The Great Blowjob Debate

1 Petra Joy: The "she-pornographers" agree to disagree

Posted 27 October 2007

It was a particularly exciting day for us as before the panel discussion Marita Neher premiered her documentary “The She Pornographers” that shows us and many other female erotic artists at work. The documentary was followed by two clips of my new film, now titled “ART-core”, and it was exciting to show those two finished vignettes to the audience. The screenings were followed by the big panel discussion on “porn for women”. In front of a sold out cinema seven female porn film makers (Jessica Grenier, Erika Lust, Julia Ostertag, Ovidie, Audacia Ray, and myself) discussed their vision of porn. We are all from different backgrounds, some of us working independently, others being employed by big companies. I felt closest to the ideas of Jessica who produces content for the amazing Australian website Beautiful Agony – showing real people during sex – focusing on their faces and not featuring acted but authentic scenes. It was interesting to realise that if a woman does a porn film, it is not necessarily directed at women which is where Audicia Ray is coming from. There was also a discussion in which way porn can empower rather than degrade women. Some filmmakers who call their films “feminist” were criticised for extensively featuring blow-jobs and cum-shots in women’s faces.

Our tastes on what we find sexy in the bedroom or on film differ. I believe that any female filmmaker has he right to show whatever she wants in her films but we should be cautious with our content if we claim to make “feminist porn”. I would like to empower women and this is why I choose to focus on women receiving pleasure rather than just giving it, and I also prefer to show orgasms in different ways such as showing the lover's faces, rather than ending every scene with a male cum-shot over the woman’s body. If we produce films and call them “female friendly”

or “feminist” yet the actual sexual content still focuses mainly on male pleasure and copies a commercially successful mainstream porn formula, then the powerful words that should have a very deep meaning are being mocked and hijacked as a marketing gimmick. Feminism is committed to equality of the sexes, so surely “feminist porn” should show women as equals to men rather than as subservient beings. A woman receiving head, a woman fucking a guy with a strap-on, a guy tasting his own cum and also to feature female ejaculation – those techniques that show a woman in control might be “feminist porn”. If you want to show cum on a woman’s face that’s fine but don’t call it feminist.

After the discussion I had the pleasure to get to know Ilan and Mia better. They are two new female performers with whom I will be working in a week’s time. We’d had extensive e-mail and phone contact, but this was the first time we physically met each other. Ilan, Mia, Violetta and I went for a German meal in a cosy café to chat and chill. What a blessing it is to have these two beautiful women in my cast now.

Both contacted me because they like my concept of sensual, creative and intimate porn and they wanted to be part of the “little revolution Petra is doing in the porn industry right now” as Mia put it. Mia is a gorgeous woman with a burlesque touch. She has been in porn films before and she is a little tired of faking and not feeling it. So I will bend my rule to work only with amateurs as she has promised to just do what she enjoys on camera, really let go and feel it. I hope that our shoot will empower Mia, so she is now part of the family and it does not matter what she has worked as in the past. Ilan was introduced to me by Laura. She is a wide eyed young woman who is very bright and wants to explore herself and her sexuality further on film. She has the body of a dancer and we had so much fun in the toilet of the restaurant where she tried on some of the amazing lingerie that Bracli kindly donated to me. We did some shots there and then, Ilan without make-up in champagne-coloured pearl strung underwear looking like a million dollars! It was a nice little taste of shooting together later this month.

2 Erika Lust: Can’t a feminist enjoy a blowjob???

Posted 5 November 2007

I participated in a debate about women and porn in the last Berlin

PornFilmFestival together with other female filmmakers, and as usual when speaking about sex, porn, feminism, porn for women and porn by women we didn’t quite all agree on all matters. I think that it’s great to see new women entering the porn business and showing their points of view behind the cameras as creators, directors and producers. These women should be able to express their sexuality without limits, the same way as male directors have been doing for ages.

But it’s a pity that certain women devote their time and energy pulling down the work of other women, instead of focusing on empowering our different approaches and points of view. It is not the first time and it won’t be the last time that a woman disapproves how other women are obtaining power and voice in a world still dominated by men. This new female porn war is not as the pro-sex feminists against no-porn feminists war, now it’s about what is considered to be the right kind of sex for a feminist... (is there such a thing as “right” sex and “wrong” sex???)

After the debate, Petra Joy, a female porn producer, wrote in her in her Blog:

I believe that any female filmmaker has he right to show whatever she wants in her films but we should be cautious with our content if we claim to make “feminist porn”. I would like to empower women and this is why I choose to focus on women receiving pleasure rather than just giving it, and I also prefer to show orgasms in different ways such as showing the lover’s faces, rather than ending every scene with a male cum-shot over the woman’s body. If we produce films and call them “female friendly” or “feminist” yet the actual sexual content still focuses mainly on male pleasure and copies a commercially successful mainstream porn formula, then the powerful words that should have a very deep meaning are being mocked and hijacked as a marketing gimmick. Feminism is committed to equality of the sexes, so surely “feminist porn” should show women as equals to men rather than as subservient beings. A woman receiving head, a woman fucking a guy with a strap-on, a guy tasting his own cum and also to feature female ejaculation – those techniques that show a woman in control might be “feminist porn”. If you want to show cum on a woman’s face that’s fine but don’t call it feminist.
Isn’t it funny? We have a new fundamentalist movement going on here: the Church of the Pure Feminist Porn Producers, and they are declaring that certain sexual practices that me and other women across the world happen to like, are a sin, and that we should be expelled from their pure circle. Well, guess what? I do not want to be part of a club that tells me what it’s ok to do in my bedroom or to portrait in my films, because last time I checked that was called censorship.

Ehh, it all makes me kind of wanna quit feminism and just be a HUMAN BEING, for me this is the goal of feminism anyway. But “being a feminist” is for me as obvious as that white and black people should have the same rights.

I don’t believe that the word “feminist” can be applied on sexual practices. That’s like saying that red is a feminist color and blue isn’t or fish is feminist but not meat. According to Petra, it’s feminist to suck dildos, but it’s not feminist to suck cocks??? And if there’s a man in the scene, he should be fucked up his butt - a man fucked up his butt is feminist, but a woman fucked up her butt is not? Come on!

I consider myself a feminist no matter my sexual activities. I believe that feminism is about equality of the sexes, about women having the same rights and possibilities as men, about women having the right to be looked upon as human beings at firsthand and not defined by what is supposed to be feminine. For me “feminist porn” is porn that shows real women and real men having real sex, not just women obedient to men reproducing classic power structures, not just objectified women, not just women giving pleasure but also receiving pleasure. It’s all about not falling into the stereotyping of characters that most porn filmmakers use, not every woman has to be a prostitute and not every man a mafia gangster. For me feminist porn should portray women’s fantasies and desires—all of them. I certainly know that a woman can be a strong feminist and still wanting to be taken strongly by a man or enjoying blowing a man’s cock or having his cum all over her face.

3 Audacia Ray: Feminist porn wars (new and improved!) (not really)[3]

Like I wrote about a bit in my Berlin Porn Film Festival diary post, I was on a panel called “Good Porn for Good Girls” that featured some

female porn directors. When I first found out about the panel, I was a little apprehensive – the idea of me being a good girl is kind of funny (to say the least), and it's also annoying that despite the fact that I've never called The Bi Apple “porn for women,” other people enthusiastically slap that label on it. I'm a woman, and a self-identified feminist. Ergo, my porn must be for women. Really, I find this tiresome – I made The Bi Apple for people who want to see a slightly different vision of sexual interaction, people who are queer or pansexual or just plain curious about people and bodies and fucking. Women are of course invited – but so is everyone.

The “porn for women” genre is useful and revolutionary in many ways, and I know there is a need to have a way to describe a genre if it is to sell, even if there isn’t a clear and agreed upon definition for it (see: alt porn). And it’s not that I entirely reject the label of “feminist pornographer” – but although I embrace feminism(s), it doesn’t always love me back. And sometimes it gets a bit overblown and simplified – like this summer, when I was featured in Chapel Hill's Independent Weekly, with the headline “Audacia Ray spreads the gospel of feminist Web porn.”

Anyway, as I wrote about in an article for Eros Zine that I turned in yesterday (and which will be up on the site later this month), the panel quickly devolved into an argument about blowjobs. A few audience members questioned the prevalence of blowjobs in Erika Lust's films and the extent to which giving a blowjob is a feminist act. Erika quickly said that she personally likes giving blowjobs, which is why they are in her films so much, and she personally is a feminist, so do the math. It definitely seemed like the crowd didn't buy this explanation. I've seen this happen too when people ask “Why do the men in your movie ejaculate on the women's bodies?” and my answer “I asked the female performers where they wanted the cum, so it's all up to them where it's deposited” is often greeted with skepticism. This kind of skepticism is the stuff of “false consciousness”—or the belief that if only we (being Erika, me, and female porn performers who like getting cum on them) were radicalized to better understand our oppression, we would know that cocksucking and money shots are Bad For Women.

There's been some bloggy follow up to the panel from Petra Joy and Erika Lust. Petra's post (which doesn't have a permalink so you have to scroll for it) is titled “The “she-pornographers” agree to disagree” – which is basically accurate, but she gets a little heavy-handed with the idea of What is Feminist. Here’s a bit of her post (her words in italics) that both Erika and Ms Naughty have nabbed for their posts, and I'll
break it down a bit:

Our tastes on what we find sexy in the bedroom or on film differ.

This is totally key, and the importance of this statement shouldn’t (but does) get lost.

I would like to empower women and this is why I choose to focus on women receiving pleasure rather than just giving it, and I also prefer to show orgasms in different ways such as showing the lovers’ faces, rather than ending every scene with a male cum-shot over the woman’s body.

I like to empower women too, but as much as I know porn is about the end product and it’s presence in the marketplace, the people I’m most interested in empowering are the performers, who are putting their bodies and sexualities out there for public consumption. I’m totally down with showing orgasms in different ways (hence the presence of lots of long and medium shots in my movie), but I don’t think any one kind of image—or any one person—holds the key to what women receiving pleasure look like, or even what “receiving pleasure” means for Women.

If we produce films and call them ‘female friendly’ or ‘feminist’ yet the actual sexual content still focuses mainly on male pleasure and copies a commercially successful mainstream porn formula, then the powerful words that should have a very deep meaning are being mocked and hijacked as a marketing gimmick.

As someone who is trying to make a living doing what I do, I don’t see anything inherently wrong with marketing gimmicks. Although there are a lot of shitty things about the “commercially successful mainstream porn formula,” there is a reason it’s a formula—it makes money. I really do believe that people buy what’s out there because there isn’t an alternative, but I do think the alternative needs to at least make a nod to how things are done so it’s still marketable and comprehensible to a broader audience. Also, in the bigger scheme of things—there are only so many sex acts and so many camera angles that can exist.

Feminism is committed to equality of the sexes, so surely ‘feminist porn’ should show women as equals to men rather than as subservient beings. A woman receiving head, a woman
fucking a guy with a strap-on, a guy tasting his own cum and also to feature female ejaculation "those techniques that show a woman in control might be ‘feminist porn’. If you want to show cum on a woman’s face that’s fine but don’t call it feminist.

Erika has a pretty awesome and biting response to all this:

Isn’t it funny? We have a new fundamentalist movement going on here: the Church of the Pure Feminist Porn Producers, and they are declaring that certain sexual practices that me and other women across the world happen to like, are a sin, and that we should be expelled from their pure circle. Well, guess what? I do not want to be part of a club that tells me what it’s ok to do in my bedroom or to portrait in my films, because last time I checked that was called censorship.

To me, making feminist porn is not about what is actually shown on screen and much more about what is happening on the production end of things. This is very clearly an expression of my years working in the sex industry and working for sex workers’ rights, but like Petra says in the beginning of this paragraph, “our tastes on what we find sexy in the bedroom or on film differ.” We can have a whole argument about the nurture and nature of “taste”—but I don’t think liking or not liking specific acts can make or break a feminist.

I don’t care if porn shows a woman masturbating by herself (like in many of the Abby Winters photo sets and videos), a woman fucking a guy with a strap-on (like in The Bi Apple), a woman enthusiastically sucking cock (like in Erika’s films), or a pregnant woman getting fucked up the ass with a baseball bat (like in Belladonna’s Fucking Girls Again). What I do care about is: does that performer want to be there? Is the director/producer respecting her needs and paying her appropriately? Did she get blindsided by requests for acts she doesn’t want to do?

The answers to those questions determine whether or not the porn is feminist, sex-positive, and ethical for me, not what is happening on screen.

4 Ms Naughty: Boring Blowjobs and Feminist Facials

Posted 30 November 2007

Blowjobs and facials are boring and often look silly. While I was away enjoying life a small debate erupted about porn, facials, blowjobs and feminism. It started because Petra Joy wrote this on her blog:

A woman receiving head, a woman fucking a guy with a strap-on, a guy tasting his own cum and also to feature female ejaculation—those techniques that show a woman in control might be “feminist porn”. If you want to show cum on a woman’s face that’s fine but don’t call it feminist.

Petra made the comment while discussing her appearance at the Berlin Film Festival in a seminar called Good Porn for Good Girls. Her fellow panelists, Audacia Ray and Erika Lust, weren’t so impressed with this. Audacia made this post on her blog, and Erika wrote a long, angry post in defence of blowjobs.

I was off bushwalking and guzzling wine at the time, so I didn’t make any serious posts about it. And I was tempted to just let it slide, figuring I'd missed the boat on it. But I feel the need to write a few things on the whole subject.

I’m a huge fan of Petra’s and I really support what she’s trying to do. I understand where she’s coming from with that comment, but I also understand why it caused such an extreme reaction. I copped something similar when I wrote I Hate The Money Shot several years ago. When it comes to feminism and porn, everyone has a different view, and it helps to lay down caveats at every stage.

I’ll say this: I still hate facial cumshots. I’m pretty sick of external cumshots. And the fact is that porn blowjobs bore the hell out of me.

This is a personal opinion and does not apply to all women. I don’t, however, believe I’m alone in thinking this, not by a long shot.

Facial cumshots always look fake and stupid to me. The usually involve the woman kneeling before the guy, her mouth open or smiling like a blowup Barbie doll. We only ever get to see the man’s cock and his hand while he jerks off. The cum goes on her face, in her hair, in her eye, and then she smiles and licks it all off like it’s manna from heaven, often smiling and looking directly into the camera.

I don’t think that is sexy. It just looks dumb.

Facial cumshots suck because: 1. We don’t get to see the guy’s face when he comes, which is always a sexy thing to see. 2. They’re often carefully staged, are disconnected from the sex and look fake. 3. They can be very easily interpreted as a degrading thing. Wait, my fellow rabid feminists! That’s not to say they always are, but within the context
of a very misogynist porn industry where facials are the norm, and where it’s often assumed the viewer is a male who likes to see women in their place, the facial can be a sexist thing. 4. It’s always assumed that a facial will occur at the end of sex, there’s no discussion of it and no indication that either party wanted it to be that way. It just happens as though that’s the way everybody does it.

I’ll also restate my position that I hate the way the male orgasm (as engendered in the money shot or facial) is always the “final whistle” in porn. It’s considered to be the ultimate act, the most important thing in a whole scene. And often there’s no female orgasm whatsoever.

Imagine how ground breaking it would be if we got to see the woman come AFTER the guy? Even if that meant bringing in a vibrator. Sure, it would be just as set up as a standard facial but at least there’d be a bit of equality happening.

So, can a facial ever be “feminist”? My answer is yes. As always, context is everything.

There’s a scene in Candida Royalle’s *Eyes of Desire* when Chloe asks Tom Byron if she can watch him come. It’s one of the few “money shots” in Candida’s films but it works because we the viewer know that Chloe wanted to see it. And I think that’s how a facial can be feminist (and more enjoyable)—when the viewer knows that there’s consent and desire involved.

Audacia and Erika also point out that the intentions and ethics of the filmmaker make all the difference, I do agree with them there, but as a viewer I don’t think it’s enough to make me want to watch it. Let me hear the woman on screen say “Come on my face, I love that”, and I’ll find the scenario a whole lot more believable. I’m still not going to find it sexy, but that’s just personal taste.

And the other thing is this—blowjobs are boring! I’ve been reviewing so many porn movies lately and the one thing I’m guaranteed to fast forward is the blowjob scenes. Of which there are many.

Again, this is personal taste. I don’t doubt there are plenty of women who love watching blowjobs, but I’m not one of them. Give me clit licking any day.

I’ve been pondering why I find porn BJs to be dull. It may well be because I’m a woman and I want to see the woman pleasured, not the guy.

It may also be due to the excessive screentime given to blowjobs as compared to pussy licking. Sucking dick always seems to get more airtime in most mainstream porn. Look at the recently released “Oral
themed” category nominations at the AVN awards and all but one of the films are about blowjobs.

Or it may be due to porn’s insistence of focusing only on the woman as she’s going down. From a female point of view, that’s not what’s hot about blowjobs. Fact is, when you’ve got a mouth full of cock you don’t look so great. What IS hot is knowing that you’ve got a guy right where you want him, squirming and under your control. And it’s hot to see his face as he gets lost in that pleasure. Porn steadfastly refuses to show the guy’s face.

I did enjoy watching Mr Marcus receive a blowjob in Tristan Taormino’s Chemistry, mainly because the camera stood back and showed us both Marcus and Dana. We could see how much Marcus was into the whole thing, and that was hot.

It doesn’t happen often.

So, is it ever reasonable to dictate what kind of sex acts are “feminist”? Well, no, because then you turn into Andrea Dworkin, and none of us want that.

It is reasonable, however, to think about the way mainstream porn gives priority to certain sex acts and the context in which they’re presented. And it’s OK to stand up and say “No, I don’t think those particular sex acts in that context is female-friendly or feminist.” Choice, consent and desire are what makes the difference and if I’m not seeing that, I will tend to think negatively about certain sex acts in porn.

It’s also OK to say “I want to make feminist porn and my vision of it does not entail certain sex acts or scenarios because I personally find them to be unsatisfactory or degrading.”

Feminist porn is a nebulous concept and it’s worth having a debate about what it is, what it means and what it should entail. We’ve all got different ideas about what we want to see but that’s a good thing because it means that there’s a diversity and energy involved.

And the important thing is that feminist porn—whatever that encompasses—gets out there and starts to overcome the stagnant, sexist, boring offerings that comprise the vast majority of the porn industry. Because that’s something on which we can all agree and strive for.