
Gay-for-Pay: Straight Men and the Making of Gay Pornography

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Situational homosexualities emerge when heterosexually-identified individuals encounter institutional settings that permit or reward homosexual behavior. Simon and Gagnon's (Gagnon and Simon 1973; Simon and Gagnon 1986) theory of sexual scripts allows us to understand situational sexualities as the result of interplays among stereotyped social cues, prescribed role-playing, enabling social conditions, and the converging intra-psychic motivations of participating individuals. Both the norms that regulate sexual behavior and the enabling social conditions that elicit and permit homosexual conduct from heterosexually-oriented participants can be activated using sexual scripts that circulate throughout the culture. Cues and social roles are embedded in culturally available scenarios, while the enabling conditions are often those material circumstances (prisons, barracks, economic need, drug use, or porn studio) that limit or exclude the supply of potential heterosexual sex partners (Escoffier 1999). In contrast to its use in the 1940s and 1950s, I distinguish situational sexuality from sexual behavior as governed by the individual's sexual identity which, over the course of his life, is constantly forged, reinforced, interrupted and reconfigured within and through culture and history.

In many cases, sexual scripts are situationally specific. The "situation," in part, emerges from the characteristics (gender, race, age) of the potential population of sex partners which constrain or normalize a sexual repertoire not normally chosen by the situated

individual. Albert Reiss's classic essay "The Social Integration of Queers and Peers" explored a form of homosexual prostitution that took place between young men ("peers") who did not "define themselves either as hustlers or as homosexuals" and homosexual men ("queers") who performed fellatio upon them (Reiss 1961, p. 102). Reiss found that certain norms governed the sexual transactions that occurred between the young men and homosexuals, the most important that it be undertaken "solely as a way of making money: sexual gratification cannot be actively sought as a goal in the relationship." Another was that the transaction between them "must be limited to mouth-genital fellation. No other sexual acts are tolerated" (ibid.). Reiss also found that the young men defined someone as homosexual "not on the basis of homosexual *behavior*, but on the basis of participation in the homosexual *role*, the 'queer' role."

In this article I examine the homosexual activities of a group of men whose primary sexual identities are not gay, yet who regularly perform in gay pornographic videos. These men are widely known in the porn industry and among spectators as "gay-for-pay," the implication being that they would not engage in homosexual conduct were they not paid to do so. Of course, there are many explanations for such behavior. I will argue that this group of men exemplifies "situational homosexuality." There is no irrefutable evidence establishing these men as *really* straight or *actually* gay but in denial. However, all sexual conduct in the video porn industry is to one degree or another an example of situational sexuality inasmuch as the performers are often required to engage in sexual acts for monetary compensation that they would not otherwise choose to perform and with partners for whom they feel no desire.

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The Gay Porn Industry: Identity Politics and Markets

Since the late 1960s, the pornography industry in the United States has grown rapidly. While there is little reliable information about its size or annual revenues, experts estimate that the “adult entertainment” industry—which includes “XXX” videos and DVDs, Internet porn, cable and satellite porn, peep shows, phone sex, live sex acts, sex toys, and porn magazines—takes in somewhere between eight and ten billion dollars per year. That is comparable to Hollywood’s annual domestic ticket sales or the annual revenues of professional sports. Again, while there are no reliable estimates, the gay market represents a significant portion of this amount—probably from ten to twenty-five percent (Antalek 1997a; Rich 2001; Thomas 2000).

Until the early 1970s male homosexual pornography was produced and distributed under “black market” conditions. The first commercial male pornographic films were probably made in the late 1960s, but they were few in number (Waugh 1996). Only after the gay movement had gained momentum were companies formed explicitly to produce gay male pornography. The production and distribution of commercial gay pornography took off between 1970 and 1985. Initially, gay pornographic movies were made by amateur filmmakers, and to some degree, many of the films made in this period represented an expression of the filmmaker’s own newly “liberated” homosexuality—this was especially true for many of the performers. This development also reflected the liberating effect of the sexual revolution: during the same period, straight erotic films, such as *I Am Curious (Yellow)*, *Deep Throat*, *The Devil in Miss Jones* and *Last Tango in Paris*, often played in mainstream movie houses. Wakefield Poole’s gay *Boys in the Sand* opened in 1973, followed shortly by Jerry Douglas’s *Back Row* (1974) and, like straight erotic movies, both films played in mainstream movie houses.

After 1985, production of gay pornography entered a new period in which video technology and extensive ownership of VCRs lowered its cost and made pornography more accessible. It became inexpensive

and easy to rent. The new technology also enabled pornography to be viewed privately and at home. The AIDS crisis reinforced the privatized experience, some viewers turning to video porn out of fear of engaging in homosexual activities.

Moreover, starting in the mid 1980s, the gay market developed into a lucrative and dynamic growth sector for many industries, supplying specialty consumer goods to satisfy the aesthetic, social and sexual preferences of homosexuals. The commercial development of gay male pornography also benefited greatly from the growth of the gay market and urban gay communities by supplying erotic images to a growing number of self-accepting gay men. This demand helped shape the business in a number of ways: the standards of physical attractiveness, the repertoire of sexual acts, the production values, and the narrative conventions closely reflected the prevailing attitudes of gay male consumers.

In the early days of gay commercial pornography, it was difficult to recruit performers because homosexual behavior was still highly stigmatized and production was illicit. The performers were frequently recruited by the filmmakers (who were primarily gay) from among friends, casual sexual partners and boyfriends (Douglas 1996a). There was no pre-existing network or agents to recruit performers for gay pornographic films. . . .

Today, the gay pornography industry has a highly developed infrastructure of production companies, distribution networks and technical services, as well as agents and scouts for performers. If the first phase (1970–1985) in the development of commercial gay pornography attracted primarily gay men as performers, the second phase (post-1985) began to attract performers who did not identify as gay or homosexual. One contributing factor is that male performers were better paid in the gay pornography industry than in the straight side of the business. Given the heterosexual focus of straight pornography and the primarily male audience, the industry’s female performers are better paid than most of the male performers. The prolific director Chi Chi Larue estimates the number of straight men in gay pornographic videos to be sixty percent. I suspect that this is on the high side, or it may merely reflect her selection of performers for her

own work. By the mid 1980s, there was active recruiting of performers by scouts, photographers and others who work in the gay segment of the industry.

The Spectator of Gay Pornography: Documentary Illusion and Identity Effects

Pornography probably has a more significant role in the life of gay men than it does among comparable groups of heterosexual men. Gay men often turn to gay pornography for cultural and sexual validation. As film critic Richard Dyer has noted, gay pornography contributes to the education of desire—it provides knowledge of the body and of sexual narratives, and examples of gay sexuality and of sexuality within a masculine framework. Since most gay men have become adults without having been socialized in the social and sexual codes of their communities, pornography can contribute to that as well (Dyer 1992).

The pleasure and sexual excitement that viewers of porn experience depend, to some degree, on the patterns of social and sexual interactions (i.e., the narratives, cues and symbols) that circulate in the larger culture (Kipnis 1996; Loftus 2002). The gay spectator's psychological response to the fictive world of pornography and sexual fantasy—the symbolic conditions of sexual arousal—and the everyday life of social roles, values and social structures is mediated by the ideological and social developments of the gay community; not only do psycho-social elements predominate in the organization of the pornographic materials, but both the immediate social context and wider social environment also influence the sexual response to pornography (Gagnon and Simon 1973, pp. 260–265). Gagnon and Simon, in their analysis of pornography, show that an individual's fantasy life and his capacity for sexual arousal is significantly influenced by cultural context and historical situation. For example, in gay porn condoms are widely used (for many years they have appeared in almost all videos) for anal intercourse, in sharp contrast to their virtual absence in heterosexual pornography. Some gay men find that they are not aroused by the sexual action in “pre-condom” era movies, made before the

discovery of AIDS—in this way the ideological and social context clearly influence the potential for sexual excitement.

In the case of video pornography, its effectiveness stems from its ability to satisfy the viewer's expectation that the sex is plausibly “real” in some way—a pornographic film or video is a “document” of sexual pleasure, of successful arousal and orgasm. The viewer's sexual arousal presumes the suspension of *disbelief* in pornography's fictional character. A “documentary illusion” exists in the photographic pornographic genres, which promise to enact certain sexual fantasies and certify them through the “authenticity” of *erections* (although some significance may be lost with the increased use of Viagra and other drugs) and *orgasms*. The psychological as well as the ideological power of pornography is achieved through this certification of sexual fantasy by its “documented” sexual conclusions—visibly displayed orgasms (Patton 1988, pp. 72–77; Williams 1989, pp. 93–119; Barthes 1986).

Viewers' responses and reviews of porn videos often minimize the genre's ambiguous expectations between fantasy/fiction and real sex. The sexual acts portrayed must seem genuinely exciting to the performers in order to arouse the viewer (they must be realistically credible), while also representing fantasies that invoke the culture's sexual scenarios. Reviewers sometimes will stress the “realness.” “Ultimately what viewers want to see,” one reviewer writes, “is guys *having* sex, not actors *pretending* to have sex. A few times there were some moans and some ‘Oh, yeah, fuck me!’ that sounded like typical porno soundtrack, but other than that this all seemed very authentic” (Foxxe 1999). . . .

Pornography's *identity effects* are enunciated through the genre's dominant semantic and syntactical conventions: the “standard” narrative sequence (kissing, oral sex, rimming, anal intercourse) of sexual acts, a convincingly energetic performance and, most importantly, the *erections* and visible *orgasms* that authenticate (and narratively close the scene) the embodied forms of homosexual desire. Operating within the “documentary illusion” the erections and the orgasms putatively “prove” to a gay male spectator that these “sexually desirable, masculine, and

energetic performers” are *really* gay—thus affirming the gay male identity. An individual video may often deviate from these generic expectations, either through failure to provide a credible performance or by offering new or creative sexual variations.

In addition to its identity effects, gay male porn also has a somewhat paradoxical “hetero/masculinist effect,” in which the generic conventions that consolidate and reinforce gay male identity coexist with frequent representations of “straight” men engaging in homosexual acts. In this way gay porn reinforces the incongruity between male homosexual desire—stigmatized, abject—and the heterosexual dominance of the masculine regime of desire. It serves to situate homosexual *desire* within masculine territory irrespective of heterosexual or gay identities (Pronger 1990, pp. 125–176). Thus, the widespread employment of straight performers in gay pornography intensifies the contradiction between *gay male identity* and *homosexuality without identity*, conferring legitimacy on homosexual *behavior* independent of gay identity.

The creation of a market for gay pornography relies upon the cultural and economic significance of gay identities, and not—however widespread it may be among males—homosexual desire (Bronski 1984, pp. 166–174; Burger 1995; Harris 1997; Chasin 2000). Its expansion into other identity markets continues to reflect a significant trend in the gay pornography business, hence the growing number of videos targeting various demographic or sexual audiences—Latinos, black men and other gay men of color, the leather, S/M and bear subcultures, and all sorts of sexual specialties like spanking, uniforms and other fetishisms (Suggs 1999).

The central ambivalence between *identity* and *behavior* in gay male porn frames the reactions of spectators to—along with their libidinal investments in—porn “stars” (Dyer 1979, pp. 17–19). The gay men who buy or rent and view a video expect the sexual pleasure portrayed to be “authentic” enough to produce an orgasm. For the most part, the orgasm affirms the sexual act leading up to it and contributes to the viewer’s own sexual arousal (Patton 1988; Williams 1989). But if the performer isn’t gay, then the potential “meaning” of the orgasm is ambiguous. It can mean that orgasm is “acted” (or dramatically

fabricated in some sense—“It’s really only a heterosexual orgasm!”), or it can mean that even a straight man experienced an orgasm from sex with a man—this is one of the central ambiguities of gay porn (Pronger 1990, pp. 125–154). It potentially undermines the viewer’s willingness to suspend disbelief in the fictional aspect of the porn video. Thus, while every pornographic movie made for a gay male market manifestly performs at least two tasks—to sexually stimulate its viewers and, in some way, to affirm their sexual identity—it may also perform a third and more contradictory task: to provide evidence of *homosexuality without identity* (Bech 1997, pp. 17–84). It may do so either narratively, through the inclusion of scenes portraying straight men having credible sex with gay men, or by employing “known” heterosexual (gay-for-pay) performers to credibly represent gay male sexuality.

The Theory of Sexual Scripts

. . . Gagnon and Simon introduced a thoroughgoing conception of sexual behavior as a learned process, one that is possible not because of instinctual drives or physiological requirements, but because it is embedded in complex social scripts that are specific to particular locations in culture and history. Their approach stressed the significance of individual agency and cultural symbols in the conduct of our sexual activities. . . . No previous theorists of sexuality had interpreted sexual behavior as so completely social. They redefined sexuality from being the combined product of biological drives and social repression into an arena of creative social initiative and symbolic action. . . . In their theory they argue that individuals utilize their interactional skills, fantasy materials and cultural myths to develop “scripts” (with cues and appropriate dialogue) as a means for organizing their sexual behavior (1973; Simon and Gagnon 1986).

Sexual arousal and the performance of sexual acts frequently depend upon the meanings and cues of the social and cultural context. In fact, human sexual behavior is organized by structured expectations and prescribed interactions that are coded like scripts. The theory of sexual scripts as formulated by Gagnon and Simon provides a useful analytical framework for

exploring the dynamics of sexual performance in pornographic production. Scripts are metaphors for the narrative and behavioral requirements for the production of everyday social life. In their theory of sexual scripting, Simon and Gagnon (1986) suggest that these “scripts,” with cues and appropriate dialogue, which are constantly changing and which reflect different cultural groups, circulate in societies as generic guidelines for organizing social behavior. They distinguish three distinct levels of scripting: *cultural scenarios* provide instruction on the narrative requirements of broad social roles; *interpersonal scripts* are institutionalized patterns in everyday social interaction; and *intrapsychic scripts* are those that an individual uses in his or her internal dialogue with cultural and social behavioral expectations (ibid., pp. 98–104). For example, interpersonal scripts help individuals to organize their self-representations and those of others to initiate and engage in sexual activity, while the intrapsychic scripts organize the images and desires that elicit and sustain an individual’s sexual desire. Cultural scenarios frame the interpersonal and intrapsychic scripts in the context of cultural symbols and broad social roles (such as race, gender or class) (Goffman 1976).

Thus the making of pornography, like other forms of sex work, relies upon the learned sexual responses of its participants—much of the sexual behavior shown in pornography is a display of situational sexuality. However, unlike other forms of sex work, gay pornography as a representational genre, which often implicitly reflects as well as affirms an *identitarian* agenda, is explicitly marketed to self-identified gay men. However, the gay male pornography industry routinely recruits men who do not identify as gay or homosexual to perform in gay videos. In addition, non-gay-identified men frequently have used their work in gay pornography to launch lucrative careers as escorts. Nevertheless, the fact that industry gossip about sexual orientations circulates constantly demonstrates how important these issues are to the industry’s operation as well as to the audience’s response (for examples of this kind of fan discourse see the forums at www.atkol.com). In gay pornographic videos, the ability of actors who are self-defined and otherwise behaviorally heterosexual to perform homosexual

acts, maintain erections (both while penetrating or being penetrated) and have orgasms provides the opportunity to explore the construction of situational homosexuality on the gay pornography set.

One distinctive characteristic of video pornography is that it is a dramatic fabrication of sexual activity that also requires demonstrations of “authentic” sexual signs, that is, erections and orgasms. The dramatic fabrication is achieved not only by the performers enacting sexual scenes but also by elaborate editing and montage of the filmed sexual acts themselves. Usually the filming of a sexual scene requires many takes, stops and starts, and requires the performers to regain their erections. The maintenance and refreshing of erections—“wood” in the industry vernacular—is a constant preoccupation of video pornographers.

The gay pornography business, through its employment of men who are heterosexual or who do not self-consciously identify as gay, provides straight actors with social conditions that enable situationally specific sexual behavior. The pornography industry supplies (1) the social and physical space where these sexual activities can take place; it provides (2) other actors who expect to engage in sexual activities with one another; and it offers (3) narratives of sexual activities that invoke the culturally available sexual scripts that elicit and activate the filmed sexual activities. Pornographic video production is obviously a “situation” in which sexual activity can take place: it provides access to sexual experiences for its participants (Simon and Gagnon 1986, pp. 104–107).

Gay-for-Pay as a Porn Career: Constructing the Persona

It is common practice that when anyone enters the porn industry they adopt a stage name—a *nom de porn*—by which they will be known to viewers. This protects the performer’s privacy despite what is often a very visible public presence. In addition to taking the *nom de porn*, the performer must create his “character” as a performer. This persona is a “career script” through which the performer integrates traits of personality, physical characteristics and sexual performance style.

The new “porn star” fashions himself from the cultural myths and social roles that define male sexuality or violate masculine roles, or that affirm homosexual desire or draw upon ethnic or racial beliefs. Performers must obviously also draw upon their “intrapsychic” fantasies and beliefs. Thus one performer may create his persona as the aggressive, dirty-talking “top” (the one who penetrates). In Rod Barry’s case, his persona enables him to play the military man having sex in the barracks, a white trash hillbilly who fucks his cousin Seth but who won’t kiss (they are “fucking cousins, not kissing cousins”), or a man who, in his first scene as a “bottom” (the one who is penetrated), “aggressively” urges on the man who tops him (Escoffier 2000). Another performer might create his persona as an exclusive top, a man with a large penis and a man who never kisses—elements drawn from sexual scripts, from both cultural scenarios and intrapsychic fantasies or fears.

Whatever his sexual preferences, when any man seeks employment in gay pornographic video production he must justify his choice from a number of perspectives. Participation in gay pornographic video production is, to some degree, a socially stigmatized activity (especially for those who do not identify as gay), not only because it is a form of sex work and because most people believe that public sexual performance negatively affects those who participate in it, but also because homosexuality is still a stigmatized form of sexuality. Thus, every new entrant into the porn business must give himself *permission* to engage in it (Simon and Gagnon 1986, pp. 109–110; Abbott 2000). Men who identify as heterosexual wanting to work in the gay porn industry must overcome the standard presumption that only gay men would want to perform in gay pornographic films. Obviously, the description of these performers as “gay-for-pay” presumes that the permission they require is primarily economic. But economic permission is often entangled with other reasons, such as curiosity or latent homosexual fantasies, such as in the following example:

Um, well, I was straight before I found out about gay videos, but I was a straight person with, like, thoughts and feelings. And through my twenties, they got real

strong. I almost thought I would try to have an interlude or a contact with a man. I thought about it, yeah, I was, like, one of those straight-curious types. But then I got into gay video, and I decided I can simultaneously make money and fulfill a fantasy. The money’s a perfect way to justify going into the sexual world. I guess I consider myself formerly straight and now I’m sexually bi with a lifestyle of straight (Paul Morgan, in Spencer 1998).

Permission for some performers can come from surprisingly odd sources. One performer, who had “danced” in local Latino gay bars in Jackson Heights in New York City, gave one of the more unusual forms of permission:

Interviewer: How did you get started in this business?

Tiger Tyson: I just went in and did the video Tiger’s Brooklyn Tails about two years ago. It turned out very successful. I didn’t know I was going to become this whole character.

I: Did making films come naturally?

TT: It was something new, being that I’m bisexual. You could say I lost my virginity on video . . .

I: You haven’t bottomed on film. Would you?

TT: No, never. I would probably turn into a little punk . . . I wouldn’t feel right being on the bottom.

I: Do you now date guys?

TT: No. Actually I’m engaged. She’s very supportive . . . I met her at Magic Touch while I was dancing for gay men, and she knows all about the videos. My mother is even supportive . . . that’s why I don’t bother to think I’m doing something wrong. If my mother doesn’t feel disgraced, I feel good about it (Straube 1999).

Dancing or stripping in gay bars, as Tyson’s story suggests, is a common way of entering the world of gay porn, where other dancers or agents will scout for producers of gay videos (De Marco 2002). But many of the young straight men who enter the gay porn industry develop their permission to engage in homosexual activity in a video by using a surprisingly limited number of “scripts.” One of the most common narratives that gay-for-pay performers tell of their entry into the industry is the story of responding to a modeling ad or the approach of a recruiter who misleadingly offers to set up a photo shoot that turns out to be a nude photo shoot or porn audition. Brian Estevez, who worked in the

industry in the late 1980s, gives this account of his recruitment:

Brian Estevez: *They wanted to see my whole body . . . and I thought: "What the fuck is this?" . . . At that point, I began to wonder what was going on and what the deal was. I turned to the old guy and said, "You told me modeling. What is this shit?" He then told me that these guys had big companies and that they made movies. I told him I didn't want to do movies—and then he started talking money and I swear . . . I don't know . . . I guess money manipulated me . . . I didn't want to do it!*

Interviewer: *And then the next step?*

BE: . . . *and I went ahead, even though I'm very straight to this day.*

I: *Now about being straight . . .*

BE: . . . *You know, I grew up very straight—never had any homosexual tendencies.*

I: *You didn't connect it in any way to sexual pleasure?*

BE: *I didn't get any sexual stimulation from it. Even to this day, even in a sexual act, even if I have a hard-on and everything—I still didn't connect it to "Wow, this feels good."*

I: *And yet you started in films as a bottom?*

BE: *Well, I didn't have a lot of choice.*

I: *I'd think a straight boy would be a bit put off—that being a top would be more logical . . . more straight.*

BE: *I know—and that's how I felt. I'd much rather be a top, and in my later movies I didn't bottom anymore. It's just when they manipulated me into the business, they manipulated me into being a bottom. They told me that I wasn't big enough or buff enough to play a top role, so I was labeled a bottom—a small, hot guy who gets dick up his ass. After a few times around, I said, "Fuck it—I'm not doing that anymore."*

I: *Was the fact that you were doing it eating away at you?*

BE: *[quietly] Yeah—being a top would have been easier on my ego.*

I: *Did you enjoy it while it was happening?*

BE: *No, I didn't, because suddenly, out of nowhere, I was taking these big, hot monster dicks up my ass. It wasn't pretty (Richards 1991).*

Estevez's construction of permission to perform in gay porn involves a series of disclaimers: "I'm very straight to this day," "I didn't get any sexual stimulation . . . even if I have a hard-on," and "I didn't have a lot of choice [to bottom]." Elaboration of permission

and the construction of a persona often go hand-in-hand. Estevez's account illustrates this when he explains that "they manipulated me into being a bottom. They told me that I wasn't big enough or buff enough to play a top role, so I was labeled a bottom—a small, hot guy who gets dick up his ass . . . being a top would have [been] easier on my ego." Eventually, he refused to bottom, and in his later videos he only topped. However, it is clear from the permission Estevez gives himself and his ambivalence about the roles he performs in gay pornography that his persona is fashioned from other socially prevalent sexual scripts. Particularly noteworthy is his need to disclaim the evidence of erections as signifiers of sexual pleasure in a publication for gay men.

Constructing a persona is an important step for any new entrant in the gay industry, but for the straight performers it is probably the most important step. Gay men can rely to some extent on their private sexual personalities. For the heterosexual man, constructing a persona becomes the basis for navigating the demands of directors, agents, interviewers and audience members, and provides a foundation for determining what sexual acts and roles he will perform. In part, the persona is the self-conscious construction of a "personal" sexual script that draws on the individual's intrapsychic script as well as on grand cultural scenarios. The persona is a sort of sexual resume which the actor constructs around the kind of permission that he gives himself for entering the gay pornography business, but it is also based on the image that he wishes to project of who he is as a sexual performer. The persona is what sociologist Erving Goffman has called (following certain vernacular uses) a "front": ". . . that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions . . . to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (1959, pp. 22–30). The actor's porn persona consists of a hodgepodge of beliefs about gender, sexuality, identity, acceptable sexual scripts that he may engage in, and his repertoire of acceptable sexual acts. Thus the actor's porn persona is a "situational sexual identity" that is constructed to be used within the confines of a porn career and the gay porno business. The persona is important because it enables the performer to have a self-concept that gives him permission to

engage in homosexual activity and thus to sustain a credible sexual performance, to have erections and to produce orgasms.

Once the actor has his porn persona, he will use it to negotiate auditions, interviews with the press, street encounters with fans and, most importantly, performances. He will use the persona to answer questions about why he started doing gay pornography (e.g., "I'm in it for the money"), his sexual orientation, his physical assets as a sexual performer (muscles, penis size, a "fuckable" ass), those particular sex acts he will or won't do, and to limit who is cognizant of his career in gay porn, and to provide plausible excuses for any failure to turn in credible performances. Another aspect of a porn persona is whether the actor engages in professionally related activities like escorting or dancing. Usually, people in the industry—agents, directors or journalists—help new entrants develop their porn personas. Often, industry insiders inject a more palpable "marketing spin" into a new actor's persona. Insiders also supply standard terms like "top," "bottom" or "versatile" for roles involving anal intercourse, or more complex terms like "sex pig," "trade" or "straight bottom" to characterize the actors' porn performances.

When a gay-for-pay performer successfully conveys sexual pleasure, fans begin to question the performer's sexual orientation. Frequently a performer will concede that he is in fact bisexual. Describing himself as sexual is at least as common:

Interviewer: Obviously, you think of yourself as heterosexual . . .

Rod Barry: [interrupting] I wouldn't say "heterosexual." I'd say "sexual."

I: What's the difference between being sexual and bisexual?

RB: I think bisexual means you're a switch-hitter, you like it both ways. Sexual is you like an orgasm and you don't care how you get it . . . (Douglas 1998a).

Porn personas are intentionally constructed to facilitate work in the porn industry, but they often reflect intrapsychic investments. Rod Barry's description of himself as "sexual" may be more than a justification or permission to engage in homosexual sex. Over the course of his career he has insistently characterized himself as "sexual" or even "omni-sexual" rather than gay or bisexual: "Don't call me gay. Don't call me

straight. Don't call me bisexual. Just call me sexual. I can cater to anybody . . . a gay male, a transsexual, or a female," he proclaimed in another interview (Antalek 1997b). He suggests a sexuality for himself that encompasses a wide range of "object choices" and roles (top or bottom); his image may embody an emerging style of masculine sexuality, one envisioned by Foucault: "What these signs and symbols of masculinity are for is not to go back to something that would be on the order . . . of machismo, but rather to invent oneself, to make oneself into the site of production of extraordinarily polymorphous pleasures" (Escoffier 2000; Foucault quoted in Halperin 1995, pp. 89–90).

Virtually every actor who makes a name for himself as a top is challenged to bottom at some point in his career. Rod Barry, a former Marine and one of the top gay-for-pay porn stars in the late 1990s, was frequently asked if he would bottom. He always replied, "Where's the bucks?" The decision to bottom is justified in many ways but, like other aspects of the persona, involves repackaging symbolic resources, social roles and culturally available sexual scripts:

I: Was "getting fucked" a big step or just another step?

RB: Another step. Obviously, it's a big step, because in the industry, everybody makes a big deal out of it . . . That day was, to me, like any other day. Except for the fact that I was "getting fucked" . . . It's different from what I was doing, but it's just like any other day at the office.

I: Did you feel that you were playing a feminine role at that moment?

RB: No. No. No. And if you watch the movie, I don't think so, because I'm an aggressive top and I was also an aggressive bottom, playing the same way, like reaching around and grabbing his ass and pulling him: "Do it right!" (Douglas 1998a)

Barry's performance as a bottom was very favorably reviewed by fans and critics. In a review in *Manshots*, director Jerry Douglas wrote: "Either Barry is one hell of an actor or he does delight in bottoming . . . his pleasure seems downright palpable. His energetic response to the rutting, the sparkle in his eyes, his joyous grin, and his rockhard erection all confirm that he is indeed as exciting a bottom as he is a top" (Douglas 1998c, pp. 38–39). . . .

The longer their porn careers, the more actors are under pressure to revise their personas, to expand their repertoire of sex acts, and to put themselves into new situations in order to avoid becoming too predictable, and therefore boring to their fans. An integral dynamic of the porn industry, and for many forms of sex work, is a steady pressure for “fresh meat.” . . . Most porn actors are aware of this retrogressive dynamic and try to develop a career strategy for their post-porn careers. Some leave the industry and go into other careers or businesses. Some work behind the scenes in porn, while others increasingly rely on escorting or some other form of sex work—which usually just stretches out the retrogressive dynamic over a longer period. Some performers will try to hold onto their fans by expanding their sexual repertoire—they will bottom or do a gang bang picture. But this progression usually leads to lower budget productions as well. “One interesting thing about this business,” director Kristen Bjorn observed, “is that the longer you are in it, the less money you are paid. Once you are an old face, and an old body, forget it. You’re through as far as your popularity goes” (De Walt 1998). . . .

Wood and Money Shots: Sexual Performance as Work

. . . While porn actors, like other sex workers, may exclude certain activities from their repertoire, their sexual behavior is governed by the demands and constraints of the video production context. Heterosexual actors in gay pornography must necessarily engage in homosexual sex acts. However, in the context of video production, three other factors help to define their sexual activities. One is the constant interruption of the homosexual activities in which they engage. A second is the use of various forms of heterosexual pornography—such as straight porn magazines or hetero porn videos shown on television monitors on the sidelines—as aids in maintaining their erections and stimulating orgasm. Third is post-production and editing, which result in the illusion of an “authentic” sexual performance. The finished movie is the combined product of the credible sexual performances of the actors, the director’s skill in motivating and

preparing the actors to perform the sexual acts filmed, and the success of post-production editing in sustaining the credibility and coherence of the sex portrayed and minimizing any discrepancies between the actors’ personas and their sexual performances.

For the straight actor in gay pornography, it is the on-set performance of homosexual acts that defines his ability to successfully manage the situationally specific sexual demands. Many of these heterosexual actors claim that their first sexual encounter with another man was on the set of a gay porn video. Thus, even before his first homosexual experience, a straight actor must choose his repertoire of sexual acts. Certainly his most significant decision is whether or not he will engage in anal intercourse as a top or as a bottom. The repertoire of sex acts is very much a part of the actor’s development of his porn persona. The shaping of his persona is dependent on those sexual scripts—those that exist in the culture at large, his own intrapsychic ones or those he can imagine in his everyday life—in which he is able to invest his energy. Thus, for the straight actor, there is a continuum from the “trade” role, where the actor refuses all “gay” sex roles or reciprocity, to that of “sex pig,” where he engages energetically in all aspects of sexual activities, to the “straight bottom” role, in which the straight actor engages primarily as a bottom.

The trade role is the gay porn role in which the actor “presumably” can maintain the most distance from the stigma of being labeled as homosexual but, ironically, the straight bottom is a role that allows the performer to demonstrate that he is not aroused even though he is being penetrated—QED he is not gay. The straight bottom, since he does not even need to produce an erection, requires even less of a libidinal investment than does an actor with a trade persona. However, the straight bottom role may also be adopted when an actor doesn’t have the confidence or ability to maintain an erection in order to anally penetrate his co-star. One such performer, Tim Barnett, during an interview questioning his choice of roles, responded:

Interviewer: Since you were relatively new to male-male sex . . . did you lay out any rules? . . . Was the whole menu of what you [were] going to do discussed, or was it just “You’re going to bottom”?

Tim Barnett: I think it was more or less discussed when I came out [to Los Angeles].

I: The scene was filmed around what you were willing to do?

TB: Right. And I'm very versatile . . .

I: Was there ever any question . . . whether you would top or if it would be a flip-flop?

TB: . . . They wanted me to top Greg or do a flip-flop, and it just never came about . . . I just don't know if I'm comfortable enough with the sex yet that I would be a top.

I: It's easier to be a bottom.

TB: It's a lot easier to be a bottom (Douglas 1996b).

Despite the relative "ease" of bottoming, the 1996 *Adam Gay Video Directory* (Anonymous 1996) was, nevertheless, critical of Tim Barnett's performances: "Tim is a big beefy blonde who just loves to get fucked. Unfortunately, he enjoys giving his co-stars pleasure so much he rarely has time to maintain his own erection." (Here the reviewer maintains the public pretense of Barnett's libidinal investment, attributing his lackluster performance to his focus on giving pleasure to his co-stars.) Even gay actors, like straight actors, may have difficulties staying hard while being penetrated. That can be ignored, if they project some form of libidinal engagement. Without any erections or effective engagement a straight bottom cannot give a credible performance.

Once the actor decides on the acts he is willing to perform, the major practical issue is the enactment of a credible performance of sexual acts. As I have already mentioned, heterosexual actors often use straight porn magazines, straight videos on monitors or "fluffers" (performers who fellate the actor off-camera) to help themselves achieve erections. Tim Barnett, the straight bottom quoted above, was asked if he used the person he was playing opposite to or if he drew on his own private world to get himself aroused. The actor answered: "Both. It really depends who it is. I really like my nipples played with, and sometimes the other person will be the kind of person I'd like to have playing with my nipples. A lot of times I'll use a magazine" (Douglas 1996a).

Another adaptation is the development of what might be called a "professional" work ethic on the porn set. Still photographer Greg Lenzman discusses one such actor:

Usually, with the gay-for-pay, there are certain things they will not do or they don't have that energy. But there are some exceptions. Rod Barry, who started off more as a straight—I think he's now moved on to a lot of stages in his video career . . . [H]e will give all for his shoots and is very supportive of other performers. He's a joy to work with on a set, and you just know you're going to have a good scene with Rod Barry. The scene with Rod bottoming for the first time was just like an evolution (Douglas 1998b).

Dirk Yates, the director-producer who discovered Rod Barry, concurred:

He seemed pro from the first day I met him . . . He did twenty-nine scenes in a year. He started right off the bat. And I believe the guy's straight—maybe I'm wrong—but I've never seen such a performer. He would never turn you down on anything (Lawrence 1999).

To porn video viewers, an important element is the sexual chemistry of the performers. It is unclear how often this is really the performers' chemistry or the result of editing and post-production work. How do performers who are not gay manage to project the sexual appeal needed to attract viewers? Gay-for-pay performer Rod Barry insists that "porno is all about energy" (Douglas 1998a).

Kristen Bjorn, probably the most successful contemporary director of gay porn, has made a series of videos using predominantly performers who do not identify, in any sense, as gay or homosexual (Jamoo 1997). While most of his actors are Latin American and European (and therefore from societies with different "sexual scripts"), they nevertheless have a large following of American gay men. Both Bjorn and his assistant director, who goes by the name of "the Bear," have discussed the desirability of using straight actors many times. In one interview, the Bear notes:

. . . Straight men usually have less of a problem getting erections for still photography as well as video. I believe that they are better prepared to come to work knowing that sexual energy must come from themselves through fantasy, memories, erotic magazines, etc. Gay men often come to work thinking that their work is going to be a realization of a sexual fantasy that they have had for a long time. When they realize that they are not in control of the sexual activity, partners, and duration, they

become detached and often bored with it and one another. When a gay model is turned on to another model, it can be great to film. In many cases the models are not that excited by each other, especially after four full days of filming the same sex scene. As one model put it at the end of a scene, "That was the longest trick that I ever had!" Once a gay model has decided that he is not sexually interested in the other models, it seems most difficult to bring him into the action and get him aroused. Straight boys don't seem to be as dependent upon the excitation of the other models nor as concerned whether or not they are exciting their partners. But when a gay model perceives that he is not arousing his partner, as often happens in scenes that involve gay and straight models together, it can make him feel insecure with himself. This affects his ability to get erections and ejaculate. Straight models are not as sensitive to the stimuli that can make or break a gay model's performance (Bear 1999).

The dynamics between gay men and straight actors is another important factor in the production of credible homosexual performances. Homophobic attitudes on the part of a straight actor often undermine the necessary "sexual chemistry." Gay actors often complain about working with straight performers. As the Bear notes, gay men are much more sensitive to the sexual chemistry between themselves and the straight actors. The identity issue frequently surfaces in gay men's assessment of working with heterosexual actors. Tommy Cruise, who explicitly identifies as a bisexual and as a bottom, comments:

One of the things I hate is working with straight guys, because if they're not attracted to me, then I don't like it. People say, "What is your favorite guy like?" It doesn't matter as long as they like me. That turns me on. If someone wants to fuck me really bad, that just turns me on—because they want me. Don't ask me why, I don't really know. That's what does it for me. It's not very enjoyable for me when I'm with a straight guy. A lot of straight guys, they don't even want me touching them. I'm like, "Why are you even in the business?" I've only worked with two straight guys who were okay—and one of them actually blew my mind. He was the strangest dude I ever saw. He was like, "Okay, time to get a hard-on." Boom, he'd get a hard-on. It's like he's standing there like a friggin' robot. "Okay, time to come." Boom, he comes. He was so on-cue, it was kind of freaky, but he was so good to work with (Douglas 1999).

Cruise's remarks point to the importance of the straight actor's attitude towards gay men and homosexuality, in addition to his intrapsychic need for his sexual partners to find him attractive. Buddy Jones, a gay man who has performed in several Kristen Bjorn movies, found it enjoyable to work with a straight actor. He reported:

... It was a turn-on working with a straight boy... who was eating my ass and sucking my dick. And he was really good at that, especially the rimming. I was concerned about turning him on while he was fucking me, because I was really turned on. I thought that in his mind he was just working. But then his hard cock was up my ass and his hot cum shot all over me, and it kind of made me wonder if he was really enjoying it (Bear 1999).

One gay man, Eric Hanson, who performs primarily as a top, says that his favorite co-star is "straight bottom" Kurt Stefano: "... He has a great persona about him. I think it's the straight thing going on with him. Straight-acting guys are a total turn-on" (Adams 1998).

By itself, the porn persona is not sufficient for the successful management of sexual performances. . . . Getting wood and producing orgasms are merely the certifying components of sexual performances in pornographic movies. Porn actors must convincingly play the roles of men engaged in sex in other ways in order to sustain a credible homosexual performance. As one porn actor after another iterates in interviews throughout the gay press and pornography magazines, making porn is hard work (no pun intended).

The Camera Frame: Sexual Scripts and Video Production

... For straight performers, the gay porn video set provides highly structured access to homosexual activity. It is a social space dense with sexual cues (Simon and Gagnon 1986, pp. 105–107). Video production organizes the space (both physical and social) where sex will take place. But the making of pornography necessarily invokes the culture's generic sexual scenarios—the sex/gender scripts; racial, class and ethnic stereotypes; the dynamics of domination

and submission; and various reversals and transgressions of these codes. Porn video scripts utilize these cultural and symbolic resources. These culturally significant symbolic codes help mobilize the actor's private desires and fantasy life in the service of the video's sexual narrative.

The making of a porn video requires not only the performance of real sexual acts but also the simulation of a coherent sexual "narrative." Real sex acts are usually performed, but the video representation of them is more coherent than the actual sexual activity being filmed. The shooting of any sexual scene is made up of an apparently simple sex act photographed from several different perspectives. In fact, the performed act is interrupted many times to arrange shooting angles and lighting and to allow the actors to "get wood"—to regain their erections.¹ For example, the cameraman crawls under actors fucking doggie-style, then shoots them from above to show penetration of the ass, then from behind the active party to catch yet another penetration shot of the hard penis going in and out. Then the "money shots" (shots of the actors ejaculating) of all the performers in the scene have to be choreographed, often at the end of many hours of filming. The actors may need help of various kinds to help them ejaculate—heterosexual porno magazines, porn videos on monitors, or manipulation by one of their co-actors such as biting their nipples, inserting a finger in their anus, or kissing them. Thus a 15-to-20-minute sexual scene that the viewer sees is edited and patched together, with soundtrack added, from footage shot over a six or seven hour period. . . .

Ultimately, it is the director's choreography of sexual performances and the effectiveness of the editing process that give pornography its quality as an idealization of sexual performance. Whatever shortcomings commercial pornography exhibits—the repetitiveness of sexual activities, inadequate performances (flaccid erections, lackluster orgasms, bored actors) and shoddy production values—they are exacerbated by the idealization that pornography as a medium promotes. . . .

The director uses the porn actor's persona as the raw material for the sexual plot when choreographing the sexual combinations. Of course, sometimes actors

can't successfully manage the persona that they want to project. For example, if a straight performer whose persona presents him as "trade" (i.e., he will not perform oral sex, allow himself to be penetrated, or kiss) can't get an erection, making him unable to penetrate the performer assigned to play bottom, then he and the director must negotiate some modification in order to have a credible sex scene. If he isn't fired and replaced, the actor with the "trade" persona may have to perform outside his persona—perform oral sex or agree to bottom—in order to get paid. In the last couple of years, Viagra has helped in achieving and maintaining erections, but there are still numerous other problems involving an actor's ability to live up to his persona and perform credible sex.

Conclusion

The making of gay male pornography provides an interesting example of the dynamics of situational homosexuality. Since performing in pornography is a kind of sex work, the performers' sexual conduct is a specific response to their customers' preferences and does not represent the preferred sexual responses of the performer. In other words, the sex that is performed is that for which the customer is willing to pay (Adams 1999, pp. 102–121).

In gay pornography, the participants have had to develop a "persona" or "front" (a *nom de porn*, sexual histories, a repertoire of sex acts) to negotiate the social demands they must contend with as sexual participants. Like any front, it is more manageable if it is, to some degree, consistent with biographical attributes of the participant. But the persona also provides the performer with a way of invoking the potential cultural scenarios and sexual scripts that are compatible with his intrapsychic scripts (Goffman 1959). The production process of gay pornography creates a *situation* that enables straight men to engage in homosexual sex for money. It is a highly organized commercial space that supplies sex partners, symbolic resources and other erotic stimulants, and a video production technology that can produce coherent and credible sexual narratives and images.

The *identitarian* expectations of gay spectators shape both the making of a pornographic video and

their interpretations of the sexual performances. It is commonly presumed that when an actor in a pornographic video has an erection while being penetrated he must be gay. In contrast, I have argued that credible homosexual performance, whether or not it sexually arouses the performer, can take place without conscious identification as a homosexual person or even without spontaneous preference for homosexual forms of activity. Situational homosexualities emerge when heterosexually identified individuals encounter situations that enable or reward homosexual behavior.

Situational homosexuality is socially constructed sexuality. All sexual performance is fundamentally situational and does not always result in long-lasting social psychological commitment to any one form of sexual activity. It is a process that draws on both *intrapyschic scripts* and *cultural scenarios* and integrates them into the *interpersonal scripts* of everyday social life. The theory of sexual scripts presumes that sexual performance is not about discovering and pursuing one's intrapsychic desires (the presumptive core sexual self), but about defining and constructing scenarios of desire using cultural scenarios and negotiating interpersonal situations (Gagnon and Simon 1973; Foucault 1997). The men who work in the gay porn industry—whether gay, straight or “sexual”—must all construct scripts in order to perform. In this way they are no different from any person engaging in sexual activity—since all sexual performance is situational.

NOTES

1. This has changed to some degree since the introduction of Viagra in 1998. Regaining erections is now much quicker.

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