



3-26-2014

I Watch Porn

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Broe, Chelsea E., "I Watch Porn" (2014). *SURGE*. 18.
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I Watch Porn

Abstract

I started watching porn when I was 16.

The first thing I noticed was the porn actresses' vulvas. They were hairless, perfectly symmetrical, with beautiful folds of labia. This being my only venue to see other female bodies, I assumed what I saw was normal (after all, they all looked pretty similar to each other) and that my own body, not looking like those of these women, was flawed. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, sexuality, gender, pornography, body image

Disciplines

Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Gender and Sexuality | Women's Studies

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](#) Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

I WATCH PORN

March 26, 2014

I started watching porn when I was 16.

The first thing I noticed was the porn actresses' vulvas. They were hairless, perfectly symmetrical, with beautiful folds of labia. This being my only venue to see other female bodies, I assumed what I saw was normal (after all, they all looked pretty similar to each other) and that my own body, not looking like those of these women, was flawed.

I started to shave my vulva consistently, compulsively. But the more attention I paid to my vulva, the more insecure I felt about it. Why are my labia so small? Why is my pubic mound so fat? Why is my anatomy so abnormal? It would be years before I learned how far off from reality porn is in representing (among other things) [female bodies](#), that vulvas come in an [array of shapes and sizes](#), or came to [love my hair](#) and, more importantly, realize that I should groom myself according to what makes me happy, not anyone else.

Porn also reinforced my flawed concept of the gender dynamic (that is, men are in control, and women are just along for the ride), as well as spread it to the realm of sex. I saw men do everything from take advantage of women (such as someone who is passed out or does not know she is being recorded) to act violently towards them (such as hitting or choking the woman to the point of tears or asking that he stop). I came to accept that, as a female, sex is something that is done to you, rather than with you. I had never had sex at the time, and yet, seeing all of this did not make me decide not to; I accepted that sex was a natural part of any relationship and that, were I ever in a relationship, I would just have to accept sex, too.

Fast Forward five years, and now the things that I notice in porn are a bit different.



The website [PornMD](#) features a “live search” (NSFW) function which allows you to see what porn searches are being made in real time. A quick look at the site shows searches for the following terms:

“Ebony degraded”
“crying because it hurts”
“exploited pain”
“brutal facefuck”
“big ass arab”
“caught hidden”
“passed out girl”
“please don’t”
“dehumanizing”

And from my experience, these are all pretty standard as far as porn goes. Even if we assume that all of this is totally consensual, and any acts that seem otherwise are really just part of the script (a suspension of disbelief that the porn industry has [by no means earned](#)), these searches are still problematic.

It’s vital to note specifically who is targeted in porn searches. Race, gender, and sexuality are major factors. The live search website allows people to view searches based on whether they’re for “straight,” “gay,” or “tr*nny” porn, and a slew of racial terms is immediately apparent looking at any of the lists.

Let’s start with sexuality: So-called lesbian porn is popular, even though it’s almost never an accurate depiction of how females have sex with one another (I could probably write a whole post on this alone, but basically, 1. Queer women tend to keep their [fingernails short](#), and 2. They don’t want to be [“curiously explored”](#)). But because lesbians have become fetishized for the sake of men’s enjoyment, it is this fantasy—rather than our reality—that matters.

I can’t say how trans people or people of color are treated in porn, because I have no experience watching this kind of porn (the titles of such videos always made me too uncomfortable to click). But I will say that the mere fact that this criteria is used in searches indicates the fetishization of trans bodies and race. Whether in porn or in real-life sexual encounters, this [fetishization is incredibly problematic](#), as it is based on certain assumptions about the people with these attributes. Common racial fetishes including the “black women as wild animals” ideology, “Latina women as ‘spicy,’” and “Asian women as delicate and subservient,” which, in case you can’t tell, is [pretty freaking racist](#). Similarly, to desire trans bodies in and of themselves, regardless of the person they belong to, is also based on [unfounded assumptions](#) about that person.

These fetishes seem most succinctly understood in the last search term listed above: dehumanizing. What could be more dehumanizing than literally getting off on watching people get used as props for someone else’s fantasy?

I don’t think there’s anything wrong with acting in porn; I’m glad there are women who feel empowered by it. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with kink; consenting adults should be able to choose the nature of their sexual acts. But there’s a difference between choosing acts and choosing people. And to attribute specific characteristics to a person based on one aspect of their

identity is to reduce that person to that stereotype ([fetishization should not be confused with preference](#), which does not treat the desired person as a single characteristic that they possess).

Personally, I'm glad that I've learned that the assumptions I made about sexuality based on porn were wrong. I know that real-life sex is nothing like porn. I know that I have full agency in my sexuality. I know that this agency makes for a [better sex life and a better life in general](#).

And I know that not all porn is the same. Since 2000, [Feminist porn](#), which seeks to humanize its actors and portray [realistic sexual relationships](#), has been gaining popularity. It does this by showcasing a more diverse and realistic array of body types, giving its actors more agency in deciding what acts they will participate in, and accurately representing queer sex. Feminist porn actresses [frequently comment](#) that they got into the industry because they weren't seeing the kind of sex they were having represented in porn, and they wanted to change that.

So while there are a lot of problems in the current mainstream porn industry, that doesn't mean it can't be transformed into something that respects all individuals involved. We just need to be aware of these flaws if we are going to enact change.

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Editor

<http://surgegettyburg.wordpress.com/2014/03/26/a-close-look-at-porn/>