ABSTRACT

LEMITE, DANIELLE RUVEL. Controlling Images in America’s Favorite Pornography. (Under the direction of Drs. Celeste Curington and Kim Ebert).

Black porn stars are often featured in race based porn videos headed with racial epithets such as “Dark Slut will Surely Excite You,” “The Big Black Destroyer,” and “Smallest Chick Takes 12 Inch Biggest Black Cock!” These titles reflect long-standing tropes pertaining to the sexualized Black body. These tropes serve to legitimize, normalize, and naturalize Black people as sexual deviants. Drawing on Patricia Hill Collins’s (1990) concept of controlling images, I examine if modern day sexual stereotypes represented in raced porn reproduce pervasive colonial images of Black masculinity and femininity. Existing pornography studies primarily take a religious approach or examine pornography with concern for its effects on society (Albright 2008). In contrast, I seek to understand how societal racialized and gendered hierarchies inform what is desirable in pornography. Given that porn is one of the most popular forms of entertainment today, analyzing its content can provide useful insight into the simultaneous demonization and hypersexualization of Black people. I use intersectionality, content analysis, and open coding of 29 race based pornography videos to reveal how contemporary pornographic representations are rooted in historical stereotypes about race, gender, and sexuality. I identify a new controlling image, the ‘Booty Bouncin’ Black Woman’, and compare this image to the way white women are described as inexperienced “sluts”. This popular form of entertainment is adjacent to minstrel shows and mirrors slave auctions in the way that white men are obscured and Black men are dissected.
Controlling Images in amerika’s Favorite Pornography

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BIOGRAPHY

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I would like to thank myself, Danny X, for remaining authentic throughout this process despite all outside insistence to do otherwise.
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CHAPTER 1: Theoretical Framework

Introduction

It's just an element of American culture that still exists, and that is the feeling that a white female will be deflowered or soiled, if you will, by doing a scene with a black male...But that does speak to the continued existence of bigotry and racism, and I don't think porno is unaffected by certain elements of American culture...And quite honestly, adult media is the only major business that allows for the practice of exclusion based upon race. It's definitely something that exists, and I think it's something that's built within the fabric of the industry. (Lexington Steele, as quoted in Goff 2017).

In this quote, popular Black male porn star, Lexington Steele, reflects on racism within the pornography industry. As Steele asserts, racism is built into the adult entertainment industry, especially in interracial porn where Black stars like Lexington are portrayed on screens as thugs, whores and sexual deviants. The amount of racist practices in the pornography industry ultimately drove Steele to create his own adult entertainment business (Goff 2017).

The porn industry is typically not mentioned favorably in daily conversation like other popular forms of entertainment but pornography certainly has a booming presence behind closed doors. Pornography is consumed more than professional football, baseball, and basketball collectively (Gall 2006). In 2018, the porn industry generated 15 billion dollars, outperforming the NBA which generated 7.4 billion dollars in profit (Benes 2018). As the most successful porn streaming platform, Pornhub (2018) has consistently been consumed more than Netflix. The company reported 100 million daily visits in 2018, the equivalent of the populations of Canada, Australia and Poland combined (Pornhub 2018). In a study of pornography habits of youth residing in the U.S., almost every participant interviewed stated pornography taught them about their bodies and how to have sex, which health class did not (Rothman et al. 2014).
Pornography is an extension of the entertainment industry, which creates a pathway for porn videos to potentially reproduce controlling images—the racist and sexist notions applied to the collective perception of Black sexuality (Collins 2000). Raced pornography teaches viewers about racial, sexual and gendered dimensions of the color line. When people are exposed to these white controlled and produced images, this can induce, reinforce, and amplify their distorted viewpoints of Black people. For example, Givens and Monahan (2005) discovered that after being exposed to controlling images via media, people quickly label Black women with negative terms, especially those associated with the Jezebel image. They argue that media stereotypes are accessible to the point where they become a source of information that morphs into common social knowledge. If racialized porn is displaying controlling images, that could be damaging to a person’s understanding of interracial relationships in general, and for Black people specifically.

Interracial pornography is increasing in popularity. According to Pornhub (2019), americans are 76% more likely to view interracial porn compared to people in other countries. The search term “Black” has risen nine spots since 2017, now the 11th most popular search on Pornhub (2018). Interracial pornography is thus not an exception, but a model example of the way institutions serve to maintain white masculine hegemonic ideas. Race based fetishes in particular depict a historical reality that resonates with viewers differently depending on their relationship with said history. Pornography is typically made for white male viewers by white male producers. Collins (2000) likens racialized pornography to white men viewing Black women in a sexual way at slave auctions. Black women in pornography are reduced to their sexual parts the same way enslaved Black women were. In addition, as with other institutions, whiteness is considered the norm and the race of white people is ignored unless people of color are also present. Only sex with racial minorities qualifies as “raced” sex. Interracial desire began
to be cemented in society’s consciousness as abnormal and taboo in the early twentieth century (Somerville 2000). In the contemporary era, racist, sexist descriptions of Black people are projected through the billion dollar pornography industry to a growing consumer base.

Smith and Luykx (2017) explain that viewers who prefer racialized pornography do so because they mimic an aspect of reality that is no longer attainable. One can think of interracial pornography as a visual representation of physically crossing the racial border. The porn stars in this case would be considered ethnosexual adventurers, or people who cross racial lines for exotic reasons (Nagel 2003). Smith and Luykx argue that porn films featuring Black and white stars together cannot avoid historical memory. Rather, it excites racial memory with a circuit of sexuality that gives viewers an electrified feeling while watching a reenactment of historical racial trauma (Smith and Luykx 2017). Porn films with white male and Black female stars represent racial difference, particularly the historical brutality inflicted on Black women’s sexualized person (Nash 2014).

In this study, I draw from critical race feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins’ (1990) concept of controlling images to determine if there is a connection between past and present images of sexualized Black bodies in interracial and ebony pornographic films. In accordance with the pornography websites I drew my sample from, I define interracial pornography as hard-core moving image film that depicts sexual acts between Black male and white female sex workers. Contrastingly, ebony porn features white male and Black female sex workers. I ask: Do controlling images appear in raced pornography and if so, how? Do ideological forms of racism and sexism produce a pattern of Black porn stars being dramatically sexualized and demonized across porn websites? The data was collected from a content analysis of 29 race based
pornography videos from the most popular tube sites in order to uncover the permanence of sexual racism and the controlling images that uphold it in the post-Civil Rights era.

Colonial Controlling Images

Before beginning their imperialist journey, colonizers rumored that African women had sex with monkeys and that African men had enormous penises (Holmes 2016). McClintock (2015) describes colonizers treating Africa as “porno-tropics,” or projecting their taboo sexual desires onto foreign lands. These assumptions combined the negative connotations of incivility and hypersexuality and assigned it to Africans, therefore ushering in racialized, sexualized, and gendered controlling images of Black femininity and masculinity. Sexuality was, as a result, thought of as “the African sin” (McClintock 2015).

The white man’s narrative of Black women assigns excessiveness to Black women’s bodies. That is, they are culturally framed as having large breasts and buttocks and malformed genitalia (Miller-Young 2014). In reference to sexual stereotypes assigned to Black women, Collins (2000:137) asserts, “notions of gender, race, nation, and sexuality were linked in overarching structures of political domination and economic exploitation.” An example of this is Sarah Baartman, stage name Hottentot Venus, a Black woman who was put on display by colonizers to entertain white men with her body. She was fetishized for her large breasts and butt, affirming the dominant white narrative. This occurred in the nineteenth century and can be perceived as an early form of racialized pornography. Black women were degraded, objectified, and exposed for economic gain and sexual pleasure during colonialism. They were consumed, used and destroyed at the whims of the white man. Slave auctions were akin to entertainment shows, white men found pleasure in physically examining Black women’s bodies for their reproductive capabilities (Miller-Young 2014). Enslaved Black people were forced to comply
and even made to sing and dance for potential buyers (Miller-Young 2014). Sexual assault of Black women by whites was ritualistic and white men pretended like this kept white womanhood pure. In contrast to white women, Black women’s sexuality was framed by whites as subordinate and illicit, allowing them to relieve their conscience of guilt while they used Black women’s sexual labor to fuel the plantation economy (Miller-Young 2014).

Controlling images, as theorized by Patricia Hill Collins, were created during slavery and included the mammy, Jezebel and Sapphire in the white man’s narrative for Black women, and the “buck” and “Brute” for Black men (Collins 2000). The controlling image of Jezebel serves to silence and erase the Black woman’s truth. The Jezebel is the controlling image constructed as aggressively hypersexual and the mammy was constructed as asexual; this vast difference allowed for a controlling image to come in handy in any situation (White 1999). They applied them at will to self-serve their political, economic, and ideological needs. Another nuanced image was Sapphire, applied to enslaved Black women deemed angry, loud andemasculating (Harris-Perry 2011).

During slavery, white slave owners commonly used animalistic depictions of Black people as docile and submissive work horses to rationalize expropriation (Holmes 2016). Whites repeatedly constructed Black women’s identities as mules, implying that they were only useful for their labor (Simms 2001). The idea of Black women as insensible beasts served as justification for slave masters to whip them if they didn’t obey. The concept of Black women as non-human animals was combined with sexual objectification, cementing them as “breeders.” This was institutionalized to increase profit for whites (Holmes 2016). The law did not protect Black women who were raped because by definition, breeders cannot be chaste (Crenshaw 1993). They were objectified, faced frequent rape by white men and their sole purpose was to
provide productive and reproductive slave labor by doing whatever the master forced them to, which often included birthing new slaves (Holmes 2016; White 1999). Black women’s worth was determined based on the amount of money they made white slave masters. During slave auctions, Black women were violated as potential white buyers examined their profitable sexual and reproductive organs. Black women were stereotyped for breasts, butts, and genitalia.

Furthermore, given that slavery required hard, manual labor, whites objectified Black men’s body as overwhelmingly strong and big to justify their enslavement. Yet, whites sought to negotiate Black men’s strength with white domination. Thus, white men created the controlling image of the “buck” for Black men. The buck was intellectually inferior to the white man but thanks to the white saviors, bucks are slightly tamed (Collins 2000). Still, bucks “need” white men to direct their supposed extreme strength to the appropriate form of labor. Brutes, on the other hand, were not tamed and their wild sex drive was determined as a threat to white womanhood. Whites decided that the only appropriate response to violent and uncontrollable Black men was lynching (Smiley and Fakunle 2016). They often took the additional step of castrating their victims and keeping the penises as souvenirs (Harris 1984). Harris (1984) describes castration as a transfer of power that reinforces white power and punishes Black sexuality. The brute controlling image would later serve to justify harsh structural punishment in the form of egregious prison sentences against Black men (Smiley and Fakunle 2016). Whether they were categorized as bucks or brutes, Black men’s defining characteristics were large muscles and penises according to the white gaze. The stereotypes white people created involve biological concepts, enforcing the notion that Black hypersexuality is inherent and unchangeable (Collins 2000).
Collins (2006) asserts that white men have been successful at profiting from the raced, sexualization of Black people pre-colonization to the current year. Controlling images embedded in common social knowledge at the beginning of amerikan society, thus they became hegemonic, or normalized (Collins 2000). Hegemony allows colonizer’s views to go unrecognized, unnamed, and unchallenged by most. Even when controlling images evolve over time, the overarching theme remains one of abuse and domination. Hegemony falsely posits colonizers’ views on Black sexuality as expertise. Antonio Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony states “consent to the rule of dominant group is achieved by the spread of dominant ideologies--a collection of world views, beliefs, assumptions, and values--via social institutions like education, media, family, religion, politics, and law, among others” (Cole 2016). Embedding ideology into social structure is most effective when citizens accept the beliefs to the point where it becomes common sense (Cole 2016). Complacency occurs as a result of socialization (Cole 2016). Gramsci’s ideas were built on Marx’s belief that ideology plays an important part in perpetuating the economic system and its supporting social structure (Cole 2016). Colonialism created an economic system that could only exist because of the ideology that subjugated Black people. This hotbed of racism easily manifested controlling images of Black sexuality that came to be perceived as natural, normal, and inevitable.

Because of ideological legitimization, the abuse of Black women can be found at the basis of racialized pornography in the form of controlling images. Racialized stereotypes imply that Black men and women both had immense sexual appetites (Kitch 2009). Black women were stared at in awe, for entertainment and pleasure while Black men—viewed as a threat to white women—were hung from trees and castrated (Kitch 2009). White women and men encouraged the narratives that posited Black men as sexual beasts and white women as vulnerable and
innocent (Kitch 2009). These controlling images functioned to delegitimize Black women’s narratives in court rooms when they spoke of rape and support voices of the white women who accused Black men of rape (Crenshaw 1993). With this ideology in place, white men had no reason not to rape Black enslaved women and no reason to doubt the white women with pointed fingers (White 1999).

Post-slavery, white people used the Black brute image to maintain their dominance by framing Black men’s sexuality as something to be hidden, feared, and controlled via the controlling image of the Black brute (Collins 2006). White women became the prime demographic that would be ruined by Black men’s alleged sex drive; this necessitated the control of Black male sexuality for ‘the good of society’ (Collins 2006). In contrast, a Black woman’s sexuality needed to be controlled for her own good (Collins 2006). Black individuals’ sexuality was ideologically fixated as violent and therefore was a danger to the public. White men constructed their own identity as the white heroes to eradicate the Black menaces. White women were assigned the stereotypes of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity that defined true white womanhood (Kitch 2009). The virtues of true white womanhood are constructed in opposition to Black hypersexuality (Hamilton et al. 2019).

Stereotypes against Black sexuality can also be easily identified in minstrel shows. Often depicted was the exaggerated difference in penis size between Black and white men. Minstrel shows were regular entertainment put on by white working-class men, and sometimes Black men, in blackface (Roediger 1999). The shows had songs and plotlines describing Black people’s sexuality in accordance with the white dominant narrative. Minstrel shows emphasized violence as well, contributing to the objectification of Black people (Roediger 1999). Minstrel shows made the white male audience simultaneously feel aroused, scared, and happy (Roediger 1999).
The shows affirmed the white man’s definition of Black people as sexual animals, something to be consumed and discarded. The entertainment from minstrel shows was yet another benefit white men received from the perpetuation of the racial system of oppression. According to Collins (2000), white masculinity and Black masculinity gain meaning in relation to one another. By participating in minstrel shows, white men were simultaneously portraying Black men as hypersexual animals and constructing themselves as the standard of a “real” hegemonic man.

**Contemporary Controlling Images & New Racism**

The Civil Rights Era caused a cultural shift in social norms, thus overt racism became frowned upon. Racism was not abolished but rather transmuted. This new racism, or color-bl*nd racism, is defined as having “race based frameworks actors use to justify/oppose the racial status quo” (Bonilla-Silva and Embrick 2006, p.23). Whereas Jim Crow racism relied on moral and biological reasoning, color bl*nd racism is more subtle and institutional (Bonilla-Silva and Embrick 2006). A key point of difference with new racism is the liberal lens through which race is viewed. Whites feel more comfortable thinking that amerika is a post-racial society that rewards individual accomplishments, hard work and education with race as a nonfactor (Gallagher 2003). Color bl*nd racism uses well-off Black celebrities such as LeBron James as proof that race is no longer a barrier, effectively rendering white privilege invisible (Gallagher 2003). Color bl*nd racism operates on the false belief that racism is illegal and therefore will be punished (Gallagher 2003). Through the liberal frame of color bl*nd racism, whites absolve their guilt and grant themselves a psychologically comforting clean slate that severs history from present reality (Gallagher 2003).

With new racism comes modified controlling images (Collins 2006). Collins (2006) argues that controlling images function to legitimize the ideology behind new racism. The new
images reflect the global economy, global racism, the importance of the media and class status (Wingfield 2007). Under a system of sexualized racism and sexism, Black people’s image continues to be manipulated by the white narrative. This new racism is the same ideology that justifies state violence and incarceration against Black men and, increasingly, women. In order to maintain the public’s compliance with this, new racism must remind them that Black men are naturally violent.

After the cultural shift of the Civil Rights Era, brute was re-coded as the thug, a Black man whose mere physical presence indicates violence (Smiley and Fakunle 2016). The Black thug is a violent rapist and this image serves to contrast white men (Wingfield 2007). The white gaze sees working class Black maleness in a binary of criminal or athlete. The unintelligent Black male athlete is favored by whites. Collins (2006) argues that the media rewards Black youth who are eager to submit to the workings of capitalism via having their labor exploited in professional sports. Whites argue that Black men are biologically destined to be superior at sports in contrast to white men who have to rely on their intelligence to become valuable players (Carter-Francique and Richardson 2016). In popular team sports, the media and corporations tend to pick out individuals to make into stars. Corporations in turn commodify them as objects to advance products for profit (Banet-Weiser 1999). Unlike the thug, the athlete’s physical capabilities are admired, profitable and entertaining to whites.

Research on modern day controlling images has been conducted by Christensen, Gill and Perez (2016) to determine how newspapers construct Black masculinity. Christensen et al. (2016) view controlling images for men as a binary between the Good Black Man and the Bad Black Man. The Bad Black Man acts “too Black”, with a biological urge for violence (Christensen et al. 2016). The new hyper heterosexual image means the Black man needs to be
disciplined by the white man. Instead of lynching, which is no longer acceptable under new racism, the state takes over punishment and does so penally. Poor and working-class Black men get the brunt of the new criminal stereotype. The middle-class version of the Bad Black Man is the Angry Black Man. He’s educated but still experiences racism. Like the Bad Black Man, he is seen by whites as menacing and overly aggressive (Wingfield 2007). Middle class Black men can also be portrayed as sissies or sidekicks to a white lead (Wingfield 2007). For example, NFL pro Ray Rice was depicted in the media as the Black brute after abusing his girlfriend. Newspaper reporters vilified Ray Rice from stepping out of his original controlling image of “Good Black Man”.

One of the contemporary controlling images for Black women is labeled the sexualized bitch by Collins (2006). This image is somewhat of a modern-day Jezebel. The sexualized bitch owns her sexuality by having sex with men for her own monetary or status gain. Other scholars use the term “sexual siren” to describe the poor Black women who are stereotyped as uncaring whores (Woodard and Mastin 2005). The new image of “bitch” targets the femininity of working-class Black women. A bitch is aggressive, loud, confrontational, and rude. Collins (2006) argues this image is a mutated version of the mule image that was prevalent during slavery. Whereas the mule was stubborn and in need of motivation from the white man, the bitch is actively pushing against the white man. Bitches are problems because they don't accept subordination and confront social issues and must be silenced. Harris-Perry (2011) sees the modern bitch as an extension of the traditional Sapphire, a Black woman who is irrationally angry, loud and emasculating. Both images serve to silence Black women’s feelings and opinions (Harris-Perry 2011).
Other new images are the welfare queen and the lesbian athlete. The welfare queen is a bad mother who mooches off of state assistance to feed her many kids. She’s supposedly unwed, lazy, amoral, sexually offensive and manipulative (Dow 2015; Woodard and Mastin 2005). A welfare queen is a burden and a bad role model because respectable Black people are not poor or working class. A key function of controlling images is to provide a landscape to project white problems onto (Smiley and Fakunle 2016). The welfare queen has become the scapegoat for the failures of amerikan economy. Placing the blame of poverty on the impoverished removes the focus on the inherent failures of capitalism. Posing poor Black women as draining the economy and country of its resources makes them a threat to national security. The welfare queen image is a prime example of how controlling images changed throughout centuries. Having multiple children was a good thing in the plantation economy. Now that Black women can choose for themselves how many children they want to have and it doesn’t directly benefit whites, they find a problem with that.

A lesbian athlete excels in her sport and therefore must be masculine. According to this idea, real women cannot be physically strong. True women are small, dainty, and submissive. Femininity is not routinely granted to Black women (Carter-Francique and Richardson 2016). Black female athletes who are winners in their sport have been accused of having too much testosterone. It has been a challenge for WNBA players to shake the misconception that they are all masculine and therefore lesbian. Being labeled homosexual translates to deviance in the eyes of a heterosexual dominated society (Banet-Weiser 1999). The mental gymnastics of white ideology lands on “lesbian athletes” being biologically similar to men yet lesbians at the same time. Society would rather Black women be mentally strong, in alignment with the strong Black woman image. The strong Black woman is emotionally resilient, independent from men and
should not ask for help (Dow 2015). Some Black women find power in this matriarch image that puts value in their role in their home. Others find the perception that they should be superhuman constraining and develop a fear of appearing weak (Harris-Perry 2011). Harris-Perry (2011) and Dow (2015) argue that the strong Black woman image was made in response to the negative mammy, sapphire and jezebel images. Whites weaponize the strong Black woman image to blame mothers for the failures of their children (Woodard and Mastin 2005).

Wingfield’s (2007) work finds three images associated with middle class Black women. The educated Black bitches, Black ladies and modern day mammies. The Black lady is not much of a threat because her supposed wild sexuality is contained to heterosexual marriage but educated Black bitches are considered manipulative. Modern day mammies uphold white supremacy at their own personal expense. In the workplace, they are expected to silently accept disrespect as to not make waves. They must willingly accept subordinate positions for the advancement of the company and their white male boss. Much like original mammies, modern day mammies are seen as exploitable and must strive to be the ideal subordinate.

Given the long-standing permanence of controlling images in popular culture and representations of Black men and women, it should come to no surprise that they also surface in pornography. Although purely theoretical works are important, there are few published empirical articles that examine the frequency by which older and contemporary controlling images surface in interracial pornography. In this paper, I build from these findings to examine how Black women and men are represented in contrast to their white counterparts in interracial pornographic films. I examine if modern day sexual stereotypes represented in interracial porn reproduce pervasive colonial images of Black masculinity and femininity.
Pornography is a ubiquitous part of social life and the field of sociology should explore how it informs and reflects human behavior, thoughts, and motivations. How raced porn reflects society has not yet been examined thoroughly using an intersectional lens. Existing literature on raced pornography ranges from older studies on videocassettes (Monk-Turner and Purcell 1999, Cowen and Campbell 1994) to a few modern day empirical analyses of free porn streaming sites (Shor and Golriz 2019, Fritz et al. 2020). To my knowledge, no other scholar has coded for or otherwise empirically identified controlling images in pornography. Scholars have identified Black men are depersonalized in porn and represented as aggressive but did not make connections to controlling images (Fritz et al. 2020, Cowen and Campbell 1994, Shor and Golriz 2019). My research specifically identifies representations between Black and white interracial and ebony porn whereas other scholars compare all white porn to interracial porn or examine porn with people of color broadly. Moreover, existing literature does not delve into representations of white men in race based pornography thus playing into the normativity of white maleness.
CHAPTER 2: Content Analysis of Race Based Porn

Data and Methodology

To investigate how controlling images appear in interracial porn, I rely on a qualitative content analysis of 29 interracial and ebony pornography videos. Content analysis is a useful method for my project because it is specific to the context and method of communication (Stan 2010). In my analysis, I focused on emergent patterns of controlling images, paying particular attention to how the controlling images vary according to race-gender dyad representation (e.g., Black women/white men versus white women/Black men). Given the importance of intersectionality, I also took Black sex worker’s skin tones into account to detect whether actors who had lighter or darker skin tones were depicted differently (Crenshaw 1993).

I focused on porn tube sites, which are a popular, free and accessible way of viewing pornography online. My sample consists of 29 systematically chosen raced pornography videos. I chose the top three pornography sites for my population, based on web traffic statistics from Alexa.com. The websites for my sample are pornhub.com, xvideos.com, and xnxx.com. I used the eleven-year time frame of 2008-2018, which accounts for the creation of newer porn production companies. The benefit of using these sites as my data source is that they are likely the most representative of total internet raced pornography videos. All three are tube sites that are designed to function similarly to YouTube. They are free of charge, have a high number of videos in any given category and come up at the top of Google search results for pornography.

I sampled twenty videos, five with Black male/white female and five with white men/Black women, from XVIDEOS and Pornhub. From XNXX, I sampled four Black men/white women videos and five featuring Black women/white men. In total, my sample
consisted of 14 videos with Black male/white female representation and 15 videos with white male/Black female representation. Videos that met the following criteria were included in the sample: (1) at least one male and one female actor of Black and white races, respectively, are present in the video, (2) the video is at least three minutes in length and (3) the video was filmed by a company. When I chose the videos for the sample, I went in order from most to least popular website out of the three. On Pornhub’s site, I applied the filter to show the “most viewed” videos, as opposed to “featured recently”, “hottest” or “top rated.” Anyone can view a video on Pornhub without an account but you must be signed in to rate a video. I filtered for videos attributed to the United States, although Pornhub did not indicate what that meant specifically. Other filters I chose included videos in the history of the site and videos filmed by companies.

The other two sites did not have filters so I filtered them the same way visually. For example, I did not choose any videos that were filmed by amateurs. A sex worker’s brand name or a corporation’s name on screen during the video are indications of who is in control of production. I chose every third video under the respective category (Black man/white woman or white man/Black woman) until I reached five videos. I started with the most popular site, Pornhub, because I expected it would have the most videos. There is a chance videos are duplicated across websites. To avoid repetition in my sample, I picked the third most unique video in the search results from the porn site. While sampling from Pornhub, it became apparent that under the interracial tag, there were very few videos of Black female stars with white male stars. This became an important data point in itself as it suggests that pornography websites are designed to define Black men/white women pairings as interracial. I had to deviate from choosing every third video in order to find a Black woman and white man together. I instead
chose the next available video with this race ratio. I ran into the same issue on the other two platforms. On XNXX, there were no videos of Black women with white men on the first five pages of the interracial porn tag. To collect the correct videos, I went under the “Black girls/women” tag and chose every third video that featured a white man as well. On Xvideos under the interracial tag, there also were not any videos of Black women, solely white women with Black men. I went to the tag “Black girls” and selected every third video for my sample that featured a Black woman with a white man. This process made it all the more evident that interracial films are not about sex between Black and white people broadly but rather sex between a white woman and a Black man specifically. Ebony pornography refers to sex between a Black woman and a white man.

My method is qualitative content analysis with a combined inductive and deductive, also known as abductive, approach (Timmermans and Tavoy 2012). For each video, I created two documents: 1) a transcript and 2) a record of the actions that took place during the video. I examined the videos for examples of the controlling images as described by Collin’s, including the sexual Jezebel, Sapphire and black brute. As I analyzed the data for apparent themes and patterns, I remained open to seeing new types of controlling images that appear to fuse elements of multiple controlling images or add new dimensions to them. I noted the frequency of behavior and language as well as their direction (positive or negative). I distinguished intensity (minor or major) and space (amount of time allocated to an act in comparison to total video time) of actions. I detailed what the stars looked like and what they wore. I also indicated in my notes which actor(s) controlled the pace of the sexual position and where they are in relation to the other actor(s). The statistics for the video (likes, views, total duration) were also included in my notes.
I uploaded all the transcripts and field notes, 60 documents in total, into NVivo, separated them by website, then used the open coding method to create codes. I chose to use NVivo to keep my documents systematic and organized. I coded for latent examples of controlling images. For example, instead of coding for “jezebel”, I broke it down into “slut” and “initiate, female”. I attached “initiate, female” to instances where the female star commenced any activity with the male star. I attached “slut” when the female star wore, said or did something that was framed as promiscuous. If the codes overlapped and coincided with a Black female star, that indicated the Jezebel controlling image. These features guide the coding process from open coding to a more closed set of controlling images and/or codes. I analyzed the intensity and underlying meanings of the dialogue between porn stars. A deficit of qualitative research is the interpretivism that comes with the coding and analysis process. However, this also allows qualitative research to identify nuances and processes that are unable to be adequately studied through quantitative methodology alone (Babbie 2013).

Analysis

During analysis I examined examples of controlling images by first noting the general concepts I saw, using the aforementioned questions and a guide in approaching analysis initially. Then I transformed those general concepts into categories, then those categories into codes. I then gradually developed concepts by engaging in theoretical dialogue with the existing literature. To create codes, I watched 29 interracial pornography videos to analyze them using the software NVivo. The sampling units are words or actions (Stan 2010). My method of developing codes comes from Elliot and Bowen’s (2018 p.503) research which they describe as an “iterative process of coding, memoing to develop a codebook to use on all transcriptions, recoding or adjusting code categories as necessary.”
During the process, I checked to see that actions or words do not overlap between categories and that the categories are not too similar (Stan 2010). A benefit of content analysis is I am able to correct errors and fix codes without having to completely start the project over (Babbie 2013). While coding, I memoed the process. In these memos, I jotted justifications for my coding choices, video analysis and emerging patterns.

Results

Using the coding memos and code frequencies, I looked for theoretical connections in the sample videos. I maintain that patterns of sexual stereotypes in raced porn today will reflect colonial treatments of Black masculinity and femininity. Specifically, interracial pornography is adjacent to minstrel shows and ebony pornography mirrors slave auctions. Black men are reduced to their penises while Black women’s butts are marveled through the white gaze. Overall, I found that the representation of white women focused on their sexual inexperience with Black men and their eagerness to explore. The Black men they co-starred with were typically not portrayed as whole individuals, but rather dissected to focus on their bodies, especially their penises. Interracial pornography was more likely to use camera angles that highlight the difference in the Black male pornstar’s large dark body in contrast to the small, white female body.

An important variation in representation by race emerged in the ebony pornography videos. Generally, men were not shown in their entirety in sampled videos regardless of race but videos with white men specifically centered the man’s gaze through POV, or point of view, camerawork. Ebony porn used POV to make the viewer feel connected to the scene which also deprioritized variations in body size between co-stars. Although contrasting body size was not a focus of ebony porn videos, the Black woman’s body was. Before intercourse scenes, the Black
female star would often do a dance that, in tandem with camera work, emphasized showing her butt and vagina. White women did not consistently do anything similar to this in the interracial pornography videos in my sample. Instead, they helped set up the intercourse to come with dialogue that stimulates the viewers with racial stereotypes about their male co-star’s body.

*The Black Brute versus The Young Slut*

The video “Sex Kitten Bambi Black First Interracial” on the site XVIDEOS exemplifies how the contrasting portrayal of a white woman who is childlike yet prepared to be defiled by a Black man is considered sexy. While white women were typically posed as young and pure in this fetish, Black men were represented as sexually experienced deviants. Their role is to soil the white woman, solidifying her identity as a “slut.” This can only be achieved through intercourse; thus the Black man’s penis is what is most useful to the production of this type of pornography. Given that his penis is the focus of the film, viewers rarely see the face of Mandingo, the male sex worker. This is a form of dissection which was utilized for entertainment in minstrel shows. One may argue this is the case for all pornography, focusing on genitals. Race differences are central to interracial and ebony pornography, without a Black person present it is not an interracial video. As Smith and Luykx (2017) argue, there is no ignoring a history of racism when whites and Black people are pornography co-stars.

The video begins with an interview with the white woman, named Bambi Black, conducted by an unseen man behind the camera. During the conversation, they establish that she is nineteen, recently graduated high school, wants to be a princess when she grows up and is new to starring in pornography. It is her first “Black scene” (in the words of the man behind the camera), while her male counterpart has been doing this professionally. Initially, she says she is excited for the scene but after prodding from the man, she changes her answer to say she is
nervous. Before her co-star, Mandingo, is even in front of the camera, his penis is present in their conversation. Bambi says that he is huge, and the male interviewer agrees that he’s “famous for having a rather big dick”. They debate what measurements constitute being huge. Bambi shows the unseen interviewer a tattoo of the Hindu god Ganesha on her back and he responds that Mandingo’s penis looks like the god’s elephant trunk. This demonstrates how the people producing the pornography play a role in setting a gendered and racialized ideological basis for the scene to come. Like minstrel shows, those who put on the show control the narrative against Black masculinity.

The sex worker’s stage name, Bambi Black, perfectly portrays innocence (Bambi, a cartoon baby deer) and sexuality (Black, a negative opposite of pure white). Even the title reflects this by using the words “sex kitten” and “first.” The interviewer asked probing questions that may seem like he wanted to get to know Bambi, but it also served to establish her as childlike yet ready for this new sexual experience to push her limits. This contrast creates the taboo storyline that draws in viewers. In the interracial fetish, the white woman is pure by definition of having never been sexually active with a Black man. In my sample, video dialogue did not emphasize that the white women were virgins, meaning they are sexually experienced with non-Black men and that is their pre-existing limit. The Black man is there to degrade her, simply by evidence of his skin color, a racist idea about Black masculinity that originated in colonial times (Collins 2006). Holmes (2016:8) argues that “racial fetishization is an extension and reproduction of white supremacist colonial racism.” A sexually attractive, initially pure white woman and a deviant Black man creates the recipe of an enticing interracial porn film.

The interview introduced the concept of race and penis size before the Black male star was on scene. His reputation preceded him which may excite the viewer about what’s to come.
This marveling and fixation over the size of a Black man’s body occurred 129 times across this sample, compared to 15 times for white men. This reflects a history of white colonial ideas about Black men’s bodies, used to construct the controlling image of the Black brute. White men were never referred to with inhuman descriptors in the videos I chose for my sample, yet Black men received these adjectives, such as “abominable” or “monster cock”, 16 times. As in most pornography, dialogue diminishes greatly once intercourse begins. In this case, the reduction of Black men to their penises is not limited to language and thus doesn’t end when the interview does. Mandingo and Bambi’s bodies next to one another highlights the difference in size between them that the viewer can’t miss. Thin, short, pale white women and tall, muscular Black men are typically casted for interracial pornography.

Booty Bouncin’ Black Women

Booty Bouncin’ Black Woman is a controlling image given that it appeared most frequently in my sample, appearing in 11 out of 15 ebony porn videos. This image manifests as Black female porn stars performing dances prior to scenes of intercourse in ebony pornography. I theorize that this happens because white women, seen as hegemonically feminine, have the benefit of being considered automatically attractive because of their whiteness. Black women of subordinated femininity have to work harder to be considered attractive and worthy of white male attention. This harkens back to Black women being forced by white slave owners to perform at slave auctions. In essence, Black women like Nicole are selling their sexuality to the white viewer in order to keep him watching.

Amerika’s favorite porn site, Pornhub, hosts a video titled “Sexy Black Teen Nicole Bexley Hot Fuck”. It is an “ebony” video featuring a light skin Black woman, Nicole, alongside a white man who goes unnamed and mostly unseen. The events before the actual sex entail
Nicole doing a strip tease as she takes nude photos on a phone. She twerks, gyrates and touches her body for the camera. Nicole pours oil all over her body as she continues enticing the viewer with her dance. I found Black female porn stars performing dances in ebony porn twice as much as white women do in interracial porn.

The video cuts to a POV scene of Nicole performing oral sex on a white man. Point of view videos are a way of making the viewer feel like they are in the scene, having sex with the sex worker who is visible on camera. The less the viewer sees of the man in the video, the more they can project themselves into the scene. The camera is shooting from an angle that makes it so the white man only visible from the waist down, giving any white man watching this video the ability to feel like the scene is happening from his perspective. The entire video is not shot POV style but it is filmed in a way that continuously obscures seeing who the man is. This is achieved by the cameraperson zooming in on Nicole’s vagina or butt closely. In most cases, white men were also rendered invisible in the description of the ebony porn videos. While interracial porn videos proudly boast the names of both stars, ebony porn often only mentions or tags the Black woman. This absolves the white man of the sin of being considered a pornstar. If a name is tagged or mentioned on a video, it links to a pornstar profile on the website.

The way ebony porn videos are filmed simultaneously erases white men while hyper emphasizing and dissecting Black women via the white gaze in the video. Again, we are reminded of slave auctions that consistently featured white men hyper analyzing the bodies, especially vaginas, of Black women. Black men are given the same treatment in interracial pornography. Overall, in the ebony porn I studied, focusing on the butt, whether visually or verbally, was done over three times more frequently to Black female sex workers than white female sex workers. The same tactics that were used in slave auctions are now seen in ebony
pornography to achieve an equal result - economic growth and sexual entertainment for white men. The separation that the glass screen of a technological device creates is transcended by the POV camerawork. From Carbado (2013), we are aware of the dangers of erasing and normalizing the white man’s gaze, especially upon Black women. Leaving them unaddressed cements them as a normal backdrop against which everyone else appears unnatural. Centering the white gaze instead of Black women reproduces colonial mindsets about Black people, upholding multiple forms of oppression.

_The Jezebel_

Although Collins (2006) maintains that Jezebel is the most prevalent controlling image in raced pornography, this image only appeared a few times in my sample. It is still significant that colonial images have survived long enough to show up in modern day pornography. Videos containing the Jezebel truly show how limiting controlling images are. It is restrictive because Jasmine, a Black female sex worker in one of the videos in the sample, could not try to come across as innocent to the viewer in the way Bambi Black can, thus dictating what kind of femininity she can perform. In opposition to the portrayal of white femininity, Black women are normalized as predators and white men as prey. Like representations of Black masculinity, Jasmine is sexually adept and in control. If the viewer internalizes this view of Black women as whores, they may apply that to Black women they encounter outside of porn. Stigmatized labels are not easy to shake, “a whore is always a whore” (Ronen 2020).

“Big Long Hard Cock For Hungry For Sex Superb Milf (jasmine webb) video-18” on the platform XNXX portrays intercourse between a white man and a Black woman, predicated by a fantastical story. The Black female pornstar, Jasmine Webb, is playing a realtor who is showing a property to the white male co-star, Danny D, and his white fiancée. Jasmine is a curvy,
darkskin woman whose character quickly makes sexual advances on Danny while aware that he is engaged. She wears red lipstick and a tight dress with a garter and no underwear underneath. At first, she only engages sexually with Danny when his fiancée isn’t looking. She is nice to his fiancée but talks about sex while she shows the house in a way no professional realty agent would. Danny acts confused, nervous, and helpless, yet he does not resist Jasmine or say anything to his fiancée. His fiancée makes a comment about Jasmine’s behavior to Danny saying that Jasmine is a “sex fiend” but Danny pretends like he does not know what she means. Danny’s fiancée is scripted to express what the white man thinks about Jasmine’s sexuality. At the first opportunity, Jasmine abandons all subtlety and locks his fiancé out of the house so she can have sex with Danny. She physically pushes and orders him around.

This script leads Jasmine to talk and act in ways that indicate she is ravenously horny, playing into old stereotypes about Black feminine sexuality. Her character is so thirsty for sex that she is willing to risk her career as a real estate agent. Not only is she a slut for wanting to have sex, but she’s also a slut for doing it so carelessly and with a soon to be married man whose fiancée is present. She outright disrespects the white, christian institution of marriage. Paired with her race and gender, this makes her a Jezebel.

Jasmine says in the video she has had sex in the house she’s showing them before, assumedly with another client. She is scripted as sexually experienced while Danny acts as if he is sexually inept. The uncertain facial expressions and body mannerisms of Danny indicate that he is not consenting to the sexual interactions Jasmine wants. Violating consent is essential to this video and many other porn films. Without violating consent or portraying consent as assumed for sex, there would be no pornography. Coercion or assumed consent is what leads to a scene that the viewer can climax to. While this certainly happens in real life, porn is a fantasy. In
a fantasy there are no consequences for a real estate agent who sleeps with clients in a home she’s selling or for an engaged man who cheats on his fiancée. Fantasies are designed to optimize pleasure. The Jezebel image present in this video is a part of that fantasy for a white man who wants to appear desirable to Black women.

Discussion

Race based pornography mirrors colonialism by way of controlling images. A new controlling image, Booty Bouncin’ Black Women, emerged from my research, highlighting how Black female sexuality must constantly be sold to viewers in order to keep them entertained. Even though this image was not created during colonialism, it is not entirely removed from the fetishization of the Black body that originated from that time. The hyperfixation on Black women’s butts and vaginas in ebony pornography is reminiscent of slave auctions. This finding is in line with Collins’s (2000) argument that racialized porn mimics the way white men viewed Black women at slave auctions. In both past and present contexts, the sexualization of these body parts has turned a profit for white men. The utilization of a POV camera angle in ebony porn ensures the white man’s gaze is catered to. At the same time, this angle erases the white man. POV videos add an element of hyperrealism to the viewing experience.

The Jezebel occurred less frequently than the Booty Bouncin’ Black Woman in the sample, but its presence still speaks to the long-lasting roots of colonialism in racial used pornography. While videos featuring Booty Bouncin’ Black Women are made to feel more realistic, the Jezebel is present in fantasies. The fantasy erases the actual political and sexual power white men have over Others while hyping up the sexuality of Black women, effectively inverting the hierarchy of power. Viewers see Black women relentlessly pursuing sex from white men which alters the historical reality of sexual relations between Black women and white men.
when the Jezebel image was created. White men continuously and legally forced themselves on Black women so the Jezebel image has served to put the idea in the collective mindset that Black women are asking for it.

Another colonial controlling image still present in modern pornography is the brute. Black men’s penises continue to be viewed as weapons against white female piety and purity. White women who face the brute, ready for the boundaries of true white womanhood to be dissolved are desirable in the interracial fetish. These interactions are typically predicated by ideological foreplay, a dialogue exploring existing contrasting stereotypes of Black masculinity and white femininity. It can’t be argued that interracial porn is entirely identical to minstrelsy because minstrel shows are comedic forms of entertainment rather than sexual. Yet, interracial porn serves up the same narrative of Black male sexuality that white audiences expect and love to hear. Those preexisting notions are present not only in dialogue but in the casting of porn stars as well. Aligning with the controlling image of the brute, Black men cast for interracial porn are usually muscular and tall with dark skin and big penises. To create stark contrast, white women who are most similar to children in their height, body weight and overall aesthetic are chosen as co-stars. Interracial films emphasize these differences further through skilled camera work.

Fundamentally, the interracial fetish relies on youthful, sexually adventurous white women paired with intimidating, experienced Black men.

Stigma against pornography is well established in society, leaving academics and feminists at odds about its effects. Sex alone is considered too taboo for conversation, leaving a sizable gap in the literature about sex work. Most people who have contributed to the conversation about sex work in general have taken an anti-porn, pro-religion stance. They began dominating the narrative in the 80’s, silencing sex workers lived experiences and marginalizing
in the process (Nagle 1997). My research has a pro-porn approach where I do not seek to place blame on pornography but link the problematic issues found in pornography to society writ large. My description of controlling images in race fetish porn reveals a new type of controlling images, which could help further the understanding of racism in pornography.

My research could also benefit the public. Watching porn is popular but not normalized. Maybe my research could help normalize watching porn and notify consumers on how porn may be affecting them without dissuading them from watching it. Many young people turn to pornography for sex education (Rothman et al. 2014). Porn plays an important role in the youth of amerika and it would be useful to understand the negative and positive elements. My research may help people understand that if they choose to watch interracial pornography, they should be wary of internalizing the way Black people are portrayed.

My research is limited by its descriptive nature. I won’t be able to make predictions on the entire pornography industry, but I am able to make note of similarities in this specific niche of porn. It is my hope that it can serve as a basis for future research for others and myself. Further research could compare what controlling images appear in interracial pornography based on website types, viewer types, or both. I could further this project by examining porn sites that specifically cater to race fetishes rather than house all types of pornography and see if more controlling images are present.
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