

Sex Work in the 21st Century

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In the twenty first century, pornography and its impact on society have become evident; specifically, there is a changing shift in moral judgments surrounding pornography. A recent example is adult film star Belle Knox. Knox, her stage name, was a Duke University student, where she studied law and women's studies. Knox was revealed in class as an adult film star and was ostracized by her peers as well as the media. Knox explained that she turned to pornography in order to pay college tuition because loans would not cover the expenses. The media had a frenzy with Knox and she was coined, "The Duke Porn Star". Knox defended her line of work by warranting her actions with a higher education. Knox backing her unconventional career choices has shifted society's view on sex work, pulling it out of the bedroom and into the mainstream media. Society is more accepting of the sex industry as a profession than it has been in the past.

Society's perception of sex work can be viewed through social movements. Media coverage is a major way that social movements gain momentum and notoriety. Jasper (2014) highlights the media dilemma. He discusses the way social movements gain spotlight through established media. It is not every day that the news reports on pornography; however, the Duke Porn Star changed this. While it was difficult for Knox at first, eventually her peers and the school began to accept her line of work after appearing in the media and explaining her career. Knox's appeal to societal morale is what ignited the shift in attitude toward accepting sex work. The question arose as follows: should sex work be viewed as a career if it is to attain a socially responsible goal? After appealing to a strong societal value, a higher education, Knox was able to get people to start accepting a taboo act, such as porn.

Pornography in Academic Research

The media has rushed to judge sex workers and exploit the profession without adequate knowledge. One study sampled the discourse that the media uses to describe pornography and its effects on relationships on married heterosexual couples (Campbell, Fisher, Kohut, & Montgomery-Graham, 2015). The research found that the media focuses on five themes when it comes to porn: pornography and its effect on sexual behavior, porn as a form of adultery, its benefits for couples, addiction, and porn making a partner feel inadequate. The study compared the media's assertions about pornography and relationships with academic research. The results of the study compared the five themes previously mentioned and noted that popular media tends to not accurately describe the true relationship between porn and people. The media reported that porn addiction was much more prevalent than it really was and neglected to note how pornography actually strengthened relationships (Campbell et al., 2015). This article highlights biases in the media through the discrepancies the media is reporting on porn. The inaccuracies that the media report on further misconceptions surrounding the sex work industry. Without education and the ability to see the world through someone else's perspective, ignorance continues to influence popular opinion.

Historically, sex work has been deemed an industry for those who are uneducated and desperate; however, this stigma is typically inaccurate. I found a study that helps shut down those misconceptions about the objectification of the male and female bodies. The research focuses primarily on the perception of one's mind as well as the perception of one's body (Barrett, Bloom, Gray, Knobe & Sheskin, 2011). The research describes six scenarios in which exposing the body changes the perception of an individual's mental capacity. This study displays photos of people revealing their body and others covered up. Those who were represented

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exposing their bodies were seen to have less moral responsibility than those who were in non-revealing scenarios. There is a reality that viewing a person's body may make their focus only physical and take away from their intellectual capacity; I like to call this the dumb blonde effect. I found the beginning of the article to be quite powerful; the authors begin with the question: "Do people's mental capacities fundamentally change when they remove a sweater?" (Barrett et. al., 2011, p.1207). The study found that those who viewed the revealing photos did not necessarily discredit the subject's mental capacity, rather they believed their moral agents were much different than those who were in less revealing photos. These conclusions made me think about how in society we equate morality and education, education with money and so on. Think about this: we don't blame specific members of society for their actions because we relate it to where they came from and how they were raised. Society doesn't realize how often we shift our moral compasses during varying situations.

The sex industry has not been well represented in the media. Crystal A. Jackson (2016), studied prostitutes in the United States. She examined sex workers who want society to stop viewing them as victims and start viewing them as people who have rights. Jackson interviewed 19 U.S. sex workers in Las Vegas, Nevada. Interviewees wanted society to understand that these sex workers are not victims, they are performing a job, and that they are not contributing to the statistic of illegal sex trafficking. They want to put an end to the stigma that sex work is a criminal offense and it is not a morally wrong profession. Jackson (2016) found that sex workers highlight two problems: the media portraying prostitutes as victims of sex trafficking and prostitution as a social problem. This got me thinking about the line that differentiates the workers who voluntarily are participating in the sex industry and those who may be forced. How does society navigate their moral compass here? Though there are sex worker coalitions who

want to put a stop to the stigma that the media puts on the names of sex workers, there are victims that are being forced into the industry.

Paul J. Wright and Soyoung Bae (2015) discuss how the media ridicules people who work in the sex industry; especially the young woman I am focusing on Belle Knox. There is a long debated idea that consuming porn results in gendered attitudes towards women. The authors perform a content analysis where they review the way that men and women are portrayed in media outlets in an explicit nature (Bae & Wright, 2015). In this case “explicit” is used to describe a situation that is intended to sexually arouse the viewer or consumer. The media consistently puts women and men and gender stereotypical poses and situations. The authors have found that the attitudes toward women in sex work are generally different depending on the individual and are not consistent across the spectrum of society. The study describes that older generations consuming porn view women more negatively than the younger generations; this helps to show that pornography is gradually being accepted in society, especially in younger generations.

Laura Kipnis is a professor of media studies at Northwestern University; “The Eloquence of Pornography” (2016) is an excerpt from her book *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America*. Kipnis (2016) goes over how pornography is an underlying presence in American culture whether we like it or not. Kipnis (2016) explains that pornography can best be understood as a form of cultural expression. She believes that pornography should be viewed as a genre, similar to drama, science fiction, etc. The article explains how there are many subgenres of porn that can reflect almost every portion of societies preferences. Kipnis writes, “We don't choose the social codes we live by, they choose us. Pornography's very specific, very calculated violations of these strict codes (that have been pounded into all of us from the crib),

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make it the exciting and the nerve-wracking thing it is” (2016). This explains how pornography and the sexual nature of our society have always been rejected as morally wrong, yet it surrounds us in more ways than we think; let’s put it this way, sex sells...right?

In the world of marketing and advertising, many have heard that sex sells. Authors Reichert and LaTour (2011) explain how sexually explicit and provocative images surround us in almost every aspect of media. The authors researched how varying levels of nudity have influenced the opinions of a fragrance advertisement. The research findings were based three variables: emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral responses as nudity increased. Previous research found that nudity in advertising would push consumers away from the product at hand; however, recent research has proved that society is moving away from this and more accepting to nudity in advertising. The images that were reviewed were three photos of a woman holding a perfume bottle; the model is completely dressed in the first image, demure, the second she is in her undergarments, partially clad, and finally she is completely nude holding the bottle. The purpose of the study was to identify how personal variables may influence a consumer’s view on sexual imagery in advertising. The research found that moral equity played an important role in perceiving the photos from demure to nude. Prior to this study, conducted in 2007, research proved that sexually explicit images in advertising was detrimental to a product, however, time has shown that society is more accepting of nudity in society. This depicts how society has become accepting of sexual images and situations in the media. The twenty first century has catalyzed a shift in morality. In regards, to sex, it is evident all around us that much of society we have become accepting, even callous to sexually explicit material because it is so prevalent in advertising and in the media. This way of thinking about sex in advertising seems to be

transferring in to the sex work industry, especially with new regulations for sex workers in America.

California was one of the first places in the United States to regulate pornography. Jason Shachner (2014), explains the Los Angeles Safe Sex in the Adult Film Industry Act. The act requires performers to use condoms during any acts of vaginal or anal sexual intercourse. The act also requires all adult film producers to have a public health permit and to pay the fee to produce the movie legally. If these steps are not taken, the producer may face a misdemeanor charge, a fine, and possible jail time. The purpose of the act is to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases as well as protect performers and citizens of California. This shows how sex work is slowly being recognized as a legitimate profession; however, sex workers are not being consulted about the regulations imposed upon them. This highlights the divide between sex workers and those who are scrutinizing them. Performers having sex in an adult film are having a very different experience than those who are having sex in their bedroom; a statement from an anonymous performer claims, “This is not making love...it’s athletic, it’s sweaty, it’s for the camera” (2016). Performers have said that condoms create issues when trying to perform their job. Problems for men and women include an increase in injury, compromised comfort, and allergic reactions. Those working in the industry are mandated be tested for sexually transmitted diseases and HIV frequently and many feel that this is enough. The mandating of condoms in California has led to many performers to go to places with no regulation such as Miami, as seen in the documentary *Hot Girls Wanted* (2015).

The article by Kraus and Rosenberg, “Lights, camera, condoms! Assessing college men’s attitudes toward condom use in pornography” (2016), investigates the attitudes of male college students and the use of condoms in pornography. Responses were split into two categories:

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condom critical attitudes and condom supportive attitudes. It was seen that heterosexual men were supportive of condom use in adult films and homosexual men were overwhelmingly supportive of condom use. Though many adult film producers argue that actors wearing condoms will decrease their views, research shows that most college men are supportive of condom use in porn. This shows the relationship between those viewing porn and the regulation of it. Aside from health problems that may arise due to condoms, many viewers do not see wearing them in films as displeasing. Clearly there is divide between the sex industry and regulations, however, as society opens more to sex as a profession then regulations may be passed to satisfy both sides.

Finally, Amy L. Huang (2016) argues that sex work should be viewed as a legitimate occupation. There are many controversial aspects regarding sex work because there are many stigmas associated with the industry. For example, in the past sex workers have been viewed as drug addicts and victims of the sex trading, however, this often not true. The article explains how sex workers want others to view them as a profession rather than victims. Huang explores how sex workers are viewed negatively in society because they are vulnerable to stigmatization, especially women. Many women find sex work to be liberating because they are freely able to show their bodies; Belle Knox explains her experience with pornography to be freeing. The article also talks about the decriminalization of sex work in order to lose this stigma that is attached to it. With increased regulation and decriminalization of the sex industry people are becoming more accepting of things such as pornography as a legitimate profession.

Pornography and the Media

It's not surprising to see something in regards to sex work on the news a few times a week. Belle Knox was interviewed by Piers Morgan on CNN (2014) and the video went viral. The

interview discusses her career, the empowerment that she feels, and the scorn that she receives from society for it. In the interview Knox explains how she made headlines due to be revealed in class by other students for being a porn star. Morgan asks Knox whether her family has disowned her for choosing to do porn or whether or not she would be happy with her future daughter in the sex industry; her answers surprise Morgan when she explains how her family supports her and that she feels empowered and liberated by doing porn. The interview is the epitome of society versus something that goes against societal norms.

The Netflix documentary produced by Rashida Jones, *Hot Girls Wanted* (2015), looks into young women who are trying to break out into the amateur porn industry. The documentary follows young women ages 18-25 that leave their homes behind to live in Miami in pursuit of a career in porn. The documentary exposes the exploitative side of the porn industry. In the beginning of the documentary there is a blurb about how the state of California has recently passed laws mandating the use of condoms in all pornography; the documentary then explains that adult movies that do not use condoms are more popular, therefore more women who are trying to break into the industry go elsewhere where there is not regulation, such as Miami. This made me think about the young women and men who are manipulated into the industry and how this influences societal views on sex work; it is evident that these stories are louder and influence people more however this isn't an accurate depiction of sex work.

An article by Dave Berg (2005), goes over the how pornography is stepping into the spotlight of mainstream media. Berg highlights the fact that many adult film stars are making increasingly more appearances in the news and popular culture. The article also reviews the mega famous porn star Jenna Jameson, who many describe as the woman who pushed porn onto American culture. Jameson is frequently used in advertisement for clothing, video games, and

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many other divisions that are not related to porn, however, using a porn star to promote things in the media furthers the underlying relation between pornography and popular culture. Put in simplest terms: sex sells. Businesses and companies realize this and are starting to incorporate adult film stars into campaigns. Abercrombie and Fitch did it with Jameson and saw sales increase. This is a prime example of how pornography is generally more accepted than it was in the twenty first century.

Sex is prevalent in our society in ways that we often don't think about. The influence of Hugh Hefner and Playboy has positively impacted society and is presented in the documentary, *Hugh Hefner: Playboy, Activist, and Rebel* (2010). The documentary looks at the beginnings of the hugely successful Playboy franchise that Hugh Hefner started at a time where sex just was not up for discussion. Hefner was attacked in the media for producing "smut", however, he explained that woman posing for Playboy felt empowered and liberated. Hefner explains that he advocates for everyday woman to try and be in the magazine because beauty is all around us. Hefner also was outspoken about sex and advocated that sex was a natural part of life; he wanted to end the negative stigmas surrounding sex and show society that it is nothing to be ashamed of. Playboy positively impacted society by trying to end discrimination in the work place. Hefner employed people of all races, genders, and sexual orientations. Hefner also worked on behalf of woman in order to advance sex laws, such as birth control and abortion. Playboy, a company rooted in sex, has done so much for society by breaking social barriers and showing society that sex is healthy for men and woman. This is an example of how sex laws and sex in our society has come a long way since the 1950s.

Academic research about sex work in society aligns with the way that popular culture reflects sex work. Much of this project focuses on adult film star Belle Knox. Knox describes her

porn career as freeing in her interview with Piers Morgan on CNN (2014). This aligns with research in the article by Huang (2016); she reports that most sex workers describe the act of pornography as liberating, especially in a patriarchal society, because they are able to show their bodies on their own terms. This helps de-stigmatize the notion that all sex workers are victims. It is quite the contrary; in fact, sex workers wish to be viewed as having a legitimate profession. This relates to another article, "Framing Sex Worker Rights; How U.S. Sex Worker Rights Activists Perceive and Respond to Mainstream Anti-Sex Trafficking Advocacy" by Crystal A. Jackson (2016). Those interviewed wanted society to understand that these sex workers are not victims, they are performing a job, and that they are not contributing to the statistic of illegal sex trafficking. The mandating of condoms in pornography has caused a lot of controversy between those enforcing the law and sex workers. The documentary *Hot Girls Wanted* (2015), explains how the California act that requires performers to wear condoms during adult films, drives many performers to work in places that do not have regulation. This negatively impacts those who do porn because they may be exploited. This is not an accurate depiction of the entire porn industry, however, it does explain what is wrong with some parts of it. Research shows that society is becoming more accepting of sex work as a profession and this can be seen in the way that society views sex in the media. We also see a shift in regulating the adult film industry, while controversial, legislation being passed on behalf of the sex industry is indicative of acceptance.

Society is constantly exposed to media and the way that the media portrays situations shapes dominant viewpoints in society. The morality of sex work relates to *Media, Persuasion and Propaganda: Rhetoric and Persuasion* (Soules, 2015). The media ecology approach to communication begins with the observation that communication technologies "affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value. It tries to find out what roles media force us to

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play, how it structures what we are seeing, why media makes us feel and act as we do" (Soules, 2015, p. 19). Media ecologists believe that communication technologies shape both messages and the communicator's consciousness. This is where bias comes into play. The media have a bias to move forward certain beliefs while diminishing others. As seen in the interview with Piers Morgan, his stance on pornography is clear when he asks Knox loaded questions. Morgan's use of rhetoric in the interview is indicative of a conservative view of sex work. Aristotle defines the three modes of persuasion as: logos-reason, pathos-appealing to emotions, and ethos-the moral character of the speaker. Rhetoric can be seen as a play on language that's intended to persuade and move an audience one way or the other. Knox uses her ethical beliefs, or ethos, to explain that she feels liberated through porn and does not see an issue in her profession. Logical fallacies are an excellent way to look at the misconceptions surrounding pornography. Aristotle has identified points of logic for listeners to evaluate validity. Logical fallacies are errors in deduction and reason. It is important to be cautious of logical fallacies because they can be highly persuasive when they are framed correctly with rhetorical devices, ambiguous language, and figures of speech. A common logical fallacy is ad populum, commonly known as the bandwagon fallacy. This suggests that something is right because a majority agrees with it. This relates to the morality of sex work in society because you more often see that people are against sex work rather than for it. The media has a huge impact on the way society behaves by reaffirming social norms.

Sex and Identity

Mead's primary work was with symbolic interactionism. Over time this concept has become more of a reflection on one's self. People do not just behave; people behave in response to

situations and the way others respond in those same instances. We tend to focus in on ourselves in order to keep situational behaviors the same. In recent, the idea of self has aligned with the symbolic interactionism. According to Turner, “self is now viewed as a set or series of identities that can be invoked individually or simultaneously in situations” (2013, p. 332). It is important to recognize that the idea of self is not a one-way street; our identity is either approved or disapproved by society and this largely dictates the way we behave in a situation. If a behavior is rejected this may cause one to oppress this side of themselves in order to be approved by society. Sheldon Stryker’s identity theory views behavior as a socially organized by symbols in the environment; symbols vary according to the environment and space one is in. People are attached with various titles and positions according to their environment as well, this is important to keep in mind. There are various expectations that are shared amongst society that are relied upon in order for social life to flow. Stryker recognizes that as individuals we differ in varying situations. This leads to the creation of salience hierarchies, these are made up of one’s self-identities. As stated, if others take identities positively, it reinforces commitment to this identity. We are only willing to continue this identity because of the affirmation of others around us. Turner writes, “If this identity is positively evaluated in terms of the reactions of others and broader value standards, then this identity will move up a person’s hierarchy,” (2013, p. 334). Consequently, if the behavior is rejected by society in terms of culture or norms, the person’s identity may induce guilt or shame. This addresses the idea of society rejecting sex worker because it falls outside of the norm, however, after seeing the other side and listening to those in this field, society may be more accepting of their behavior. Those working in the field of pornography have felt like they had to hide what they were doing for fear of rejection and shaming.

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In the past, society has shamed people, especially women, for exposing their bodies. It is evident that in the twenty first century there has been a moral shift in society's outlook. Sex is everywhere we look; some go as far as saying pornography is all around us. Over the years, sex work has become more regulated and less exploitative as previously assumed; for Belle Knox, she finds the act of pornography liberating. Rubin writes, "Trends that lead to transformations of prevailing moral systems almost inevitably involved people sense of who they are and how they relate to those around them" (2015). Morality in society is dynamic and changes depending on the circumstance. The rise of individualism and self-fulfillment has a lot to do with the changing circumstances of morality in society. In this day in age sex work has become more accepted due to these changing dynamics. Without an open mind society stays stagnant. Morality shifts with the generations and this can clearly be seen in twenty first century pornography.

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