunning Newcomer Brixley Benz Pounded by BBC, Film Still, AllBlackX, 2020

In thinking about the spectacle of the crowd and the ownership of gaze, I can't help but note the differences in the treatment of Black women's bodies compared to white women in a particular type of solo set-up. In both partnered and solo scenes the featured woman will often go through a solo-presentational sequence where she shows off her body; often swaying, dancing, pouting and caressing herself as the camera pans up and down her body. The ways in which specifically racialized bodies are expected to play up the tropes associated with their sexualities is emphasized in these moments. This presentational process for Black women echoes the process of "reading bodies"⁴² at the slave market, where Black enslaved women would be visually and physically inspected, their "femaleness" or value within the sexual economy of slavery being assessed by white slaveholders. This included white women, whom writer Stephanie Jones-Rogers refers to as "mistresses of the market,"⁴³ women for whom owning slaves not only made them more attractive to potential suitors, but reinforced their economic investment in the institution of slavery. In these solo-pornographic-presentational sequences, Black women are expected to perform their supposed hyper-sexuality, often seen twerking or presenting their bodies in ways that emphasize already fetishized features, with the aid of further fetishizing extreme camera angles. While white women often establish their innocence or purity (that is ripe for defilement), in these sequences, I also often notice white women mimicking many of the gestures that Black women

are expected to re-perform and simultaneously shamed for, like twerking.

Working With Their Hands was made early on in my explorations of the "interracial" pornographic space, and intended to explore the differences in the performed femaleness of a selection of women participating in a filmed handjob contest found on Pornhub. Presented as a small-scale single-channel video projection, the work unfolds over the course of approximately eleven minutes. A series of women appear and begin to reappear as the different rounds of competition unfold. Similarly to *Mixed Doubles*, I crop each performer's image, this time to remove the male figure from the frame, who is the primary focus on the women's physical labor and whose eventual satisfaction is what stands between them and the ultimate prize. I preserve the black negative space around the image to point to the redaction of visual information for the audience. I again refocus the audience's attention, shifting it to the women's faces, this time leaving them unobscured so that the audience can bear witness to the variations in performance. It becomes clear when we begin to see multiple women of color appear that they feel the expectation to over perform their enthusiasm, femininity and presence in a way that the white women do not. At times, we see one white woman barely veiling her seeming disdain for the entire exercise, despite being (we assume) a willing participant in the activity. As I continue my explorations of racialized desire within the pornographic space, I plan to return to the lines of thinking I established in this piece and further examine racialized performances specific to different types of women.



Megan Christiansen, *Working With Their Hands*, 2019, single-channel projected video, no sound

⁴² Miller-Young, Mireille. *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography*. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2014, p32.

⁴³ Jones-Rogers, Stephanie E. *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2019, p14.

“Within white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, rebel black masculinity has been idolized and punished, romanticized yet vilified.”

- bell hooks⁴⁴

“Interracial” pornography relies on othering the Black male body specifically as a means of normalizing whiteness. Film Critic Richard Dyer writes, “As long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people.”⁴⁵ However, I would go as far as to say that pornography specifically normalizes the white male body, naming and coding all others, including white women’s bodies (although in a different way to most others.) The only time it seems you will see the white male body named as such within tube sites seems to be when it is exerting its power over an othered body, e.g. “*White dick fucking innocent black girl*.”⁴⁶ While “numerous scholars have revealed how representations of the black Other simultaneously provoke attraction and aversion in whites,”⁴⁷ this othering doesn’t exist alone. It works hand in hand with the criminalization of the Black male body and the continued surveillance of and fear provoked around these bodies, especially in relation to its threat to the white female body. It is this crossing of gender and racial lines, the provocation of this taboo in “interracial” pornography that provokes this simultaneous aversion and attraction in the white viewer.

The continued construction of fear around the Black male body manifests itself visually, constantly and unrelentingly. It is integral to the continuation of the structure of racial hierarchy that images of Black men which reinforce stereotypes, or play into the narratives described earlier, are circulated widely. We see this in television news, surveillance shows, and through social media, where images and language that reinforce these narratives are spread like wildfire. American sociologist Darnell Hunt explains, “Blackness as threat is attractive, it seems, as long as it can be controlled and whiteness can be affirmed. As we shall see, the interplay of the ever-present

representations of blackness and whiteness is riddled with tensions and contradictions related to this basic tenet.”⁴⁸ Control and affirmation are vital notions here, especially when speaking about “interracial” desire; the fantasy space of television proves to be the perfect forum for white folks to encounter the Black body from a “safe distance,” whether through television news, cop shows, via televised sports, or through pornography.

Television news and surveillance shows utilize the medium’s power to construct the Black male body as a site of crisis, as “television constructs black masculinity as the moment of crisis that we all collectively witnessed.”⁴⁹ In consuming relentless imagery of Black bodies (and specifically Black men) in crisis, the white majority audience becomes conditioned to imagine that this is the “truth” of Black masculinity, unable to imagine any sort of nuance and diversity for the othered people they see on television. Both television news and surveillance shows engage in the dialogue of the collective, creating a separation between “us” (the good guys, the police officers, the normative white audience) and “them” (the bad guys, the criminals being caught on television, the bodies in crisis we must fear.)

Professor and writer Cynthia A. Young uses the example of Glenn Beck on Fox News to discuss this approach, “The ‘we’ about which Beck waxes poetic turns out to be a ‘we’ defined by exclusion; it is riven with simultaneously acknowledged and unacknowledged conflicts over race, gender, sexuality, and political belief that result in the consolidation of white supremacist, masculinist defenses of militarized violence abroad”⁵⁰ – and, I would add, here at home. It is this simultaneous acknowledgment and erasure of key social constructions and power dynamics at the heart of the “interracial” taboo, when considering Black men’s and white women’s bodies within “interracial” pornography. The naming of this taboo and its relationship to these imposed social structures is always just outside the frame in pornography, on the tip of the tongue – or perhaps a *knowing flirtation* (to return to Tessa Perkins).

It is not just the language or visual structure, but also spatial conditioning that is used to construct a

⁴⁴ hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. NY, Routledge, 2015, pg 96.

⁴⁵ Dyer, Richard. “The Matter Of Whiteness.” *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*, edited by Paula S. Rothenberg, 2nd ed., Worth Publishers, 2005, p10.

⁴⁶ Pornhub, *White Dick Fucking Innocent Black Girl // Mia Marley*, 2020. Accessed 17 April 2021

⁴⁷ Hunt, Darnell M. *Channeling Blackness: Studies on Television and Race in America*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2005, p5.

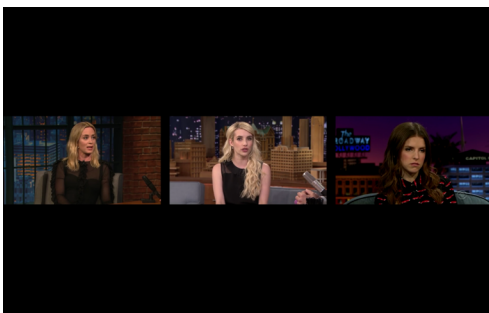
⁴⁸ Hunt, Darnell M. *Channeling Blackness: Studies on Television and Race in America*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2005, p7.

⁴⁹ Best, Stephen M. “Game Theory: Racial Embodiment and Media Crisis.” *Living Color: Race and Television in the United States*, edited by Sasha Torres, Duke University Press, 1998, p220.

⁵⁰ Young, Cynthia A. “Becked Up: Glenn Beck, White Supremacy, and the Hijacking of the Civil Rights Legacy.” *Racism Postrace*, Duke University Press, 2019, p99.

criminalized image of the Black male body. Cultural historian and theorist Harvey Young's commentary about the proper space for the exhibition of the Black male body comes to mind, specifically in reference to Muhammad Ali's 1967 refusal to step forward during the induction ceremony as he was drafted into the Military, a step which signifies one's willingness to die for their country. Young states, "The body that stands still finds itself caught within an endless cycle of hailing and through the cycle is repeatedly reminded how difficult it is to occupy the space between the federal military and federal prison."⁵¹ Young goes on to highlight that the only other space designated for the exhibition of Ali's body is the boxing ring. The concept that Black men's bodies are only deemed appropriate within the confines of these designated areas; criminality, sports, or service is something that occurs in the pornographic space. The Black male body is relegated to the categories like "interracial", BBC, or cuckold where its exhibition is deemed "appropriate." These are spaces where white men and women can bear witness to the exhibition of these bodies for their own pleasure, within the comfort, distance, and anonymity of their own homes (and bedrooms).

As I continue to think about how power dynamics play out in various representations of "interracial" sex, I must also consider how these dynamics and stereotypes function visually. If the representations we see are made for white viewing pleasure, is it possible to use this media to have a nuanced discussion about "interracial" desire?



Megan Christiansen, "B-words", 2021, film still, three-channel video, three-channel stereo audio

In *B-words*, I use reproduction as a form of critique, engaging with the possibility of transforming these representations. While this piece may seem like a deviation from an intense study of pornography, it seeks to provide an opportunity to consider the

racialized, gendered, and hierarchical use of language within and outside of the pornographic landscape through an exploration of the constantly contested word "bitch."

Three-channels of found video populate three television screens, all 32-inches, and are arranged in a triangular formation that the viewer must physically step into. The viewer has to constantly make choices as to which monitors they are going to focus on because all three of the channels cannot be viewed simultaneously. The three screens are supported by steel stands, and are arranged facing each other. The viewer occupies the center of this arrangement, between the screens, with enough room to comfortably allow one viewer or for multiple viewers to collectively negotiate their shared positionality. The monitors are arranged so that the light activates the viewer's peripheral view while opposing images are reflected in the disengaged monitors as they turn on and off. This combination of reflection and peripheral stimulation, along with the three audio channels, guides the viewer and encourages a physical practice of looking. Throughout the piece the three-channels of audio often become disconnected and reconnected to their video source, each coming from different directions to further complicate the found footage. The exterior space, outside of the monitors, becomes another opportunity for spectatorship, a chance to watch the viewers on the interior perform this physical decision making.

B-words began by stumbling upon a clip on YouTube entitled *Isiah Thomas on Bitches*⁵². Uploaded 13 years ago by user "newsjog," the footage is a segment of basketball player Isiah Thomas' deposition in the 2007 sexual harassment case brought against him by a former colleague, Anucha Browne Sanders. In this one-minute clip, which has been removed from the context of the trial, it seemed like five different conversations were happening simultaneously. A man, presumably white, asks Isiah if he thinks it is more offensive for a white or a Black man to call a woman a bitch. As a woman, I use this word all the time, often without consideration as to the complicated power, gender, and race dynamics associated with it; the question began to resonate. I reproduce cultural texts from late night television, cinema, comedy programming, Ted Talks, radio, documentary, and more. I pull both from texts that carry specific personal ties or memories associated with the word bitch like *Poetic Justice* (1993), along with texts I discovered for the first time in the making

⁵¹ Young, Harvey. *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body*. Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 2010, p78.

⁵² Newsjog, *Isiah Thomas on Bitches*, 20 September 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ocb4MFkDiAY>. Accessed 10 September 2020.

of this work, like a controversial 1995 *Eye To Eye with Connie Chung* interview with then Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich's mother who reveals "he thinks [then First Lady Hillary Clinton]'s a bitch." The pornographic and cultural texts I reproduce and place in conversation with this Isiah Thomas clip begin to push against each other, they complicate and destabilize each other; the power dynamics shift and reorganize. Thomas's video deposition returns in fragments through the entirety of the piece. Through its repetition and difference in scale (it is the only video text which is shown at a smaller scale within the frame), the video fragments act as chapter markers, reminding the viewer of the central provocation.

The use of the word bitch in porn, specifically "interracial" porn is often used to designate power within Gangbang or Double Penetration scenes featuring performers of different races, especially those that visualize Black men and white women. This epithet amplifies the supposed denigration of the white woman's respectability through these encounters. The word bitch is also used liberally to reinforce problematic "thug" stereotypes within this space, as shown in the clip from *Let Me Tell Ya Bout White Chicks* (1984) that I re-contextualize within *B-words*. This piece however steps outside of the purely pornographic space and begins to encourage the audience to enter into a more self-aware and self-reflective space in terms of the broader media landscape they consume and the potential effects it has on them.



Arthur Jafa, "Love is the Message, the Message is Death", 2016, installation view

In Arthur Jafa's earth-shattering 2016 video work *Love Is the Message, The Message Is Death*, his approach to the archive and the ways he questions the hierarchy of these texts in order to address Black pleasure and question the notion of Black cinema has been hugely influential to me. Jafa uses found footage from sci-fi films, YouTube, news media, viral videos, archival footage, and more, set against Kanye

West's 2016 gospel track *Ultra Light Beam*. Jafa engages an approach that he calls "polyventuality," which he describes as "multiple tones, multiple rhythms, multiple perspectives, multiple meanings, multiplicity."⁵³ Jafa examines the possibility found in layering multiple narrative structures that are each embedded with their own multiplicity of frequencies and intonations.

In *Love is the Message...*, Jafa pushes against the construction of the popular "Black bodies in crisis" narrative presented by television news, particularly by TV anchors like Fox News's Tucker Carlson. He reveals to the viewer that these moments of pain, terror, and violence are only some of the many elements that construct a broader, more complex Black experience, in which he centers pleasure and joy. As Philip Brian Harper puts it, "the insistence that television faithfully represents a set of social conditions [...] composing a singular and unitary phenomenon known as 'the Black experience' runs smack up against a simultaneous demand that it both recognize and help constitute the diversity of African American society."⁵⁴ By vibrating between televisual representations of violence and trauma and images of Black excellence, historical achievement, and joy – we as consumers of visual material can rethink the multiplicities of social meaning and power that these media-texts are inscribed with, and the oppressive structures that distribute them.

In his essay 69, Jafa goes on to address polyventuality and Black pleasure, asking, "why do we find these things pleasurable?" In thinking through this question, I began to think about why multiplicity is pleasurable more generally. I think it has a lot to do with fantasy, with the pleasure we derive from engaging our imagination, something that porn in many ways simultaneously shuts down and opens up. Porn aids imagination by playing out many of our fantasies visually – which is extremely important and healthy. At the same time, porn can also limit the imagination because of its ubiquity – if I need to get off quickly, why take the time to imagine when I can jump on a tube site and have countless versions of what "turns me on" at my fingertips? Like the production of pornography, the consumption of it can become a similar echo chamber – one that extends to wider media.

⁵³ Jafa, Arthur. "69." *Black Popular Culture*, Seattle : Bay Press, 1992, pp. 249-254. *Dizzy Moods*, <https://dizzymoods.tumblr.com/post/173644243530/arthur-jafa-69-black-popular-culture-pgs>. Accessed 13 May 2021.

⁵⁴ Harper, Philip B. "Extra-Special Effects: Televisual Representation and the Claims of "the Black Experience." *Living Color: Race and Television in the United States*, edited by Sasha Torres, Duke University Press, 1998, p78.

I take simultaneous approaches within *B-words*, through recontextualizing found video and audio, presenting at times competing and complementary visual representations. Most importantly, I utilize censorship - I censor the word bitch, to strip away its spectacle, amplify its context, and question if it is in fact harmless enough to allow on network television over other problematic language. To borrow from Jafa, there are different “frequencies” associated with the word bitch, and the multiplicities of meaning in this word are reliant on its circulation and performance. Who is speaking? Who is performing this word, and to whom?

Like much of my practice, there is an ambivalence that underscores *B-words*. I present simultaneous, often contradictory representations of the word bitch, not only to point to the complex nature of the word itself, but also to my own complicated and ever-changing relationship to the word as a woman. Through the making of *B-Words*, my use of the word ‘bitch’ in everyday life now comes with a consideration of its potency, one I hope my audience takes with them after viewing.

Conclusion

“Viewing practices for pornography are varied and dynamic; viewers are not solely abused by porn or trained for violent, misogynistic behaviors. While the adult industry is shaped by the problematics of heteronormative, homophobic, transphobic, and racist corporatist practices, pornography is not a monolithic or static entity. Porn is dynamic, diverse, and open for revision, including by those on the margins such as women, sexual minorities, and people of color.”⁵⁵
- Mireille Miller-Young

Why, as a female artist, do I choose to stay (for now) within the patriarchal pornographic structure, asking questions? Why do I choose to sit in discomfort with this racist and misogynistic material and look for possibility? Why ask so much of my viewers by inviting them to consider this material with me? Ultimately, I think there is value in mass distribution and access to a wide range of visualities of sex. I love that mainstream pornography allows people to engage in fantasy, to explore what turns them and their partners on, to build online communities, *and* I acknowledge the vast problematics that are embedded in the industry.

As a woman, I want to see people fucking, enthusiastically engaging in fantasy. I want to see more women, people of color, LGBTQ folks infiltrating the mainstream structure (both as performers and on the production side) and sharing their visions because at the end of the day this *is* how most people, especially most men, access their porn. While I think that creating alternative spaces is vital, I hope that artists and creators can also disrupt these traditional spaces and take advantage of the access/distribution that mainstream platforms can offer. I want performers to be able to go to work, get paid fairly for their labor, to not be put in the position of choosing between their livelihood or being called a racist name on set, and not be ostracized for fulfilling essential roles in many peoples sex lives, including mine. I want partners to talk about the type of porn they watch, to communicate their desires. At the end of the day, these things lead to better sex for everyone.

My work does not make people feel comfortable, least of all me; but I believe the only way it is possible to have conversations about sex, race, gender, and desire is to have them openly and often, to

⁵⁵ Miller-Young, Mireille. *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography*. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2014, p20.

acknowledge our discomfort, which may say more about ourselves than others, or even the content of the conversation. If someone is showing us something, pointing to something, what does it mean to step outside of that discomfort and question it rather than simply reacting to it?

This work and my practice is not doing “the thing” yet - and I frankly am still figuring out what the ultimate goals of this practice are. For me, making, and looking, and experimenting are a means for me to step back and say “OK, what am I *actually* looking at, and where does it come from?” To begin asking questions, to start unpeeling, and developing a language to examine the conceptual concerns wrapped up in this visual material.

In the future, I want to make my own porn; the process of figuring out what that pornography would look like, how it would live and function will be an unfolding process. I want to spend extended periods of time in the San Fernando Valley (the American porn capital) to learn the dynamics and functions of the industry from the ground up, and ultimately, to extend my explorations to broader performances of racialization and gender both within the adult industry and outside of it.

This artmaking language and the tools I utilize are something I will continue to develop over the course of my artistic practice. My work has been referred to as an exercise in “white ambivalence,” a characterization with which I would agree. It is so important for white folks to linger in that space, to resist knee-jerk reactions, to question the performative, to ask questions that are perhaps at odds with ourselves, and to acknowledge all of the things we don’t know. These spaces of discomfort may be the most generative. Asking questions about gender and sexuality has been, and will continue to be, a life-long practice.

An Incomplete Porn / Civil Rights Historical Timeline

- 1619 - The first African slaves arrive in North America
- 1861 - Civil War and Emancipation
- 1863-1877 - The Reconstruction Era
- 1896 - *The Kiss* by William Heise is released - containing the very first kiss on film
- 1896 - Jim crow 'Separate But Equal' laws - state and local laws that enforced racial segregation until 1965
- 1910 - Boxer Jack Johnson defeats "Great White Hope" James Jeffries - resulting in weeks of riots
- 1915-1968 - The Stag Film Era, pornographic films that were illegally produced and distributed
- 1915 - *Birth of a Nation* by D. W. Griffith is released, referred to as the most controversial film ever made in the United States
- 1916-1970 - The Great Migration, 6 million African Americans move from the rural South to the urban Northeast, Midwest, and West
- 1920 - The Harlem Renaissance
- 1932 - 8mm film introduced, opening up video production
- 1953 - *Playboy* launches in Chicago, a men's lifestyle and entertainment magazine which played a key role in the sexual revolution
- 1954 - Brown v. Board Of Education, the Supreme Court rules racial segregation in public schools is unconstitutional
- 1955 - Emmett Till is lynched by a racist mob in Mississippi after being accused of offending a white woman
- 1957 - Little Rock Central High School is integrated, a group of nine African American students enroll leading to the Little Rock Crisis
- 1961 - Freedom Rides, civil rights activists rode interstate buses into the segregated Southern who were not enforcing rulings that made segregated public buses unconstitutional

1963 - "I Have a Dream," historic speech delivered by Civil Rights Leader Martin Luther King Jr.

1964 - The Civil Rights Act is enacted on July 2nd

1965 - **Softcore pornographic magazine Penthouse is launched in the UK**

1965 - Selma to Montgomery Marches - three marches from March 7th to March 21st demanding African-Americans be able to exercise their constitutional right to vote

1965 - Civil Rights Leader Malcolm X is assassinated on February 21st at the Audubon Ballroom, New York

1965 - The Voting Rights Act becomes effective on August 6th

1966 - The Black Panther Party is founded

1967 - Loving vs Virginia - a landmark supreme court case ruling that anti-miscegenation laws violated the constitution

1988 - **The first scripted "interracial" kiss airs on US television. Star Trek episode *Plato's Stepchildren* featured a kiss between Captain Kirk (William Shatner) and Officer Uhura (Nichelle Nichols) -- both characters were being "mind-controlled"**

1968 - The Fair Housing Act is enacted on April 11th

1968 - Civil Rights Leader Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated April 4th in Memphis, TN

1969–1984 - **The Golden Age of Porn**

1972 - Shirley Chisholm Runs for President, the first woman, and African American to seek the nomination from a major political party

1972 - **Behind the Green Door released, the first film featuring "interracial" sex to have a mainstream release**

1973 - Miller vs California, US Supreme Court modifying its definition of obscenity from that of "utterly without socially redeeming value" to that which lacks "serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value"⁵⁶

1977 - **VCR and VHS recorders introduced in**

⁵⁶ *Miller v. California*, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miller_v._California. Accessed 12 March 2021.

America, reducing the cost of production and allowing consumers to watch porn at home

1978 - The Bakke Decision and Affirmative Action, a decision making university's "racial quotas" unconstitutional but upholding affirmative action

Late 1970s-early 1980s - **The Feminist "Sex Wars"**

1984 - Rev. Jesse Jackson galvanizes Black voters during his run for the Democratic presidential nomination

1984 - **The explosion of 900 phone sex numbers**

1986 - **Oprah Winfrey launches syndicated talk show, the first African American to do so**

1990s - **Penthouse magazine evolves into a hardcore pornographic magazine**

1991 - **The first web page is created, along with the first content based search protocol, and the first webcam**

1992 - The Los Angeles Riots, a series of riots from April 29th to May 4th following the acquittal of police officers who used excessive force to beat Rodney King

1994 - **Sex.com launches, thought to be the first pornographic website**

1995 - Million Man March, a large gathering in Washington D.C. on October 16th to unite Black men against the economic and social issues plaguing the African American community

1997 - **DVD players are introduced in America**

2005 - **YouTube launches on December 15th, online video platform**

2006 - **Xtube launches, the first aggregate porn tube site**

2007 - **Pornhub launches, the largest aggregate porn site**

2008 - Barack Obama becomes 44th US President and the first Black president

2013 - The Black Lives Matter Movement begins

2014 - **Blacked.com launches, the largest "interracial"**

porn production company

2016 - Donald Trump becomes 45th US president

2016 - Onlyfans launches in the UK, a content subscription service utilized by adult performers and content creators

2020 - George Floyd protests begin around the world on May 26th following his murder by police in Minneapolis

2021 - Kamala Harris becomes the first woman and first Black US Vice President

Key:

Media/Technology Civil Rights History Pornography

Bibliography

- ACLU. "Marriage as a Tool of White Supremacy (EP.71)." *ACLU Podcast*, 31 October 2019, <https://www.aclu.org/podcast/marriage-tool-white-supremacy-ep71>.
- Best, Stephen M. "Game Theory: Racial Embodiment and Media Crisis." *Living Color: Race and Television in the United States*, edited by Sasha Torres, Duke University Press, 1998, pp. 219-238. Jstor.
- Browne, Simone. *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2015.
- Camp, Tina M. *Listening To Images*. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2017.
- Davis, Adrienne D. *Black Sexual Economies: Race and Sex in a Culture of Capital*. University of Illinois Press, 2019.
- Delany, Samuel R. *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. NYU Press, 1999.
- Dickson, E.J. "Racism in Porn Industry Under Scrutiny Amid Nationwide Protests." *Rolling Stone*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/racism-porn-industry-protest-1010853/>. Accessed 06 April 2021.
- Doane, Ashley "Woody". "Shades of Colorblindness: Rethinking Racial Ideology in the United States." *The Colorblind Screen: Television in Post-Racial America*, edited by Sarah Nilsen and Sarah E. Turner, University Press Scholarship Online, 2014, pp. 15-33.
- Dyer, Richard. "The Matter Of Whiteness." *White Privilege: Essential Readings On The Other Side Of Racism*, edited by Paula S. Rothenberg, 2nd ed., Worth Publishers, 2005, pp. 9-14.
- Hall, Gordan. "Why I Don't Talk About 'The Body': A Polemic." *Monday Journal*, <https://monday-journal.com/why-i-dont-talk-about-the-body-a-polemic/>.
- Harper, Philip B. "Extra-Special Effects: Televisual Representation and the Claims of "the Black Experience." *Living Color: Race and Television in the United States*, edited by Sasha Torres, Duke University Press, 1998.
- Hartman, Saidiya V. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Holland, Sharon P. *The Erotic Life of Racism*. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2012.
- hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. NY, Routledge, 2015.
- Hunt, Darnell M. *Channeling Blackness: Studies on Television and Race in America*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Jafa, Arthur. "69." *Black Popular Culture*, Seattle : Bay Press, 1992, pp. 249-254. Dizzy Moods, <https://dizzymoods.tumblr.com/post/173644243530/arthur-jafa-69-black-popular->

culture-pgs. Accessed 13 May 2021.

Jones-Rogers, Stephanie E. *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2019.

King, C. Richard, and Charles F. Springwood. "Body and Soul: Physicality, Disciplinarity, and the Overdetermination of Blackness." *Beyond the Cheers: Race as Spectacle in College Sport*, State University of New York Press, 2001, pp. 185-206.

Miller-Young, Mireille. *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography*. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2014.

Paris, Rae. *The Forgetting Tree*. Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2017.

Perry, Imani. *Breathe: A Letter To My Sons*. Boston, Beacon Press, 2019.

Perry, Imani. *Vexy Thing: On Gender and Liberation*. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2018.

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen*. Minneapolis, Greywolf Press, 2014.

Snorton, C. Riley, and Hentyle Yapp, editors. *Saturation: Race, Art, and the Circulation of Value*. Cambridge, MIT Press, 2020.

Warner, Kristin J. "If Loving Olitz is Wrong, I Don't Wanna Be Right." *The Black Scholar*, vol. 45, no. 1: Scandalous, 2015, pp. 16-20. Taylor & Francis Online, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00064246.2014.997599>.

Williams, Linda. "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess." *Film Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4 (Summer), 1991, pp. 2-13. Jstor, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1212758>.

Williams, Linda. *Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"*. Expanded Paperback Edition ed., Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1999.

Williams, Linda, editor. *Porn Studies*, edited by Linda Williams, Duke University Press, 2004, pp. 271-308.

Young, Cynthia A. "Becked Up: Glenn Beck, White Supremacy, and the Hijacking of the Civil Rights Legacy." *Racism Postrace*, Duke University Press, 2019, pp. 86-112.

Young, Harvey. *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body*. Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 2010.

With thanks to all of my lovers, real and imagined xx