

Nora Winter | Morgaine Struve

The Other Sex Work

The Feminist Academic Pornography Discourse

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With a Foreword by Prof. Dr. Christian Welzel

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Dedication

We would like to thank our supervisors Chris Welzel and Ben Trott, especially for giving us the opportunity to research and write about such an unconventional topic. Additionally, we would like to shout out Chris for providing the foreword on such short notice.

We would also like to thank Dagmar Knorr and Leonie Wetzel, as well as Micha Edlich and Johannes Rux, for their detailed and helpful feedback during the revision process.

Additionally, we want to acknowledge Janice Irvine, from whose 2015 article “The Other Sex Work: Stigma in Sexuality Research” we adopted the title for our thesis. To us, it simply perfectly encapsulated how critical pornography research such as our work – and sexuality research more generally – is framed within academia and beyond.

Preface

We have contributed equally to this thesis. Nevertheless, we had to decide whose name would be first in the order of authorship. In previous papers and projects throughout our studies, we chose to list our names alphabetically for practical reasons. We are aware that, in general, the first authorial position is considered to be the most prestigious (and therefore coveted). This time around, we have decided to go another route and drew lots to determine whose name goes first. The sequence of authors is therefore purely coincidental and not an indicator of the proportion of work done.

Foreword

In this co-authored bachelor thesis, Nora Winter and Morgaine Struve provide an intensive and nuanced qualitative analysis of feminist academic discourses about pornography – a still atypical topic throughout most disciplines in the social sciences.

The thesis aims to answer two questions: (1) How pornography is constituted in feminist academic discourse, and (2) which explanations exist to understand the discrepancies between the opposing positions they discovered.

In answering these questions, the authors situate their epistemological orientation within the framework of Michel Foucault's poststructuralist theory, which defies simple truths, objective facts and authoritative knowledge and challenges these positivist terms with subjectivity, reflexivity, and relativism. On the basis of this epistemological foundation, the authors then lay out their methodology, which is a combination of constructivist grounded theory and discourse analysis, using the software tool MAXQDA.

After an extensive and intelligible review of the academic pornography literature, the authors select two relatively recent academic publications on pornography as the study material for their discourse analysis, namely an article by Clarissa Smith and Feona Attwood from 2014 and another by Robert Jensen from 2016. The two writings represent the bandwidth and diversity in the academic pornography literature, especially as concerns opposite normative positions. The following chapters and sections subject the two texts a very detailed and informative discourse analysis.

Summarizing the results, it turns out that Jensen considers pornography as a vicious phenomenon that continues to operate as a tool of patriarchal oppression. Smith and Attwood's position, by contrast, is apparently more open and interprets pornography as a part of human culture that should be studied in its manifold and diversifying mani-

festations, rather than condemning it altogether from the outset. It becomes obvious that Morgaine and Nora sympathize with the second position, although they admit this explicitly as a potential limitation of their study.

In contextualizing their interpretations of the studied two writings, Nora and Morgaine depict capitalism, the feminist "porn wars," "neoliberalized" universities and the rising Internet as formative forces of their thinking. They also argue that the two writings reveal conflicting images of what acceptable forms of sexuality are. These images are fluid and underly an emancipatory transformation of moral values, thus giving rise to more permissive sex norms (evidenced with World Values Survey data). Yet, this cultural metamorphosis is far from being complete and has instead left Western publics (illustrated for the US and the UK) with a generational rift between older and younger cohorts over restrictive-vs-permissive sex norms (one might add that in-migration from Muslim majority countries into Western countries magnifies the culture clash over sexuality). Morgaine and Nora further point out that age hierarchies in neoliberal universities tend to preserve restrictive views on pornography that either neglect the phenomenon or condemn it, all the while growing needs for a postmodern science require more nuanced and diversified views instead of a fixation on one truth. The authors conclude that this inner contradiction generates conflicting discourses on pornography, which occurs to me as an intelligible answer to the two research questions.

The thesis is structured alongside a stringent logic and eloquently written in a fashion that reveals a great deal of reflection and nuanced-ness in thinking. Nora and Morgaine engage a large literature in an informative manner. The study design and methods appear appropriate and well thought through. The authors also discuss the limitations of their study and its design and are cautious to avoid over-generalizing their results. Nevertheless, their discourse analysis enables them to come to meaningful conclusions that make sense in my eyes. I am myself not at all an expert on either pornography or on discourse analysis. Yet, the authors did an excellent job in widening my understanding of these previous blind spots of mine. I find it particularly laudable that Morgaine and Nora did not shy away from any effort to make themselves familiar (without professional assistance) with a topic and

a methodology that were never part of their curriculum. For all these reasons, this is an excellent piece of research.

Prof. Dr. Christian Welzel
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