

Title: The Boundaries of Porn Studies

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Abstract: This essay centres around *Porn Studies* (ed. Linda Williams, 2004: Duke University Press). It examines the disciplinary terrain set out in this volume and the broader implications for the way in which we think about pornography in an academic context. Firstly, I explore the implications of the shift away from feminist debates about the nature, existence and regulation of pornography that this volume and others have called for. Secondly, I discuss the “porn” of porn studies: how do we define it, what is included and excluded by our definitions, and what are the implications of this definitional practice? Finally, I turn to the “study” of porn studies to consider the ethical and pedagogical consequences of canonising porn within the classroom and academic publishing.

Introduction

In the introduction to *Porn Studies*, Linda Williams begins to map the terrain upon which the contemporary academic study of pornography takes place. The key markers on this terrain differ from previous maps. Censorship, harm and production practices – central to feminist debates through the 1980s – have largely disappeared. Instead, Williams’ collection offers textual analyses grouped around five central themes.

The first section considers four rather different contemporary “pornographies”: the *Starr Report* that scrutinised President Clinton’s relationship with Monica Lewinsky (Maria St. John); the home video that became *Pam And Tommy Lee: Hardcore and Uncensored* (Minette Hillyer); Japanese pornographic comics for women (Deborah Shamoon); and amateur on-line porn sites (Zabet Patterson). This eclecticism marks the collection as a whole, though in later sections there is a clearer emphasis on audio-visual pornographies and on historical moments in porn’s development.

Part 2 – Gay, Lesbian and Homosocial Pornographies – offers essays on the homosocial possibilities of the classical American stag film (Thomas Waugh); the cultural-aesthetic specificities of all-male moving-image pornography, illustrated through a close reading of a 1977 film (Rich Cante and Angelo Restivo); historical trends, styles, motives and developments in lesbian pornography from 1968-2000 (Heather Butler); and a “queer” reading of gay director Chuck Vincent’s straight pornography of the 1970s and 1980s (Jack Gerli). The focus of Part 3 is Pornography,

Race and Class, and the first essay – by Nguyen Tan Hoang - brings us back to the present, focusing on gay Asian American porn star “Brandon Lee”. Essays by Linda Williams (on the links between inter-racial porn and mainstream sexualised fantasies of racial difference) and Constance Penley (on the “white trashing” of porn) complete this section. Williams explains the organising principle of the fourth section - Soft Core, Hard Core and the Pornographic Sublime – as a consideration of “the variety of historically produced technologies that have engendered recognizable forms of pornography in both soft- and hard-core forms” (9). The specific forms scrutinised here are the illustrated World War II pinup (Despina Kakoudaki), the pornographic feature film that came to prominence in the 1970s (Eric Schaefer) and video (Franklin Melendez). Finally, Part 5 is comprised of two essays – by Ara Osterweil and Michael Sicinski – that consider pornography’s relationship to the avant-garde through case studies of Andy Warhol’s *Blow Job* (1963) and Scott Stark’s *NOEMA* (1998).

This essay explores the ramifications of the re-mapping of porn studies attempted in this volume from three angles. Firstly, I examine the implications of the shift away from feminist debates that this volume calls for. Secondly, I discuss the “porn” of porn studies: how do we define it and what are the implications of this definitional practice? Finally, I turn to the “study” of porn studies to consider the ethical and pedagogical consequences of canonising porn.

Rejecting Feminism

Where once it seemed necessary to argue vehemently against pro-censorship, anti-pornography feminism for the value and importance of studying pornography [...] today porn studies addresses a veritable explosion of sexually explicit materials that cry out for better understanding. Feminist debates about whether pornography should exist at all have paled before the simple fact that still and moving image pornographies have become fully recognizable fixtures of popular culture.
(Williams, 1)

Anyone who has read the countless feminist anthologies on pornography is bound to sympathise with Williams’ reluctance to tread back over that well-worn and increasingly muddy ground. The acrimonious, and frequently inaccurate, labelling of feminist positions on pornography has stymied clear-headed analyses. Anti-pornography feminists are denounced as anti-sex or their position conflated with pro-censorship (as, indeed, Williams does here). On the other side, anti-censorship feminists claim the pro-sex ground or are condemned as apologists for the sex industry, participants in women’s subordination. The two groups (though broad and by no means homogenous in themselves) are caricatured and set up in opposition to one another. Meaningful dialogue has long since broken down, to the extent that it is rare to find opposing views represented side-by-side in an academic context, with each “side” blaming the other for this.¹ I often wonder, for example, whether those lambasting the analyses of anti-pornography activists - described with condescension by Strossen (1999) and others as “MacDworkinites” - have understood Dworkin’s or MacKinnon’s arguments or have looked beyond them to the diversity of writing and activism that falls under the anti-pornography banner. Equally, anti-pornography

feminists are frequently guilty of a lack of subtlety and respect in their characterisations of other feminists' work.

Williams' stated intent to move beyond "the kind of agonizing over sexual politics that characterized an earlier era in the study of pornography" (1) promises more nuanced readings of pornographic texts and, indeed, textual analysis is *Porn Studies*' central methodology. Given the relative scarcity of academic work on pornographic texts and aesthetics, this is a significant move. With "the value of studying pornography" taken as read, there is less defensiveness about the object of study with the interesting result that the volume as a whole is not uncritically celebratory in its treatment of pornography.

However, there is a definite sense that Williams and her collaborators are throwing the baby out with the bathwater, prematurely discarding important questions raised in feminist debate. For example, in abandoning feminist debates about pornography's existence, *Porn Studies* ignores regulatory issues: not only should pornography exist, but who should be able to access it and in what circumstances. These questions remain pertinent to public policy and it is disappointing to find the academic debate moving in a direction that undermines its practical application. Further, consumption practices are not a central concern. Women and heterosexual couples may be increasingly targeted by pornographers but the fact remains that pornography is largely premised on men buying sexual access to women and other men. How can we move beyond sexual politics in this context? That violent pornography is largely ignored is also significant here. While anti-censorship feminists have long argued that anti-pornography feminists over-estimate the amount of violent content in commercial pornographies (e.g. Rubin, 1993), to exclude such content sanitises the object of study and marginalises an extensive body of academic work. This seems counter-productive in a volume that states its intentions to *look* – and to look carefully – at that which has been kept off-scene (that is, in Williams' terms, ob/scene).

Rejecting feminism has, therefore, meant that many crucial questions remain unresolved. Indeed, while *Porn Studies* as a whole engages with a diverse and interdisciplinary web of academic work, there is a very cursory engagement with foundational feminist texts. In a book that will inevitably be seen as offering an introduction to the field, this selective historicisation of porn studies' development is disappointing.

What *Porn Studies* does offer, however, is a clear sense of the pornographisation of popular culture. One of its central concerns is the permeability of the category "pornography", as illustrated by the inclusion of essays on texts as diverse as the *Starr Report* and the avant-garde films of Andy Warhol. *Porn Studies* expands our notion of the pornographic, finding its traces in the everyday, in political discourse, illustrations and modern art: in objects that are not – necessarily – produced, distributed or consumed as pornography and, indeed, that may or may not show explicit sexual acts. For example, in her reading of the *Starr Report*, Maria St. John suggests that it is not only the *Report's* fascination with the sexual that is pornographic. Like the pornographer, Starr is obsessed with the "truth" of the body: in this case, the Presidential penis and its ejaculate. Yet, the material evidence of male sexual pleasure (the semen stain on Lewinsky's dress) cannot capture the moment of orgasm. In the courtroom, this moment is recreated as a confession: a confession that is live and has

the status of evidence, yet in its performance of generic conventions and its recording points to its very distance from the bodily truths it apparently exposes. In this respect, St. John usefully points to pornography's *on/scenity* not only in the public fascination with the sex act between President and intern but in the anxiety over the authenticity of its recreation and the instability of sexual meaning. However, pornography is not St. John's only reference point: she also points to the Report's relationship to detective fiction, courtroom drama, the bodice ripper, soap opera and melodrama. Whilst she notes the gendered dynamic of these genres in passing, it is striking that she does not develop an analysis of gender and power in relation either to the real "event" (Clinton's relationship with Lewinsky) or its recreation for the impeachment trial.

Williams also argues that moving beyond feminism allows for a consideration of difference and diversity and this is reflected in *Porn Studies*' emphasis on gay, lesbian and homosocial pornographies, and on issues of race and class. This re-casting of radical feminism as exclusionary of difference is one I have been critical of elsewhere (Boyle, 2005b) and there is already feminist work in these areas: for example, Dworkin's *Pornography* (1981) deals with racism in some detail. However, it is certainly true that there has been a tendency to treat pornography as a homogenous entity and, with its somewhat eclectic selection of case studies *Porn Studies* provides a welcome corrective here.

Nguyen Tan Hoang's article on Asian American porn star Brandon Lee provides an interesting case study of the construction of multiply marginalised identities in contemporary pornography. Hoang's object of study is more recognisably "pornographic" than the *Starr Report*, yet Hoang too is interested in the ways in which pornography echoes mainstream representational concerns. Hoang positions Lee in relation to mainstream representations of Asian (and Asian American) men and points to the racialised sexual stereotyping they share, whereby Asian men are rarely portrayed as sexually appealing, desiring or, even, masculine in a context where maleness is predicated on whiteness. However, in Brandon Lee's porn persona, Hoang tracks the development of a different kind of gay Asian American identity that is masculine and explicitly desiring but assimilated. Here, Hoang makes a provocative link between the porn-star and his mainstream "father", martial arts superstar Bruce Lee, pointing to the parallels between the fight number and sexual number as choreographed moments of re-masculinization that depend upon racialised stereotypes even as they seek to differentiate their (Asian) American star from the undifferentiated Asian American co-stars and extras. Their difference then, is the difference *from* the "Other" (marked by economic, social and cultural status as well as by physical endowment of muscle or genitalia) rather than their difference *as* the "Other" and this gives them narrative, male dominance. Yet both Bruce and Brandon are simultaneously marketed *as* "Other" and positioned – generically and, to an extent, narratively – as exotic and feminised. However, this is a generalised exoticism, detached from specific ethnic or national markers: in other contexts, "Brandon" has been coded as Latino or Filipino. As Hoang suggests, this raises interesting questions about spectatorship: affirming the white male viewer's position of dominance (even vis-à-vis an apparently Asian American actor coded as a "top"), whilst providing a more complex position for the Asian male viewer.

Hoang provides anecdotes from his own and others' experiences as a means of beginning to work through these complexities and it will be interesting to see how future audience research develops this analysis. Whilst Hoang's article does acknowledge the power differentials upon which pornographic fantasy depends, it is significant that the volume as a whole considers these differentials primarily in relation to apparently "marginal" pornographies rather than the pornographic "mainstream". This issue will be taken up in the next section as I discuss the "porn" of *Porn Studies* in more detail.

Porn

Defining pornography is notoriously difficult and nowhere in *Porn Studies* is such a definition attempted. Yet, as I have already suggested, the very permeability of the category "pornography" is clearly demonstrated by the inclusion of such a diverse range of texts within this volume. What I want to focus on here are the boundaries that locate the porn of *Porn Studies*, examining the implications of framing "pornography" as such an unstable category.

Porn Studies provides an interesting collection of "porn" for consideration, challenging the long-standing conceptualisation of porn as a homogenous and unchanging category. Articles by Thomas Waugh, Eric Schaefer, Heather Butler and Constance Penley, for example, follow specific historical trajectories in the development of different forms of pornography. Waugh's interest is in the homosocial possibilities of the classical American stag film, both in relation to the on-screen representations and their modes of exhibition. Schaefer is also interested in exhibition but in relation to the technological, legal and cultural contexts which gave rise to the pornographic feature film. Butler's focus is the development of lesbian and dyke porn from 1968-2000, a development she considers alongside lesbian representations in more "mainstream" pornographies and exploitation films. Penley concentrates on porn's long association with "white trash" sensibilities which, she argues, can "challenge the assumed social and moral superiority of the middle and professional classes" (311). Rather than seeing this as a unique feature of pornography, Penley makes connections to other forms of popular culture from bawdy songs and jokes to *The Howard Stern Show*. In seeing pornography's *continuities with* the mainstream, Penley is less concerned with pornography's sexual representations and immediate gratifications, than with its broader social and political functions.

Many of the articles in *Porn Studies* are similarly focused on the permeable boundaries of the pornographic. This is apparent not only in the wide range of texts discussed *as* pornography, but also in the concern with delineating porn's relationships to more (or less) "legitimate" modes of popular culture within individual articles. This web of pornographic connection includes home video, avant-garde film, motion study, B-movies, current affairs, martial arts movies and Japanese romance comics for teenage girls.

Williams' own article, "Skin Flicks on the Racial Border: Pornography, Exploitation, and Interracial Lust", considers the eroticisation of racial and gender difference across a range of more or less "pornographic" texts. These include: photographer Robert

Mapplethorpe's *Black Book*; hard-core features *Crossing the Color Line* (dir. Gino Colbert, 1999), *Let Me Tell Ya 'bout White Chicks* (dir. Dark Brothers, 1984) and *Behind the Green Door* (dir. Mitchell Brothers, 1972); police sergeant Stacey Koon's account of his involvement in the Rodney King beating; and the mainstream film *Mandingo* (dir. Richard Fleischer, 1975). As with Penley's article, the strength of Williams' analysis lies in the way she reads porn and its fantasies, not as "other" to mainstream culture, but as offering representations of racialised desire and fear that are in many ways congruent with those found both in high art and in racist actions.

However, the inclusion of Koon's account points to some of the difficulties of *Porn Studies*' broader project of marginalising pornographic action (material practice involving real and specifically situated bodies) whilst emphasising representation (how those bodies are mediated). For Williams, Koon's account is a "phantasmatic projection of one white man's racial-sexual fear, envy and resentment," grounded in a "scenario of interracial lust" that is congruent with both pornographic fantasy and certain mainstream representations (287). Interestingly, she focuses on Koon's written, retrospective account of his motivations and actions, suggesting that what is "pornographic" in this context is the precipitating thought rather than the videotaped action. That Williams does not consider the videotape here might be because, unlike the other texts she discusses, its *content* is not obviously "sexual" (and, so, pornographic).

What if Koon *had* abused King in an obviously and explicitly sexualised manner? In this scenario, there would be a case for seeing the video, its production and consumption in relation to commercial pornography. Following Williams' example, the purpose of this exercise would be to investigate the lines of congruence between these texts and, so, to explore the societal fears and desires they expose. Finally, imagine a videotape produced not by a bystander (as in the King case) but by a participant in the action. In this scenario, the perpetrators' decision to *record* that abuse would be a clear extension of the abuse: as when American soldiers photographed their sexualised abuse of Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib. Representation and action cannot be easily separated in these cases.

However, in the introduction to *Porn Studies*, Williams attempts exactly such a separation in a discussion of Catharine MacKinnon's article linking pornography and rape in the war in Bosnia (11-12). I share Williams' frustration at MacKinnon's casual collapse of the boundaries of pornography and reality (Boyle, 2005a: 13-14). Nevertheless, as MacKinnon and others have noted, the fact that some abusers make pornography of their sexual abuse of others is not incidental. It is impossible to understand audio-visual child pornography, for example, outside of the real-world crimes that are its raw material (Kelly, 1992: 121). That said, the pornography of actual violence does not (contrary to MacKinnon) prove that prior exposure to commercial pornography *caused* an individual to sexually abuse a woman or child on film. Indeed, in the context of the pornographic continuum of sexualised racial difference that Williams identifies in "Skin Flicks", it is difficult to see how the prior influence of commercial pornography could be isolated. Rather, what Williams proposes is a way of understanding how pornography contributes to the broader discursive construction of racialised fear and desire. Her argument that commercial pornography and the recordings of war rape should *not* be understood in relation to one another contradicts this much more fluid conceptualisation of pornography and its

relationship to action.ⁱⁱ Re-considering the video of the Rodney King beating, the photographs from Abu Ghraib, or the videos from the Bosnian rape camps *in relation to pornography* may allow us to better understand another set of boundaries in pornography (and porn studies) - i.e. those between reality and representation. These boundaries exist in relation to action, representation and consumption practices and the neglect of the questions they raise is one of the more worrying implications of porn studies' textual turn.

At this point, you might object that these examples – the pornography of war crimes and child abuse - are not “pornography” in the way that most people understand it: they are not legally sold or distributed; they are not mass-produced; they represent reality not fantasy. This is true, but *Porn Studies* does not include any sustained discussion of violent pornography that *is* commercially produced either – though there can be no doubt that such pornography still exists. For example, whilst I was writing this article I did a quick on-line search and within three clicks was able to access sites such as “Savage Rape” (“all of the girls featured on this site were brutally harmed”) and “Rape.to” (“100% rape footage from amateur rapists all over the world.”). One of the most-often repeated criticisms of feminist anti-pornography and anti-prostitution work is this tendency to use the “extreme” example as paradigmatic.ⁱⁱⁱ So, let me be clear: I am not presenting these examples as representative of *all* pornography or, even, of all internet pornography. Rather, my concern is that the apparent expanse of the category of pornography – in *Porn Studies* and in the field more generally – has worked to exclude violence in a way that is intellectually inconsistent with the simultaneous destabilising of the category that defines this collection.

As the preceding discussion indicates, identifying the distinctiveness of the pornographic text is far from straightforward in the broader cultural context in which *Porn Studies* situates itself. As Feona Atwood (2002) asks: “In the context of this sexualized media, will a focus on ‘pornography’ be useful any longer?” *Porn Studies* offers a somewhat equivocal response. On one hand, the porn of *Porn Studies* is most obviously defined by its fluidity. On the other, the term is wielded at a number of points to connote a specific commercial and representational context, that of the industry to which Williams (12) refers in her introduction:

To me, the most eye-opening statistic is the following: Hollywood makes approximately 400 films a year, while the porn industry now makes from 10,000 to 11,000. Seven hundred million porn videos or DVDs are rented each year. Even allowing for the fact that fewer viewers see any single work and that these videos repeat themselves even more shamelessly than Hollywood [...] this is a mind-boggling figure. Pornography revenues – which can broadly be construed to include magazines, Internet Web sites, magazines, cable, in-room hotel movies, and sex toys – total between 10 and 14 billion dollars annually. This figure, as *New York Times* critic Frank Rich has noted, is not only bigger than movie revenues; it is bigger than professional football, basketball and baseball put together. With figures like these, Rich argues, pornography is no longer a ‘sideshow’ but ‘the main event’.

Here, it appears to be the very pervasiveness of pornography that makes it worthy of study. Similarly, Penley makes a persuasive case for considering pornographic film

“as popular culture” (315): again, emphasising the mass appeal of pornography as key to understanding its representations and functions.

“Pornography”, as commercially-defined, would exclude not only the Abu Ghraib photos but, also, much of the porn of *Porn Studies*. Yet, one of the consequences of *Porn Studies*’ focus on the blurred edges of the pornographic is that it actually offers few analyses of what both Hoang and Butler label “mainstream” pornography. Those articles that do consider this pornographic mainstream – the articles by Penley, Waugh and Schaefer – are historical accounts of moments leading to the pornographic present. For one volume to cover the entire contemporary porn landscape would clearly be unrealistic, but the marginalisation both of the extremes (violence) and centre (contemporary pornography aimed at heterosexual men) produces a selective (if eclectic) corpus of “pornography”. As a result, it seems that Williams is able to steer this volume away from “the agonizing over sexual politics” that characterized earlier feminist debate not because those questions have gone away but because she has been selective in her choice of pornography. This reluctance to engage with the contemporary scene suggests a certain squeamishness about studying pornography in the here and now that contradicts the explicit intention of the book. It is to this vexed issue – of how we study pornography – that I now turn my attention.

Studying Porn

To state that the study of pornographic texts should involve looking at or reading those texts with the same kind of attention to detail expected in the study of other genres, is, in many ways, self-evident. But while it may be self-evident, it is far from uncontroversial and raises important questions about the location as well as the definition of pornography.

Locating pornography is a vexed issue in academic and activist work. On one hand, as noted above, the very pervasiveness of pornography is used to justify our study of it, whether from an anti-pornography or anti-censorship position. Yet, both positions simultaneously recognise pornography as the ob/scene: that which is kept off the stage of mainstream culture. This contradiction manifests itself in early anti-pornography feminists’ work that sought to expose women to pornography (based on the assumption that they would not otherwise be familiar with it) whilst, at the same time, suggesting that pornography pervades and distorts every aspect of the culture (Dworkin, 1981: cover blurb). Similarly, in *Porn Studies*, porn is that which is everywhere, rendering public/ private divisions unsustainable (Williams, 2), and, yet, we are also offered specific information about how to locate hard-core materials (491-4), suggesting that they are still marked by their exclusivity.

One effect of this tension between the assumption of knowledge and ignorance has been a tradition in much anti-pornography feminist writing to present pornography as a decontextualised object. For example, in *Against Pornography: The Evidence of Harm*, Diana Russell (1993, ix) defends her decision to include some images without date or source in the following way:

I have included pornographic pictures whose sources or dates I was unable to locate because this information is not needed to appreciate the degradation and abuse of women conveyed in these materials.

Whilst I share Russell's horror and distress at many of these images – at their misogyny, their violence and their recasting of sexual abuse as humour – I cannot agree that the sources and dates are immaterial, nor do I imagine that they are entirely immaterial to the consumer. That is, where and how pornography is distributed and consumed – in other words, how ob/scene it is – is essential to its meaning (Juffer, 1998). Further, the ahistoricism of Russell's presentation prevents us from analysing and understanding how pornography relates to the society that produces it as well as how new technologies might impact upon production, content and consumption.

More than a decade after *Against Pornography*, the pornographic landscape of *Porn Studies* is a radically different one. Yet, concerns about locating and reproducing pornography remain. In her introduction, Williams (4) discusses the publishing history of *Porn 101* (Elias et al, 1999), a collection of essays “whose title suggests, but whose presentation contradicts, the arrival of pornography as a legitimate academic subject” as its publishers “denuded” the text of its visuals. A more recent British anthology, *More Dirty Looks* (Gibson, 2004), is less squeamish about reproducing images from pornography but their presentation raises questions about how and why we look. For example, an essay on Arab-Male fetish pornography (Mahawatte, 2004: 131-2) is illustrated by two stills. Both stills show young Arab men alone: one is standing, facing the camera; the other is lying down, apparently masturbating. In the reproduction of these images, a white box covers the erect penis. The author offers no specific comment either on the stills or on their distortion, so it is difficult to see what they add to the text beyond a sense of the transgressiveness of studying pornography. In the context of *More Dirty Looks* as a whole, this obstruction of the gaze is even more puzzling. A later article in the same volume reproduces a photograph of a woman sucking an erect penis but dispenses with the white boxes: here, the erection is fully visible (Kotz, 2004: 194). The acceptability of this image (where the man cannot be identified though the woman can) suggests that double standards around ob/scenity continue to operate in academic publishing, but the failure of the authors and/or editor to comment on this undermines the effectiveness of the visuals.

Porn Studies is rather different. Underlining the principle of bringing pornography on/scene for serious academic study, many of the articles are illustrated, individual images are referenced in the text and captions offer contextualisation to help the reader understand what s/he is seeing. The overall emphasis is not simply on *showing* (bringing the ob/scene on/scene as an end in itself) but on analysing how particular images are constructed and contextualised. The exception to this rule is, interestingly, not in the use of visuals but in Waugh's uncritical, unreflective, and at times puerile, deployment of pornographic language in his article on the classic American stag film. The article has the epigraph: “Seduced by A. Prick/ Directed by Ima Cunt/ Photographed by R.U Hard”, taken from the credits of a 1927 American stag film. Whilst there is clearly value in discussing the language of pornography, at points Waugh simply replicates it, repeatedly peppering his analysis with references to the three pornographic players in his epigraph.

How to describe pornography without replicating it is, of course, a question that has been raised by feminist scholars: Dworkin, in particular, has long been criticised for her almost salacious repetition of pornographic detail and language. The tone of *Porn Studies* as a whole is far more careful, scholarly and distanced, and the use of images is thoughtful and appropriate. Indeed, many of the images are not in themselves sexually explicit and point to the way in which the volume seeks to move textual discussions of pornography beyond narrative structure, signature shots and the realities of interpenetrating bodies. For example, Patterson's article "Going On-line: Consuming Pornography in the Digital Era", is illustrated with a screen capture of a mundane, daily domestic scene that nicely illustrates the waiting and frustration that – contrary to many sensationalist articles about on-line pornography – characterise much of the experience of the on-line user.

Nevertheless, one particular image crystallised for me the ethical difficulties of teaching pornography as a textual object divorced from material practice. The image shows Pamela Anderson fellating her then husband, Tommy Lee, in a video that was stolen from a safe in their home and became widely available (on video, on the internet and as still images in *Penthouse*) about a year later, after the couple failed to prevent its commercial release. Minette Hillyer's fascinating article points to the tape's variously hybridised identity: as private home movie and public document, made by public figures in a private space, "authenticated" both by its mundanity (the mark of the home movie) and its explicitness (the mark of pornography). In this context, the reproduction of the image makes a great deal of sense: after all, part of what interests Hillyer is the way in which the tape has been re-edited to decontextualise the scenes of sexual action (as, indeed, the image is decontextualised here), disrupting narrative cohesion to "create a more coherent pornographic product" (68).

Hillyer's analysis is provocative and convincing, but the image itself gave me pause: what does it mean for academics to analyse, and reproduce as pornography, an image distributed without the consent of its participants? Can our analysis of the text ignore these conditions of production and distribution? Surely I cannot be squeamish about a still from *Pam and Tommy Lee: Hardcore and Uncensored* when, earlier in this essay, I advocated making photographs of actual torture part of our study of pornography? The tension exemplifies the difficulties of how we define and locate pornography and the implications of those decisions. I have real ethical concerns about reproducing this material. Yet, equally, I have ethical concerns about constructing "pornography" as an intellectual category divorced from these realities. Whilst my two examples are, in many ways, as fundamentally different as it is possible to be, both the home movie and the torture photographs were made by participants in the action, ostensibly for use within their own immediate circle, and, in both cases, we can assume that the making of the image was an integral part of the sexualised experience for those initiating the action and its recording. In other words, both texts might have something to tell us about pornography while, at the same time, raising questions about our construction and canonisation of the category.

Clearly, these difficulties are not unique to *Porn Studies* or, indeed, to porn studies. Anti-pornography feminists have long used images of rape and torture in their slide shows and obtaining consent to reproduce these images is almost impossible. Outside of porn studies, students of news media will almost certainly be exposed to images

(such as those from Abu Ghraib) obtained in conditions where there could, by definition, be no meaningful consent. In a somewhat different context, reality-television formats frequently depend upon footage covertly obtained and it is not always clear whether or how the consent of those depicted has been solicited. Here too, the concerns of porn studies overlap with more general issues in media, film and television studies - such as privacy, viewing experience and censorship – and it is disappointing that the textual emphasis of *Porn Studies* allows these issues to slip from view.

Although I have focused so far on the reproduction of pornography, there are obviously more general concerns about how to teach pornography, questions that Williams tackles in the introduction.^{iv} To stay with ethics for a moment, it is notable that *Deep Throat* (Damiano, 1972) features in Williams' syllabus (14). As a key text in the development of film pornography, *Deep Throat*'s inclusion here is hardly controversial. However, it is also a key text for anti-pornography feminism since Linda "Lovelace" became the most high-profile porn-star to document the abuse that paved her way to pornography and continued on-set (Lovelace, with McGrady, 1981; Marchiano, 1983). Whenever someone watches *Deep Throat*, she states, they are watching her being raped. To be clear, I am not arguing that the reality of abuse automatically renders the film unwatchable on moral grounds – to take this line would make studying the news of war, for example, virtually impossible - but to study the film without reference to Lovelace's account is hardly objective, nor does it allow students to make fully informed choices about their engagement with pornography. To understand the pornographic text divorced from production, distribution and consumption practices can only ever provide a partial account.

Of course, watching pornography in the classroom is, in itself, a strange experience and how best to prepare students for that experience is a difficult question. Given the concerns raised in this review, it will come as no surprise that I am in favour of providing students with sufficient information to enable them to make informed choices about their participation in such a class. Nevertheless, there is a danger that too many "advance warnings" can serve to construct pornography as a unique – and uniquely problematic – object, pre-empting student responses (Williams, 14). As Henry Jenkins (2004: 4) writes,

however neutrally crafted, these [warning] policies are framed with specific ideological assumptions in mind. No one requires you to warn students that the Disney movie you are about to show contains sexist, racist and homophobic content.

Jenkins is right, of course, but I am tempted to turn this around and ask, instead, why we do not warn students about the Disney movie. Indeed, one of the few screenings to prompt a walk-out in my classes was *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (Spielberg, 1984): unwatchable for one student because of its racism. Clearly, providing "warning" labels about every film or television programme we show is not possible, nor can we – or should we – be able to pre-empt every text that might cause "offence". But it *is* possible – and arguably desirable – to give students basic information about audio-visual content and to give them pointers to guide their viewing. In this respect, rather than seeing the teaching of pornography as the problem to be solved, paradoxically perhaps, there is a case for seeing such classes as

examples of best practice that could usefully be extended to other media teaching environments. The contentious – and potentially litigious – decision to teach pornography involves academics in a process of self-reflection that is rarely required of those of us teaching outside of this field. As a result, the following issues are consistently foregrounded for staff and students alike:

- Class dynamics: boundaries, power, safety, respect, difference, tolerance.
- Self-reflective learning: why, how and what we study.
- Moral and ethical decisions about learning.
- Canonicity, cultural and intellectual value.
- The place of affective response in academic criticism.
- The context of viewing and the construction of meaning.
- Students' relative agency in constructing their curriculum.
- Intellectual freedom 'v' academic accountability.
- Censorship (including self-censorship) and regulation of media images in public and educational contexts.

These are all issues that can (and perhaps should) also be a part of the learning experience of students of media, film and television studies who are *not* engaged in the study of pornography. Encouraging us to account for our learning - for its parameters, its methods, its relationship to other contexts and places – is one of the ways in which the study of “pornography” (however we define it) can enrich the media, film and television studies curricula. In conclusion, then, neither this essay nor *Porn Studies* itself can provide a “how to” (study pornography) guide, but the tensions exposed in both suggest some of the questions that might drive the debate about pornography and its place in the curriculum in the 21st century.

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ⁱ The collection *Feminism and Pornography* (Cornell, 2000) is one of the few anthologies which presents work from a variety of more or less oppositional perspectives within the feminist debate. It is all the more challenging for it.

ⁱⁱ Williams' main reasons for excluding the pornography of war rape from her analysis are that they do not share the representational conventions of contemporary pornography and are put to varying uses by their producers/ consumers (Williams, 12).

ⁱⁱⁱ Though as Weitzer (2005) notes, accounts that celebrate and romanticize the sex industry are equally guilty of marshalling the "best available examples" to argue that prostitution (for example) is an empowering and lucrative profession. Whisnant's (2004) discussion of choice and consent is important in this context and offers a corrective to work that seeks to personalise prostitution (including that filmed for pornography) by focusing only on the prostitute.

^{iv} See also Jenkins, 2004, Jones and Carlin, 2004 and Reading, 2005.