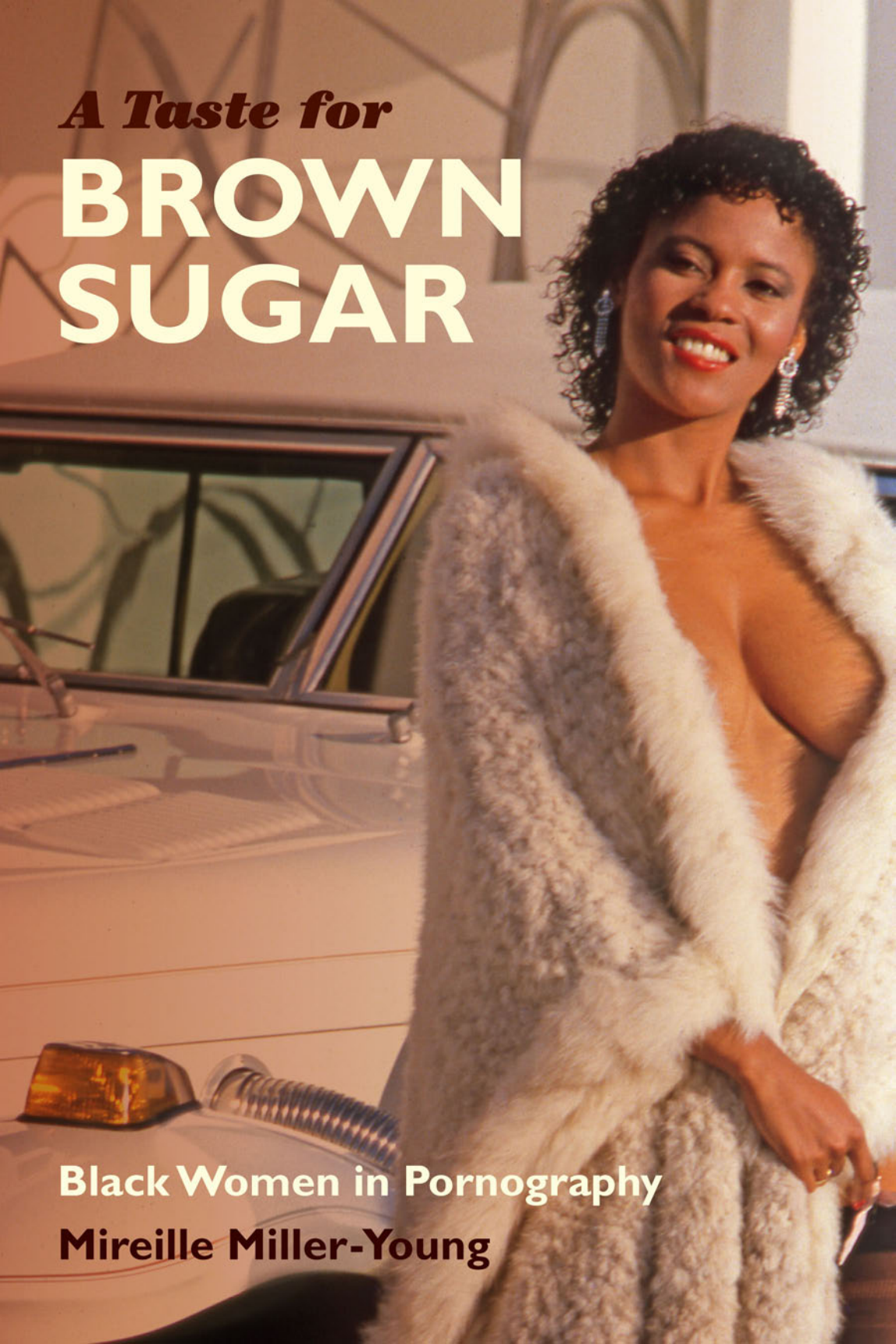
A Taste for BROWN SUGAR



Black Women in Pornography

Mireille Miller-Young

A Taste for
BROWN SUGAR

A Taste for BROWN SUGAR

Black Women in Pornography

Mireille Miller-Young

Duke University Press Durham and London 2014

Printed and bound at Grafos SA, Barcelona, Spain
Typeset in Minion Pro by Tseng Information Systems, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Miller-Young, Mireille, 1976–
A taste for brown sugar :
black women in pornography / Mireille Miller-Young.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-8223-5814-5 (cloth : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-0-8223-5828-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Pornographic films—United States—History and criticism.
2. African American women in motion pictures.
3. African American motion picture actors and actresses. I. Title.
PN1995.9.S45M55 2014
791.43′6538082—dc23
2014013060

Cover art: Jeannie Pepper during her tour of Europe, Cannes,
France, 1986. Courtesy of JohnDragon.com.

Contents

Preface *Confessions of a Black Feminist Academic Pornographer*

This is the first book about black women's images, performances, and labors in the porn industry. Most criticism of pornography excludes the position of the black female pornographic producer or consumer. Still less discussed are the ways in which black women producers and consumers have sought pleasure, subjectivity, and agency in pornographic representations. This book takes on the important challenge of talking about one of the most controversial businesses (pornography) through the lens of its most marginal workers (black women). To illustrate the sexual economy I am presenting, and to provide readers with a shared vocabulary of visual culture, I have chosen to include images of the films, events, and people I discuss throughout the book.

In over ten years of researching black women in pornography, I have grappled profoundly with issues of representation, racism, and violence in pornographic images. I have been called a pervert and a pornographer not only for writing about the history of black women's images, performances, and sex work in pornography, but for showing images from this history in various presentation formats. In this way, I have joined a history of what Sander Gilman has termed "academic pornographers." When Gilman first published his groundbreaking work on the iconography of the Hottentot Venus and early nineteenth century racial-scientific inquiry into black female sexuality, he was also accused of being a pornographer. Gilman's amply illustrated study, published in the famed special issue of *Critical Inquiry* from autumn 1985, and his own monograph *Difference and Pathology* (1985), displayed images of Saartjie (Sara) Baartman's genitals as they were studied and eventually dissected and exhibited by French scientists.

Although Gilman was accused of "bringing black women into disrepute"[1] by showing these images, his work revolutionized the study of black female

sexuality, inspiring scores of black feminists to theorize (and argue about) Sara Baartman's iconicity as urtext for emergent thinking on racialized sexuality and discourses of black female sexual deviance.[2] Gilman reflected on being labeled an academic pornographer in his foreword to artist Kara Walker's book *My Compliment, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love* (2007). Responses to Walker's controversial art had ignited similar accusations about her role as exhibitor-purveyor of "negative images" that pandered to the racism of white audiences.[3]

Because this book reproduces and circulates images of black women in pornography, perhaps to the greatest degree ever accomplished in an academic work, I find myself considering Sander Gilman's embrace of the pejorative title of pornographer, and his argument that we must look at and engage in discussion about sexualized images of black women, even if this is at times traumatic. I represent and analyze the complex iconography of race found in pornography, both on behalf of those in the image, and in order to understand the enduring power of these images in our lives.

This is not to deny how sexualized images of black women are saddled with notions of dirtiness, or how they might produce a visceral response in the reader because they reveal a history and an imaginary of the black body as pornographic object. However, as a critic I am interested in challenging my readers to question their probable gut reaction to the images. By offering my own analysis of this iconography, I aim to expose the conflict and inspire conversation. I want to spotlight the ways in which the overwhelming focus on stereotypes and damaging images ignores the people involved in their creation.

The visual representation of black sexuality is a powerful concern for black feminists. Indeed, black visual artists including Kara Walker, Renee Cox, Carrie Mae Weems, Lyle Ashton Harris, Zanele Muholi, and Carla Williams use sexuality, and sometimes their own bodies, in their art in ways that forcefully illuminate how the process of making visible black sexuality necessarily invokes a collective racial trauma.[4] It is in this collective racial trauma that black feminists find ourselves groping for a language to talk about our own pleasure and for a set of practices for living within and against all the contemporary forms of exploitation, alienation, and objectification that make up life under advanced capitalism and sexualized racism.

To accuse scholars who reproduce sexualized images of black women of being pornographers is to follow a line of discourse dating to the 1970s about the role of images and representation in black women's lives. Many members of the academy are concerned that our culture is overwhelmed by, and indeed

teeming with, injurious images of black womanhood. Because these images are so titillating and profitable, they tend to replicate themselves, crowding out the wide, complex reality of black women's lives. This anxiety about the damaging role of images in popular and political culture is so profound for black feminists that it may lead us to censor ourselves for fear of opening up our wounds, allowing taboos to further annihilate our humanity.

A politics of African American women's respectability first emerged in the late nineteenth century in post-emancipation Christian women's activist circles. This "respectability politics" seeks to counter the racist stereotype of the lascivious and deviant black woman by upholding and embodying an image of gender and sexual normativity evocative of a patriarchal ideal of feminine virtue.[5] Black women have adhered to respectability politics as part of an effort to resist and dismantle representations and social structures that cast them as sexually promiscuous, and hence—according to the racist and patriarchal logic of American social life—deserving of rape, abuse, and stigma. In addition to the politics of respectability, black women have learned a "culture of dissemblance," which Darlene Clark Hine describes as tactics of masking, secrecy, and disavowal of sexuality that allow black women to shield themselves from sexual exploitation.[6] The culture of dissemblance produces a cloak of silence around black women's sexual life. These twin cultural traditions—the politics of respectability and the culture of dissemblance—framed sexuality itself as hazardous and contributed to the sexual policing of black women.

In black communities, those who deviate from respectability and dissemblance politics by participating in nonnormative or nonconforming sexualities, including queer, contractual, or public sexuality, are promptly censured. They are accused of undermining African American claims to citizenship and belonging based on sexual respectability, and of giving cause to harmful discourses of black pathology. In this framework of respectability-dissemblance, black women in pornography—as well as those who write about it—are thought to invite further criticism and control of black women's sexualities.

Perhaps for this reason, black feminist critics since the late 1970s have largely dismissed pornography as inherently violent and dangerous. Tracy Gardner posits that pornography is "brutal and deadly" for women, and Aminatta Forna writes: "Images of black women are exploited by pornography and black women are exploited by pornographers."[7] Patricia Hill Collins asserts that black women in pornography "embody the existence of victim and pet" and engender a "totally alienated being who is separated from and who seemingly does not control her body."[8] Alice Walker posits the centrality of

the pornographic as an idiom for the sexual consumption of black women during slavery: "For centuries the black woman has served as the primary pornographic 'outlet' for White men in Europe and America."[9] These black feminist analyses contend that pornographic representation continues a history of sexual violence against black women's bodies.[10] In addition, for Audre Lorde, pornography is the polar opposite of eroticism, and as the epitome of superficiality and individuality, rather than subjectivity and intimate relations, completely lacks the potential for truly progressive political work by black feminists and others.[11]

This book is not a rejection of the important feminist works outlined above. We cannot elide the historical role of slavery and colonialism in producing a scopophilic and coercive relationship to black women's bodies, one that is foundational to their depiction in pornographic images. Yet there is another tradition of black feminism that I wish to prioritize. This tradition provides a new lens to read the work of pornography on black women's bodies. Barbara Smith, Cheryl Clarke, and Jewelle Gomez write: "Even pornography which is problematic for women can be experienced as affirming women's desires and women's equality. . . . The range of feminist imagination and expression in the realm of sexuality has barely begun to find voice."[12] My work takes seriously this charge to find the voices of black women in pornography. I have used ethnographic methods to help these voices be heard—including interviews, participant observation, set visits, and my own years-long relationships with performers, some of whom I call friends. By reproducing these images of black women in pornography, I hope to honor their performances and document their interventions into the complicated history of black women's sexuality.

I assert that black women in pornography do other kinds of cultural work beyond representing injury, trauma, and abuse. I draw on black feminist critics whose work challenges the silences and erasures of the respectability-dissemblance framework and who show a particular interest in theorizing what Cathy Cohen calls the politics of deviance.[13] For Cohen, marginalized people's so-called deviant practices and behaviors are productive because they offer the potential for resistance. When "deviant groups" fight for "basic human goals of pleasure, desire, recognition, and respect," they open up and mobilize a queer politics of dissent with prevailing norms that deny the value of their lives.[14] Like Cohen, Ariane Cruz argues for the queer political potential in deviant acts, theorizing a "politics of perversion" that sees sexual pleasure as a subversive force.[15] "The stripper, prostitute, video vixen, gold digger,

and sexual exhibitionist," L. H. Stallings contends, "cannot continue to be the deviant polarity to the working woman, wife, mother, lady, and virgin."[16] For Stallings, black feminists ought not to invest in the moral policing of outlaw women, for this only sustains binaries and deadens the rich and deeply political nature of black sexual expression. What if we explore pornographic deviance as a space for important political work? This means creating new scholarship that looks at pornographic sexuality as not simply a force of abuse, but as a terrain of strategic labor, self-making, and even pleasure in women's lives.

"By concentrating on our multiple oppressions," argues Deborah King, "scholarly descriptions have confounded our ability to discover and appreciate the way in which black women are not victims . . . [but] powerful and independent subjects."[17] Evelynn Hammonds agrees: "The restrictive, repressive and dangerous aspects of Black female sexuality have been emphasized by Black feminist writers while pleasure, exploration, and agency have gone underanalyzed."[18] This book accounts for the exploitative, repressive, and even violent aspects of black women's representation in pornography as delineated by black feminist critics and the black women informants themselves. Surely, black women's erotic autonomy is powerfully constrained and assaulted by industries like pornography, and a priori by broader frames of American social life such as racial capitalism, state repression, torture and incarceration, heterosexist and homophobic cultural nationalism, and political disenfranchisement. What remains under-theorized, however, is how black women catalyze sexual freedom in their everyday lives and in their imaginations.

Characterizing porn only as bad representation dismisses an arena in which black women and men are actually working hard to create their own images, express their own desires, and shape their own labor choices and conditions. There do exist black feminists who are also pornographers, who challenge the representational, physical, and psychic violence done to black women's bodies in pornography from within. This book is about them. Black feminist labors in the porn industry do not simply challenge individual instances of representation; they radically redefine the field of pornography and expand what it can be. Pornography is always wrapped up with questions of commodification and exploitation, and it is these very issues that this book takes up, as it asserts the absolute necessity of conceptualizing porn as a powerful and important site for black women's own imagination, and yes, feminist intervention. Although I am not working in the adult industry, I do

not entirely reject the label of academic pornographer, as I write this book in solidarity with the black feminist pornographers who have inspired and supported my research.

When I began this project, I believed that issues of representation and issues of labor were separate. However, I have come to see that these issues are profoundly interrelated. As I viewed thousands of sexualized images of black women's bodies, I began to ask how the women in the images experienced these images' production, and how they thought about their own work as image-makers. This book is my attempt to begin a conversation about the vital ways that pornography shapes black women's lives, and how black women also shape the life of pornography.

Acknowledgments

I still remember the exhilaration I felt when I saw my first pornographic image. It was Vanessa Williams's famous layout in the issue of *Penthouse* magazine published in November 1984 when I was eight years old. My friend and I had taken the magazine from her stepfather's secret hiding place in the back corner of a closet when her mother was at work one day. Seeing Williams in an array of erotic poses with another woman was both shocking and titillating. She was the first African American woman to be crowned Miss America, so when the news broke it was a big deal. My friend and I had overheard our parents talking about the scandal and wanted to see what all the fuss was about. The images were absolutely thrilling to me. Williams was so beautiful and, though I did not yet understand fully what the term meant, sexy. I instantly became captivated with everything about sex, and I wanted to see more nude pictures, even though I knew that it was not allowed!

This book emerges from my longtime fascination with porn and the women in the images. In my over ten years of research into the history of black women in pornography, I have been humbled by the generosity and sisterly affection that my informants have shown me and greatly moved by their powerful courage, wisdom, and grace. This book would not have been possible without these incredible women, many of whom I proudly call friends. I am so grateful for the generosity of Jeannie Pepper, Angel Kelly, Sinnamon Love, Vanessa Blue, Diana DeVoe, Lola Lane, Marie Luv, Sasha Brabuster, Sierra, Carmen Hayes, India, Midori, Mya Lovely, Lollipop, Candice Nicole, Lacey Duvalle, Spantaneeus Xtasty, Damali X Dares, Lexi, Kitten, Obsession, Ayana Angel, Angel Eyes, Aryana Starr, Capri, Loni, Adora, Precious Tia, Phyllis Carr, Tony Sweet, Stacey Cash, Black Cat, Crystal, Sandi Beach, Honney Bunny, Lady Cash, Monica Foster, Serria Tawan, Dee, Dior Milian, Jade

Stone, Skyy Black, Ms. Panther, Misti Love, Pinky, Betty Blac, and Vanessa Del Rio. I try not to speak for these performers but instead to collaborate with them in theorizing the complexities of black women's sexualities in pornography. I appreciate their extraordinary thoughtfulness and candor. I learned so much.

A major element of my work has been to unearth the lost archive of black pornography dating back to early erotic photography and film. I wish to thank the archivists and collectors who have helped me to discover a trove of photographs, postcards, film reels, videos, and magazines. I am especially grateful to Catherine Ann Johnson-Roehr, Curator of Art, Artifacts, and Photographs, and Shawn Wilson, Library and Archives Public Services Manager at the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction. This book would not have been possible without their guidance and generosity.

I would like to acknowledge Alexandre Dupony of Editions Astarte and Archives d'Eros in Paris, France, who gave me access to his enormous collection of pornographic images of women of African descent, some of which are reprinted in this book. Albert Steg kindly welcomed me into his home for a private screening of his wonderful collection of stag film reels, many of which he painstakingly restores to their original condition. I thank him for his lovely hospitality and for providing stills of the films. David Copeland of Global Media International Films also generously shared his Historic Erotica archive with me, and I look forward to bugging him more about viewing his nine-thousand-reel collection. Finally, many private collectors and fans online were instrumental in this research. I would especially like to thank "VideoSan" and "Gregg" for providing rare copies of videos to me, and the online communities at Vintage Erotica Forums, Adult DVD Talk, and the Rec. Arts.Movies.Erotica forum for sharing their expertise, contacts, and collections with me.

I would also like to express my appreciation for the many other performers, producers, directors, journalists, photographers, agents, historians, activists, and adult-industry experts who offered the materials, information, and access that have been essential to my research: Tyler Knight, Mr. Marcus, Byron Long, Lexington Steele, Sean Michaels, Justin Long, Julian St. Jox, Ron Hightower, Shorty Mac, Orpheus Black, Nevin Washington, Laurence Christian, Lil Jon, Shock G, Money B, Fly Eli, Johnnie Keyes, Nina Hartley, Porsche Lynn, Sharon Mitchell, John Leslie, Jim South, Mark Kearnes, Jane Hamilton, Dian Hanson, Gino Colbert, Sarah Harter, Cindy Cheer, Scott Ross, Mike Ramone, Paul Fishbein, John Stagliano, Ron Jeremy, Randy West, Diane Duke, Mark Davis, Michael Fattorosi, and Ashley West. A very special

thank you goes to filmmakers Shine Louise Houston, Nenna Feelmore Joiner, Abiola Abrams, Cheryl Dunye, Candida Royalle, Roy Karch, Kiki Rockstar, and Tristan Taormino. In addition to being big supporters of this project, John Dragon, Bill Margold, Suze Randall, and Christian Mann very generously provided images.

Ken Wissoker, my editor at Duke University Press, has been an advocate for my work since I was just beginning to conceptualize the manuscript. He understood immediately the value of the story I wanted to tell and championed it. I thank him for his invaluable guidance and patience during this process, and for allowing me to express my vision. Elizabeth Ault, my associate editor, has been a dream to work with. I am grateful for her care for the book and for me.

I have received numerous fellowships and grants that made my research possible, particularly from the University of California system and my own campus of UC Santa Barbara, including the University of California President's Postdoctoral Fellowship; the UC Regents' Junior Faculty Fellowship; the UC Regents' Humanities Faculty Fellowship; the UCSB Academic Senate Faculty Research Award; the Social Science Research Grant from the Institute for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Research; the UC Faculty Career Development Award; and the Faculty Release Time Award from the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center. In addition, support for the publication of this book was provided by the UCSB Office of Equal Opportunity and Sexual Harassment/Title IX Compliance as well as the Associate Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, and Academic Policy.

In 2007–8 I held a visiting appointment in the Department of Women's Studies at the Ohio State University. I valued the chance to share my work with such an energetic community of scholars who so generously supported it. In 2003–4 I became a Dissertation Fellow in the Department of Black Studies at UC Santa Barbara. It was a great honor to be invited to UCSB by the esteemed Dr. Cedric Robinson, and I decided not to leave. The next year, when I won the UC President's Postdoctoral Fellowship, I was mentored by Dr. Anna Everett in the Center for Black Studies Research at UCSB. In 2005 I was hired into the Department of Feminist Studies, which has been an ideal space to do the work that I do. I also had the privilege to attend the Summer Institute on Sexuality, Culture, and Society at the University of Amsterdam in 2001, organized by Carol Vance and Han Ten Brummelhuis. The feedback that I received at the Summer Institute has been crucial for my thinking in this project as it evolved from dissertation to book.

I am grateful that I had the opportunities I have had to develop parts of

this book in publications and conference presentations. I thank the Institute of Network Cultures and Geert Lovink for putting on a fun conference called Netporn, and for sponsoring the *C'Lick Me* volume that brought together work by a remarkable collection of scholars, artists, and porn activists and was edited by Katrien Jacobs, Matteo Pasquinelli, and Marjie Janssen. I was pleased to be included in Susanna Paasonen, Kaarina Nikunen, and Laura Saarenmaa's book *Pornification*, and parts of that essay were revised for this book. I appreciated being a part of Michelle Wright's collection, *Blackness and Sexuality*, in which I first published my ideas about video porn of the 1980s.

I first developed my thinking about the interface between hip-hop and porn in an article for a special issue of *Meridians* edited by Janell Hobson and Diane Bartlow. In this cutting-edge collection of scholarship, I had the chance to present theories that I now expand on here. My article in the special issue of *Sexualities* on Intimate Labors, edited by Eileen Boris, Rhacel Parreñas, and Stephanie Gilmore, served as the foundation for my chapter on performers' motivations for pursuing porn work. I also am indebted to the Feminist Press at CUNY for publishing my coedited volume *The Feminist Porn Book*, in which I experimented with arguments about black women's self-authorship that I explore in this book.

I have had the opportunity to present my work at numerous universities where I greatly benefited from helpful feedback: the Center for the Study of Women and Society at the University of Oregon; the Department of Women and Gender Studies at University of Illinois, Chicago; the Department of Women's Studies at UC Riverside; the Center for the Study of Women at UC Los Angeles; the Department of Community Studies at UC Santa Cruz; the Department of Communication at UC San Diego; the Africana Research Center at Pennsylvania State University; the Department of Women and Gender Studies and the Beatrice Bain Research Group at UC Berkeley; and the Humanities Institute at SUNY Buffalo to which Tim Dean invited me to be a keynote for the conference "At the Limit: Pornography and the Humanities."

That I earned a doctorate in history at New York University with a controversial project like this one is all thanks to my stellar doctoral committee members, who saw the importance of the work even before I did. Robin D. G. Kelley brought me to NYU to work with him, and to study in the most dynamic and innovative community of scholars possible. I thank him for nurturing my intellect and imagination. Lisa Duggan was the first person to tell me that I could write a dissertation on porn, challenging me to bravely become the academic that I wanted to be. Her caring advice and rigorous reading of drafts along the way helped me grow as a scholar. Walter Johnson and

Barbara Krauthamer are scholars of slavery whose work I admire, and I thank them for being attentive and generous committee members. Finally, I owe my discovery of this topic to Simone Weil Davis who taught a brilliant course on pornography that changed my life. From the paper I did for her seminar on black women in porn, and through the dissertation and the book, Simone has inspired and sustained my intellectual development.

New York University was an amazing place to be a graduate student in the late 1990s and early 2000s. I appreciated learning from the professors there, especially Sinclair Thomson, Jeffrey Sammons, Thomas Bender, Michael Gomez, Martha Hodes, Kamau Braithwaite, Tricia Rose, Richard Hull, and Ed Guerrero. A huge hug and thank-you to my closest comrades Suzanna Reiss, Jamie Wilson, and Eric McDuffie. Thanks to my fantastic classmates from whom I learned so much: Christina Hanhardt, Richard Kim, Carlos Decena, Adria Imada, Julie Sze, Dayo Gore, Betsy Esch, Kim Gilmore, Aisha Finch, Sherie Randolph, Tanya Huelett, Orlando Plaza, Peter Hudson, Njorage Njorage, Sujani Reddy, Daniel Widener, Alyosha Goldstein, Rachel Scharfman, Seth Markle, Hillina Seife, Maxine Roach, and Greg Johnson. I miss all of the dissertation study groups, beers on Bleecker Street, beef-patty breaks, and parties on someone's rooftop in Brooklyn.

I would not have had all these wonderful opportunities without mentors at each and every step of my life. In middle school, thanks to the mentoring of Vivien Alemani and Reginald Jones, I earned a place in the Albert G. Oliver Program. The program helps talented inner city kids like me apply to private schools in New York City and the Northeast. The head of the Olivers, John Hoffman, was a magnificent man who urged me to attend his alma mater, the George School in Newtown, Pennsylvania. George School was a magical place that allowed me to thrive. Headmaster David Bourns was my Gandalf, and John Davison, my history teacher, made me fall in love with the subject. At Emory University I studied history under the guidance of mentors Judith Miller, Leslie Harris, Leroy Davis, and Ron Brown. Their encouragement inspired me to apply to graduate school.

I have always enjoyed building community. I had the chance to do so with some dear friends whose scholarship I deeply admire in the emerging field of black sexualities studies. I am indebted to Adrienne D. Davis, the William Van Cleve Professor of Law at Washington University, for not only becoming a trusted mentor, but for pulling together resources to create the Black Sexual Economies Project. With generous funding from Vice Provost Marion Crain and the Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Work and Social Capital at WU Law School, and staff support from Gail Boker and Shelly Hender-

son, Adrienne and I chose some of the best up-and-coming scholars in the field: Marlon M. Bailey, LaMonda Horton Stallings, Xavier Livermon, Matt Richardson, Jeffrey McCune, and Felice Blake. Our three-year collaboration culminated in an exciting conference, "Black Sexual Economies: Transforming Black Sexualities Research," in fall 2013. I am grateful to my BSE Project Research Scholars and our conference attendees for being my community and sustaining me.

I thank all my colleagues in the Department of Feminist Studies for their support over the years, but I especially wish to acknowledge Eileen Boris and Leila Rupp. They have championed me, pushed me, and cared for me. It was a great pleasure to celebrate tenure with them and I look forward to the book party. I also thank our department staff, Lou Anne Lockwood, Christina Toy, Rosa Pinter, Blanca Nuila, and April Bible. Many campus administrators helped me with this project, but special credit goes to Barbara Walker, Emily Zinn, and Sherri Barnes. Melvin Oliver, the Sage Miller McCune Chair of Social Sciences, has been exceptionally generous and supportive. Finally, Chancellor Henry Yang allows me to call him Henry and hugs me when he sees me. He even bailed me out of jail once. Enough said. Thank you, Henry!

The University of California, Santa Barbara, is a special place to work because we have the best community of scholars anywhere. I am especially thankful for my colleagues Constance Penley, Paul Amar, Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Lisa Hajjar, Lisa Parks, Jennifer Holt, Bishnupriya Ghosh, Bhaskar Sarkar, Stephan Miescher, Julie Carlson, France Winddance Twine, Cristina Venegas, Paul Spickard, Amit Ahuja, Claudine Michel, Cedric Robinson, Stephanie Batiste, Gaye Theresa Johnson, Ingrid Banks, Chris McAuley, Jeffrey Stewart, Anna Evertt, Cynthia Hudley, Nikki Jones, Roberto Strongman, Mary Bucholtz, Dolores Ines Casillas, Tania Israel, Elizabeth Weber, Kum Kum Bhavani, Chris Newfield, Avery Gordon, Howard Winant, Verta Taylor, Nelson Lichtenstein, Alice O'Connor, Horacio Roque Ramirez, Victor Rios, Carl Gutierrez Jones, Diane Fujino, Catherine Nesci, Christina McMahon, Beth Schneider, Dick Hebdige, Nadege Clintandre, and the late Clyde Woods.

I am fortunate to work in the University of California system, where I have an outstanding network of colleagues and friends across the ten campuses. I wish to recognize my colleagues and thank them for their warm support all these years: Deborah Vargas, Erica Edwards, Leigh Raiford, Darieck Scott, Juana Maria Rodriquez, Jane Ward, Maylei Blackwell, Grace Hong, Sarah Haley, Tammy Ho, Tracey Fisher, Setsu Shigematsu, Sara Clark Kaplan, Kristie Dorr, Rhoshanak Kheshti, Kalindi Vora, Jillian Hernandez, Gina Dent,

Felicity Amaya Schaeffer, Herman Gray, Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, Mark Sawyer, James Lee, Sora Han, David Theo Goldberg, Lisa Cartwright, and the late Lindon Barrett. I had the chance to meet many of these stellar scholars through the UC President's Postdoctoral annual retreats, and I thank Sheila O'Rourke and Kimberly Adkinson for their stunning success in keeping this important program going and maintaining it as a space for former fellows to stay connected with their peers.

I have received further support from colleagues across the nation who have invited me to speak at their institutions or collaborate on projects, offered useful advice on professional challenges, asked about my health and well-being, and told me to hurry up and get the book out. Particular thanks must go to Rinaldo Walcott, E. Patrick Johnson, Cathy Cohen, Jennifer DeVere Brody, Dwight A. McBride, Jennifer Morgan, Carol Stabile, Piya Chatterjee, Erica Rand, Jennifer Brier, John D'Emilio, Nan Alamilla Boyd, Nayan Shah, Fred Moten, Rebecca Wanzo, Erica Williams, Janell Hobson, Elizabeth Currans, Jane Haladay, Lynn Fujiwara, Tamara Lea Spira, Wendy Smooth, Francille Wilson, Shana Redmond, Zakiyya Jackson, Imani Kai Johnson, Kai Green, Philomena Essed, Nicole Fleetwood, Zakiya Adair, Jafari Sinclaire Allen, Christopher Parker, Johari Jabir, Fanon Wilkins, Derrick White, Kirby Gookin, Karl Bryant, Vicki Callahan, Brandi Summers, Kimberly Springer, Michelle McKinley, Tanisha Ford, Deborah Willis, Carla Williams, and the late Jose Esteban Muñoz.

When I began this project on the story of black women in porn I felt like I was out there alone. Therefore I was so pleased to discover a community of scholars doing work on pornography and sex work. Many of them have become my friends, collaborators, and advisers. I wish to acknowledge Ariane Cruz, Jennifer Nash, Lynn Comella, Kevin Heffernan, Chuck Kleinhans, Mindy Chateauvert, Svati Shah, Stephanie Gilmore, Becki Ross, Susan Dewey, Kerwin Kaye, Ronald Weitzer, Carolyn Bronstein, Nguyen Tan Hoang, Clarissa Smith, Feona Attwood, Tim Dean, Zeb Tortorici, Katrien Jacobs, David Squires, Andy Owens, Jennifer Moorman, Jill Bakehorn, Julie Levin Russo, Naima Lowe, Chauntelle Tibbals, Shira Tarrant, and Siobhan Brooks.

One of the most rewarding things about becoming an expert on pornography is learning about all of the artists and activists who have been doing the radical work of creating sexual culture. This community has welcomed me with open arms and I am extremely indebted to them for their care, insight, and creative inspiration. Thanks to Carol Leigh (aka Scarlot Harlot), Audacia Ray, Melissa Hope Ditmore, Rachel West, Robin Byrd, Yosenio Lewis,

Juba Kalamaka, Dee Dennis, Annie Sprinkle, N'Jaila Rhee, Charlie Glickman, William Winters, Jaclyn Friedman, Carol Queen, Reid Mihalko, Jiz Lee, Dylan Ryan, Kelly Shibari, Madison Young, Courtney Trouble, Danny Wylde, Rae Threat, Buck Angel, April Flores, and the late Carlos Batts. I loved my collaboration on *The Feminist Porn Book* because of the way it brought together many of these feminist artists and activists with feminist scholars, allowing us to have an important and unprecedented conversation. It has been such a pleasure to publicly present the work with the contributors to the volume and my coeditors Constance Penley, Celine Parreñas Shimizu, and Tristan Taormino, at the first annual Feminist Porn Conference at the University of Toronto and elsewhere.

I have revised this book many times. I had an enormous amount of material and so much to say. For these reasons I am more grateful than I can express for my colleagues who read various drafts and provided comments, corrections, and fresh ideas. I want to express my eternal gratitude to Constance Penley, the Editing Dominatrix, for her strict reading of the manuscript. But it was the nice Connie who brought me delicious food in care packages when I was on lockdown with the manuscript. The Black Sexual Cultures Working Group—Matt Richardson, Xavier Livermon, and Marlon M. Bailey—met at the "Columbus Estates" every month for several years to workshop chapters amid much hilarity and good food. Thanks as well to Nicole Starosielski, LaMonda Horton Stallings, Felice Blake, Rebecca Wanzo, Heather Tirado-Gilligan, and Heather Berg for their attentive readings of various parts of the book.

Invaluable copyediting assistance was provided by Diana Pozo, who solved some lingering issues like the brilliant editing wiz she is. I also wish to thank Anitra Grisales for her professional editing assistance. In addition, my research assistants were indispensable to the process. My gratitude goes to Diana Pozo, Amanda Phillips, Jade Petermon, Regina Longo, Nicole Starosielski, Sarah Whedon, Brandon Pineda, Vanessa Ramos, Toby Blakeney, Janai Harris, Samantha Kramer, and Amara Allenstein.

At UCSB I get to teach classes on pornography and sex work, which is fun but also a fantastic education for me. I want to thank my graduate students for their sharp thinking and enlivening discussions, which have helped advance my thinking about the scholarship: Heather Berg, Carly Thomsen, Rolondo Longoria, Lauren Clark, Kristie Soares, Pawan Rehill, Rosie Kar, Brett Esaki, Stacie Furia, Hareem Khan, Lillian Jungleib, Michelle Baca, Andrew Seeber, Kenley Brown, Randy Drake, Emily Crutcher, and Laurica Brown. I learned from several stellar undergraduate students as well, including Jessica

Hammond, Amieris Lavender, Elizabeth Canico, Sophia Armen, Tuquan Harrison, Scarlet Chan, Jessica Moore, Mor Weizman, Doug Wagoner, and Nathaniel Burke.

For over ten years I have been living between Santa Barbara and Columbus, Ohio, where my partner lives. It has not always been easy but it means that I have double the friends and support network. My Ohio family gets a big shout out: Perry Mickley, Darla Hollingsworth, Jo Anne Mickely, Tom Weiland, Damon Whitfield, and Brian and Christa Neill. My Santa Barbara family gets tons of love too: Anita David, Fred Backman, Tiye Baldwin, Morris Anderson, Mahsheed Ayoub, Lane Clark, Mike Long, Luca and Rori Trovato, Jenny Scholl, Donald and Peggy Canley, Ana Lozoya, Alyce Harris, Sharon Hoshida, Master Mel at MAFF, John Cervantes, and Terrie Furukawa.

My friends have supported me through the long process of getting this book out and now I am so thrilled to share its publication with them. My fierce love and thanks go to them and their families: Margaret Warren and my beautiful goddaughters Maya and Savanna, Nadia Wynter, Leon and Barella Kirkland and baby Grant, Erin Zimring and Dan Pipski and their sweet Felix and Juniper, Terri Paine-Cameron, Mirjam and Ethu Ukpabi, and Sophia Mann and Andrea Fiasco and their Iole and Niccolo.

My life is made rich by my family: Melody, Judy, Laurie, Rebekah, Jackie, Gitta, Jürgen, and many others. Thanks to my family angels watching over me and blessing me, especially Lannie, Wiley, Coley, and Bea. My love and appreciation to Rob "The Nose" Smith, who brought me to school every day and year, and took such good care of us. I am happy that I got to finally connect with my father, David Young, during the process of writing this book, and that he has been so open-minded and loving. But the lion's share of my appreciation goes to my mother, Beatrice Miller. She gave me the tools to dream and then go make my dreams a reality. She raised me to have a passion for learning and excellence, and to adore black culture and history. She is beautiful, brilliant, and the fiercest woman I have ever met. I hope this work makes her proud and that she enjoys reading it. Finally, I might not have continued on this path and now be realizing the wonderful feeling of accomplishment I have in this project were it not for the love of my life, my Samwise, Dorian. You are everything Dori. I celebrate this with you.

Introduction Brown Sugar

Theorizing Black Women's Sexual Labor in Pornography

You are not supposed to talk about liking sex because you are already assumed to be a whore.—JEANNIE PEPPER

In a private gathering following the East Coast Video Show in Atlantic City in 2002, legendary performer Jeannie Pepper received a special achievement award for twenty years in the porn industry, the longest career for any black adult actress. "It's been a long, hard road," she said to the audience of adult entertainment performers, insiders, and fans as she accepted the award from popular adult film actor Ron Jeremy. "There weren't many black women in the business when I started."[1] In 1982, when Jeannie Pepper began her career as an actress in X-rated films, there were few black women in the adult film industry. Performing in more than two hundred films over three decades, Jeannie broke barriers to achieve porn star status and opened doors for other women of color to follow.[2] She played iconic roles as the naughty maid, the erotically possessed "voodoo girl," and the incestuous sister in films like *Guess Who Came at Dinner?*, *Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks*, and *Black Taboo*. She traveled abroad as a celebrity, working and living in Germany for seven years.

In a career that spanned the rise of video, DVD, and the Internet, Jeannie watched the pornography business transform from a quasi-licit cottage industry into a sophisticated, transnational, and corporate-dominated industry. In 1997 Jeannie was the first African American porn actress to be inducted into the honored Adult Video News (AVN) Hall of Fame. By all accounts, Jeannie had an exceptionally long and successful career for an adult actress: she was well liked by her colleagues, and was a mentor to young women new to the porn business. Yet, as her acceptance speech reveals, her experience of being a black woman in the porn industry was shaped by formidable challenges. As in other occupations in the United States, black women in the adult

FIGURE 1.1. Jeannie Pepper during her tour of Europe, Cannes, France, 1986. Courtesy of JohnDragon.com.

FIGURE 1.2. Jeannie Pepper poses in the nude before onlookers outside of the Carlton Hotel, Cannes, France, 1986. Courtesy of JohnDragon.com.

film industry are devalued workers who confront systemic marginalization and discrimination.

Jeannie became a nude model and adult film actress in her twenties because she enjoyed watching pornography and having sex, and she was keen to become a path-maker in an industry with few black female stars: "I just wanted to show the world. Look, I'm black and I'm beautiful. How come there are not more black women doing this?"[3] She felt especially beautiful when in 1986 she did a photo shoot with her photographer husband, a German expatriate known as John Dragon, on the streets of Paris. Dressed only in a white fur coat and heels, Jeannie walked around, posing in front of the Eiffel Tower, Arc de Triomphe, cafés, luxury cars, and shops. Coyly allowing her coat to drape open (or off altogether) at opportune moments, she drew the attention of tourists and residents alike. She imagined herself as Josephine Baker, admired in a strange new city for her beauty, class, and grace. Finding esteem and fearlessness in showing the world her blackness and beauty, even in the cityscapes of Paris, Hamburg, or Rome, Jeannie felt she embodied an emancipated black female sexuality.

Still, she remained conscious of the dual pressures of needing to fight for recognition and opportunity in the adult business, especially in the United States, and having to defend her choice to pursue sex work as a black woman.[4]

As Jeannie asserts in the epigraph, she perceived that part of the difficulty of being a professional "whore"—in photographs and films—was the expectation that she was not supposed to talk about or inhabit her sexuality in ways that would seem to exacerbate harmful stereotypes about black women, namely their alleged hypersexuality. Black women sexual performers and workers have had to confront a prevailing stigma: if all black women are considered to be sexually deviant, then those who use sex to make a living are the greatest threat to any form of respectable black womanhood.

"Brown sugar," this popular imaginary of African American women, saturates popular culture. In songs, films, music videos, and everyday life, the discourse of brown sugar references the supposed essence of black female sexuality. It exposes historical mythologies about the desirable yet deviant sexual nature of black women. Publicly scorned and privately enjoyed, the alluring, transformative, and supposedly perverse sexuality of black women is thoroughly cemented in the popular imaginary. Seen as particularly sexual, black women continue to be fetishized as the very embodiment of excessive or nonnormative sexuality. What is most problematic about this sticky fetishism—in addition to the fact that it spreads hurtful and potentially dangerous stereotypes with very real material effects—is that the desire for black women's sexuality, while so prevalent, is unacknowledged and seen as illegitimate in most popular discourse.

As a metaphor, brown sugar exposes how black women's sexuality, or more precisely their sexual labor, has been historically embedded in culture and the global economy. Now a key component of the profitable industries of entertainment and sex in the United States, brown sugar played a central role in the emergence of Western nation-states and the capitalist economies. Across the American South and the Caribbean, black slaves cultivated and manufactured sugar that sweetened food, changed tastes, and energized factory workers in the Industrial Revolution.[5] In addition to physical labor, their sexual labor was used to "give birth to white wealth,"[6] and was thus the key mechanism for reproducing the entire plantation complex. "Sugar was a murderous commodity," explains Vincent Brown, "a catastrophe for workers that grew it."[7] The grinding violence and danger that attended sugar's cultivation in colonial plantations literally consumed black women's labor and bodies.[8]

Brown sugar, as a trope, illuminates circuits of domination over black women's bodies and exposes black women's often ignored contributions to the economy, politics, and social life. Like sugar that has dissolved without a trace, but has nonetheless sweetened a cup of tea, black women's labor and the mechanisms that manage and produce it are invisible but nonetheless *there*.

To take the metaphor a bit further, the process of refining cane sugar from its natural brown state into the more popular white, everyday sweetener reflects how black women, like brown sugar, represent a raw body in need of refinement and prone to manipulation. The lewdness and raw quality associated with brown sugar in popular discourse today thus shows how ideas about black women as naturally savage, super-sexual beings have flavored popular tastes even as they have driven a global appetite for (their) sweetness. While processed white sugar is held up as the ideal, there remains a powerful desire, indeed a taste, for the *real thing*.

The metaphor of brown sugar exposes how representations shape the world in which black women come to know themselves. But stereotypes usually have dual valences: they may also be taken up by the oppressed and refashioned to mean something quite different. Although brown sugar has been used as a phrase to talk about black women as lecherous, prurient sex objects, unlike other tropes such as the Mammy, Jezebel, or Sapphire, it conveys sweetness, affection, and respect. In African American vernacular speech and song, brown sugar often expresses adoration, loveliness, and intimacy even as it articulates lust, sensuality, and sex (along with other illicit, pleasure-giving materials like heroin or marijuana).[9] As in the saying, "the blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice," brown sugar is sometimes used by black people to speak to the complex pleasures they derive from their own eroticism. In this book brown sugar references a trope that black women must always broker. Sometimes they refashion this trope to fit their needs. As Jeannie Pepper shows, some black women choose to *perform* brown sugar—the perverse, pleasurable imago projected onto black women's bodies—in an effort to express themselves as desired and desiring subjects. Given the brutal history of sexual expropriation and objectification of black bodies, these attempts by black women to reappropriate a sexualized image can be seen as a bid to reshape the terms assigned to black womanhood. In this case, brown sugar might be a realm for intervention in their sexualization.

Some black women might view Jeannie Pepper, the porn star, as a menace to the hard-fought image of respectable womanhood they have sought to create for more than one hundred years.[10] Nevertheless, even though black sex workers know that their labor is seen to constitute a betrayal of respectable black womanhood, some pursue it. Their reasons may be purely economic: it's a job, and they must survive and take care of their families, after all. Or, in Jeannie Pepper's case, their motivations could be to take pleasure in "show-[ing] the world" a beautiful and sexually self-possessed black woman. While such a move to represent oneself may be viewed, especially by many in the

African American community, as perpetuating historical and ongoing stereotypes born out of horrible abuse, it is a powerful statement about how some black women redefine what respectable womanhood means for them. For Jeannie, more important than respectability, is respect.[11] Respect means being acknowledged and valued for her performative sexual labor and treated as a star. Jeannie Pepper's story illustrates how the perception of black women as hypersexual, which has persisted since the slave trade, has made it extremely difficult to acknowledge that some black women have an interest in leveraging hypersexuality. But it is possible to leverage this treacherous discourse and the black women who speak to us in *A Taste for Brown Sugar* explain how. They use the seductive power of brown sugar to intervene in representation, to assert their varied sexual subjectivities, and to make a living. In the process of making tough choices about how and when to commodify their sexualities, these women offer more complex readings of black gender and sexual identity than now prevail in the academy and popular culture. Porn is an important terrain in which this alternative sexual politics can emerge.

Pornography as Culture and Industry

Pornography is a highly controversial category, not just for its content but because it sparks heated debates about its role in society. Most often pornography is defined as a genre of mass-produced written or visual materials designed to arouse or titillate the reader or viewer. A facet of entertainment culture and a domain of the commercial sex industry since its modern circulation in literature, photography, and film in the nineteenth century, pornography has been powerfully regulated as the explicit, obscene edge of acceptable forms of sexuality. It is also more than a kind of object or media; pornography is an idiom that communicates potent, blunt, and transgressive sexuality operating at the boundaries of licit and illicit, sacred and profane, private and public, and underground and mainstream culture. Hence, as Walter Kendrick argues, "'pornography' names an argument, not a thing."[12] Pornography becomes a map of a culture's borders, a "detailed blueprint of the culture's anxieties, investments, contradictions,"[13] and a site of cultural contest about social access and social prohibition.[14] Focusing on pornography since the rise of the modern adult film industry in the 1970s, *A Taste for Brown Sugar* analyzes the operation of black women's sexuality—its conditions of production, modes of representation, and strategic performances—in both the industry and idiom of pornography. This book traces the work of

the black female body in pornography as a material object, but it also delves into pornography's function as a cultural discourse about racialized sexuality.

Does pornography really make much of an impact on how we view sex, race, and gender? One argument about porn's relevance is that it is big business with big cultural effects. Many critics have cited the broad impact of pornography on American life since its legalization during the sexual revolution of the 1960s and '70s.[15] With revenues of nearly $8–$10 billion a year, the adult entertainment industry is one of the largest entertainment industries in the United States.[16] Pornographic films, videos, and websites are one part of this larger industry that includes exotic dance clubs, phone sex, magazines, peep booths, and sex toys. While Hollywood makes nearly four hundred films each year, the adult industry makes more than ten thousand.[17]

This book focuses on photographic film and digital media from the turn of the twentieth century to the early twenty-first, a period during which pornography became a "phenomenon of media culture and a question of mass production."[18] Indeed, mechanisms of mass production and consumption have become central to the growing convergence of sexual aesthetics and media industries, and their prominent role in defining private fantasies and public spaces. In recent years we have seen this convergence happening within popular culture, from "porno chic" fashion, to reality TV shows such as *The Girls Next Door*, to mainstream films like *Zack and Miri Make a Porno* and *Boogie Nights*, to adult actress and entrepreneur Jenna Jameson being interviewed on *Oprah*. Porn as an entrance into everyday consumer life can be seen as producing what many critics have termed the "pornification" or "pornetration" of culture.[19] Previously illicit subcultures, communities, and sexual practices have been brought into the public eye through pornography, and in the process they have made their way into other modes of culture, including fashion, art, mainstream film, music, and television. Celebrity sex tapes, political sex scandals, and popular sex panics around issues like youth "sexting" have popularized the idea of public sex as a symptom of a pornographic mainstream media; they ignite worry that what is being projected and amplified is the worst of American sexual experience in terms of taste, values, and politics. Indeed, based on documentaries such as Chyng Sun's *The Price of Pleasure*, one would imagine that the biggest threat to society is not war, torture, poverty, or environmental degradation, but the proliferation of pornography and its representation of "bad sex."[20] Rather than an act of romance, intimacy, or love, bad sex is seen as the product of the narcissistic, self-interested character of our culture. This unfeeling, vulgar kind of sex rubs up against expec-

tations of personal morality and rational social values rooted in traditional, bourgeois views of sex for the reproduction of proper families and citizens. Thus, fears of bad sex expose powerful anxieties about how changing meanings and practices around sex might lead to a downward spiral, a debasing of social life and the nation.[21] More than a debate about how sex is represented in our culture, porn is a site of moral panic about sex itself.

As an act of speech that speaks the unspeakable, pornography has been defined by what the state has tried to suppress.[22] In the process of pushing against censorship and obscenity regulation, porn presses and redefines the limits of the culture of sex. Media technologies have played a leading role in making porn increasingly accessible and part of the public domain. With so many genres and subgenres of erotic fascination making up pornography's "kaleidoscopic variorum" we might even think of it in a plural sense: as *pornographies*.[23] Yet despite its vast proliferation, increased pluralism, and rich potential for the reimagining of allowable forms of desire, pornography's commodification of sex has produced what Richard Fung notes as a "limited vision of what constitutes the erotic."[24] That porn reproduces predictable, indeed stereotypical, representations of sexuality for an increasingly niche-oriented marketplace is not surprising given its profit motive. This limited erotic vision may also be the result of sexually conservative regulatory systems, such as obscenity laws, which have defined what may or may not be broadcast via media technologies like television or the Internet or sold in stores, whether locally or across state lines.[25] In addition to affecting media policy, the regulation of sexual culture has reinforced severely narrow representations of gender, desire, and sexuality that make it difficult to construct alternative imaginaries, even in supposedly transgressive spaces like pornography.[26] Nevertheless, pornography reliably takes up the challenge of subverting norms, even as it catalyzes and perpetuates them. The fantasies it produces offer fertile spaces to read how eroticism, proliferation, commodification, and regulation get played out at the very heart of our public consciousness.

In many ways porn is a political theater where—in addition to gender, sex, and class—racial distinctions and barriers are reiterated even as they may also be manipulated or transformed.[27] Race, or more properly racialization, the process by which meanings are made and power is structured around racial differences, informs the production side of commercial pornography in at least two important ways: in the titillating images themselves and in the behind-the-scenes dynamics where sex workers are hired to perform in the production of those images.[28] Black women, and other people of color, have historically been included in pornography to the extent that its producers

seek to commoditize, circulate, and enable the consumption of their images. Their bodies represent stereotypes of racial, gender, and sexual difference and the fantasies or deeper meanings behind them.[29] Until recently, when black women and men started to produce and circulate their own pornographies, those fantasies were seldom authored by black people.

Black women's images in hardcore porn show that the titillation of pornography is inseparable from the racial stories it tells. A central narrative is that black women are both desirable and undesirable objects: desirable for their supposed difference, exoticism, and sexual potency, and undesirable because these very same factors threaten or compromise governing notions of feminine sexuality, heterosexual relations, and racial hierarchy. Pornography did not create these racial stories, these fraught imaginings of black being and taboo interactions across racial difference, but it uses them. What interests me is the *work* of racial fantasy, particularly fantasy involving black women. Given our racial past and present, what is the labor of the black female body in pornography? As my informants show, the players of pornography's racial imaginarium are the ones who can best discern the crucial implications of these fantasies for black women's sexual identities and experiences. They reveal how some black porn actresses tactically employ the performative labor of hypersexuality to intervene in their representation, "contest it from within,"[30] and provide a deeper, more complex reading of their erotic lives.

Working On, Within, and Against

Historically, enslaved black women were marked as undesirable objects for white men due to their primitive sexuality. These women, as the myth went, were so supersexual that they virtually forced white men into sex they ostensibly did not want to have.[31] Enslaved black women needed their sexual powers because otherwise these unwitting white men would never desire them. This myth concealed, denied, and suppressed the plain sexual exploitation of enslaved and emancipated African American women by casting the demand for their sexuality, both in images and as labor, as impossible. Chief to the racial fetishism of black women in pornography, then, is a *double focus*: a voyeurism that looks but also does not look, that obsessively enjoys, lingers over, and takes pleasure in the black female body even while it declares that body as strange, Other, and abject.[32]

Black women are of course aware of this regime of racial fetishism in representation (and the social and legal apparatus that sustains it), which licenses the voyeuristic consumption of their bodies as forbidden sex objects.

As Jeannie Pepper noted, black women are always "already assumed to be" whores. She, then, uses this insistent myth in her own work. That is, Jeannie Pepper employs her own illicit desirability in a kind of sexual repertoire. By precisely staging her sexuality so as to acknowledge and evoke the taboo desire for it, she shows that racial fetishism can actually be taken up by its objects and used differently. Standing nude on the beach in the South of France as throngs of tourists look on, Jeannie takes pleasure in presenting herself as irresistibly captivating and attractive in the face of the denial of those very capacities. In this way, Jeannie Pepper exposes the disgust for black female sexuality as a facade for what is really forbidden desire. It is a myth that can be reworked and redeployed for one's own purposes.

Jeannie Pepper shows us how black women—particularly sex workers—mobilize what I term "illicit eroticism" to advance themselves in adult entertainment's sexual economy.[33] Actively confronting the taboo nature and fraught history of black female sexuality, black sex workers choose to pursue a prohibited terrain of labor and performance. Illicit eroticism provides a framework to understand the ways in which black women put hypersexuality to use. They do so in an industry that is highly stratified with numerous structures of desire and "tiers of desirability."[34] Black women's illicit erotic work manipulates and re-presents racialized sexuality—including hypersexuality—in order to assert the value of their erotic capital.[35]

In an industry where they are marginal to the most lucrative productions, and where the quality of productions are largely based on demand, black women, along with Latinas and Asian women, face a lack of opportunities, pay disparities, and racially biased treatment in comparison to white women.[36] Black women are devalued in terms of their erotic worth, and they are critical of how they are made lesser players in pornography's theater of fantasy. These women seek to mobilize their bodies to position themselves to the greatest advantage. This mobilization requires a complex knowledge of what it means to "play the game" and to "play up" race by moving and performing strategically. However, because not everyone is able to increase their status in the established hierarchies of desire, black women employing illicit erotic labor face a complicated dilemma: lacking erotic capital, how can they produce more, and in the process enhance their erotic power, social significance, and economic position?

One strategy for black women in pornography is to work extremely hard to carve out space and fabricate themselves as marketable and desirable actors. Their appearance is important to them; they invest a great deal of time and money on self-fashioning and taking care of their bodies in order to achieve

FIGURE 1.3. Jeannie Pepper standing before the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France, during her European tour in 1986. Courtesy of JohnDragon.com.

competitiveness. Performance is critical; most performers attempt to portray seductive eroticism and sexual skill, which may give them an edge with consumers and added appreciation by other actors and producers. In addition to appearing in adult videos, they actively cultivate themselves as "porn stars," which includes creating a captivating persona and becoming a savvy financial manager and entrepreneur. Selling themselves as brands or commodities means spending a great deal of time on promotion, including at photo shoots, appearances at trade conventions and entertainment-industry events, and on their websites, social networks, and chat rooms, to foster a fan base. All these spaces are spaces of work and contestation where black women must fight for their worth. Even more important, these primarily young, working-class black women do all this while also acting as mothers, aunts, daughters, sisters, and partners called upon to play important caretaking roles in their families. They are women who use their bodies as resources and their determined intellect as tools to make a living, and sometimes make a name too.

Marginalized and exploited in the labor market, many young, working-class black women today identify the sex industries as preferred spaces to make a living for themselves and their families.[37] This is not new. As the history of black sexual labor attests, this choice has been recorded as part of their negotiations of the labor market since slavery and through the Great Depression.[38] Black sex workers make a living when they take sex, which is associated with leisure and play, and turn it into what Robin D. G. Kelley calls "play-labor."[39] In commodifying sexuality, play-labor does not necessarily resist or overturn hegemonic institutions of power like patriarchy and racial capitalism. That is not its purpose. Play-labor is one strategy by which black women (and others) try to negotiate the existing political economy by using their corporeal resources, which are some of the only resources many black working-class women may in fact possess. Given that the other options open to working-class black women appear in service, care work, or other contingent labor industries, the "choice" to pursue sex work is of course constrained within a modern capitalist system where all work is exploited work, and black women's work is super exploited.[40]

Part of a continuum of sex work—including streetwalking, private escorting, erotic dancing, modeling, phone sex, and S/M role play—and part of a history of black women working in underground or gray economies as "mojo women . . . bootleggers, numbers backers and bawdy house operators," black women's work in pornography maneuvers within illicit and licit sexual economies to pursue what Sharon Harley describes as "personal and commu-

nity survival."[41] Their maneuvers are generally prompted by market concerns, like porn's relatively flexible and high-income work, but also by nonmarket motives, such as sexual pleasure and the enjoyment of erotic performance. Garnering fame in the adult entertainment industry is often regarded by performers as a viable aspiration and a stepping-stone to more opportunities in entertainment. For young black women, attaining fame could also reflect a desire to harness the erotic capital possessed by recognized black entertainers and actresses such as Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj, Halle Berry, Pam Grier, and Josephine Baker.

Jeannie Pepper's identification with Josephine Baker indicates that some black women working in porn understand the historical depictions of their bodies as containing dynamic possibilities for reinterpretation and re-creation through performance. These women *work on* representations of black sexuality by using their own bodies and imaginations. These representations—painful, punishing, or pleasurable—are part of what Asian American studies scholar and filmmaker Celine Parreñas Shimizu terms the "bind of representation."[42] As for Asian American women and other women of color in the United States, racialized sexual representation forms black women's "very self-recognition every day and every minute."[43] Because black women are tethered to ontological concepts of sexual deviance, it is vital to acknowledge hypersexuality as a disciplinary instrument that effects pain, trauma, and abuse in their lives, and which, like other problematic representations of race, gender, and sexuality, is extremely hard to escape.[44]

Black women are not just victims of representation, however. Referencing three black Oscar-winning Hollywood actresses—Hattie McDaniel, Whoopi Goldberg, and Halle Berry—feminist literary and media scholar Rebecca Wanzo shows how many black women entertainers recognize the potentially recuperative nature of their performances. "Familiar with stereotypes about black female identity," writes Wanzo, "they have attempted to reconfigure themselves as central agents of a particular project and then see themselves as making themselves objects in relationship to this racist history on their own terms."[45] Like actresses in the racist and sexist Hollywood film industry, some black actresses in the adult industry also recognize their performances as spaces to negotiate the overdetermined and reductive depictions, and try to engage them on their own terms. White American women are not judged in the same way, nor are they accused of representing the "hypersexuality of white womanhood."[46] Yet black women, as individuals, often come to stand for their entire racial group. Not only are black women performers burdened

with representing every other black woman, they are seen to depict only simplistic and denigrating types.[47] Black porn actresses understand that they are seen as archetypical whores and bad women by both the black community and the broader, categorically white, culture.

Crucially, these women often assert themselves within these archetypes. Performers who not only fit the stereotype, but also boldly put it to work in their performances can be read as having more sophisticated understandings and counterresponses in relationship to representation than previously acknowledged. In discussing her role as the "voodoo girl" in *Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks*, Jeannie explained that she chose a role that, though still a stereotypical representation of exotic, supernatural, and hypersexual black womanhood, she saw as an alternative to the then-standard role of the maid: "So I played the part of the voodoo girl. I wanted that part. I was glad to have [it]. I loved the way they dressed me up, with the costume. They made me look very exotic with all the makeup and feathers, and I was running around [acting possessed]. But I didn't want to play the maids. Those other girls were playing maids. . . . But I like my part." By playing the exotically fetishized black woman instead of the recognizable fetish of the servile black maid, Jeannie negotiated what she saw as a demeaning representation.[48] The voodoo girl was not necessarily a positive representation against the maid's negative one, but it allowed space for Jeannie to take pleasure in what she identified as a more complex performance. Dressed as the primitive, magical savage in a tinsel skirt that looks more fitting for a luau than a voodoo ceremony, colorful neon bangles, and 1980s eye-shadow-heavy makeup, Jeannie's voodoo girl uses a magic spell to conjure two white men to satisfy her sexual appetite. Jeannie brings erotic charisma and skill to her enthusiastic performance, stretching it beyond its impish and narrow construction. And, as she attests, her choice to perform a playful, mysterious, and (literally) self-possessed female character was a strategic move. Even though this move did not fully dismantle racist regimes of representation for black women in pornography, Jeannie's tactics for self-representation are important to recognize.

Angel Kelly, a contemporary of Jeannie Pepper in the 1980s, was the first black woman to win an exclusive contract from an adult film production company, Perry Ross's Fantasy Home Video. An A-list actress like Jeannie, Angel desperately wanted to make choices in her career that would show her in what she saw as a positive light: as glamorous, sexy, and beautiful. However, sometimes the nature of the industry meant that she became mired in the stereotypical construction of black women's sexuality. Like Jeannie, Angel was pressured to portray a "voodoo woman":

> There is one video called *Welcome to the Jungle*, where I look like an African, I look like voodoo woman [on the video box cover]. I hate that picture. I hated it. I hated it! And that's why I wouldn't do the movie for it. So there was no movie, but there was a [video box] cover called *Welcome to the Jungle* and what [the producer, Perry Ross] did was he just made it a compilation tape. See, they can screw you that way anyway because when they are shooting pictures they got footage on you, and they can take all your scenes out of one movie and put it with another cover in another movie.

As Angel describes, she importantly chose to stand up to the demands of her producer by refusing to star in the production. Yet she did feel pressure to dress like an "African voodoo woman" for the *Welcome to the Jungle* (1988) photo shoot, because as she told me during our phone interview in 2013, "Sometimes if you wanted to work you had to swallow it. I tried to hold on the best I could." Angel felt bitterly about the experience, noting her lack of power in relationship to the greater power of studios to use and manipulate her images. For Angel, who had on occasion played the shuffling maid to a white family (see *The Call Girl*), negotiating porn work included evaluating the terms of each production and deciding how she might infuse the role with her own desires. Angel expressed to me the pleasures she gained in her work: "I had a chance to play all types of great characters a man could fantasize about. I was surprised that I had as many female fans as I did male fans. I had the opportunity to be a star."

Black women's counterstrategies of representation involve at times attempting to play the stereotype in order to reverse or go beyond it. At other times they offer alternative, more complex images of black sexuality, or they may refuse the roles altogether.[49] In my analyses of black women's participation in pornography, I identify where they tell stereotypical stories in their performances, but also where performers appear to tell stories about themselves that aspire to go beyond stereotypes, the "immediately available" stories told about black women.[50] Illicit eroticism, like José Esteban Muñoz's concept of "disidentification," describes how cultural workers enact a repertoire of skills and theories—including appropriating or manipulating certain stereotypes—to "negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship."[51] Unlike disidentification, illicit eroticism describes a repertoire of appropriations distinct to the realm of sexual and sexualized labor, available to those whose sexuality has been marked specifically

as illicit, including people of color, and queer folk, including queer people of color. Illicit eroticism conceptualizes how these actors use sexuality in ways that necessarily confront and manipulate discourses about their sexual deviance while remaining tied to a system that produces them as marginalized sexual laborers. For Jeannie Pepper and others, leveraging one stereotype can mean avoiding another. Yet these performers' layered work as black women remains connected to their very survival within a punishing field of representation and labor.

Both Jeannie and Angel tell of their aspirations to be seen as more complicated subjects than the pornographic script allowed. Playing up, against, and within caricature, Jeannie, who delved into a stereotyped role, imagined herself as an actor depicting a woman with power, one who magically and mischievously produces men to service her sexual desires, while generating a kind of glamour and joviality. Imagining a black female pornographic sexuality as joyful, subversive, and attractive, Jeannie's performance asserts *erotic sovereignty*. Her performance attempts to reterritorialize the always already exploitable black female body as a potential site of self-governing desire, subjectivity, dependence and relation with others, and erotic pleasure.[52] Erotic sovereignty is a process, rather than a completely achieved state of being, wherein sexual subjects aspire and move toward self-rule and collective affiliation and intimacy, and against the territorializing power of the disciplining state and social corpus. It is part of an ongoing ontological process that uses racialized sexuality to assert complex subjecthood, inside of the overwhelming constraints of social stigma, stereotype, structural inequality, policing, divestment, segregation, and exploitation under the neoliberal state. Jeannie's interventions are never separate from the conditions that propelled and shaped her work in the porn industry during the 1980s, including the impact of Ronald Reagan's devastating economic policies on African Americans, and the porn business's interest in capturing white consumers for black-cast products during the video era.

By foregrounding the testimonies of black porn actresses like Jeannie Pepper and Angel Kelly, I hope to explain how black porn actresses might simultaneously challenge and conform to the racial fantasies that overwhelmingly define their representations and labor conditions. Their negotiations offer a view into black women's needs, desires, and understandings, and into the deeply felt conflict between what stories about black women exist and what stories they long to imagine for themselves. Agency, a central concept in feminist thought, is generally understood as a person's ability to achieve freedom or "progressive change" in the context of everyday and manifold forms

of oppression. I draw on postcolonial scholar Saba Mahmood's productive conceptualization of agency as a "capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create."[53] Not eliding the role of subordination, Mahmood reveals agency as existing along a continuum. At times agency enables progressive change or resistive action, and at other times and contexts it is the "capacity to endure, suffer, and persist."[54]

Rethinking the meaning of agency in relationship to black women's sexuality, I propose to open up the concept of agency by moving away from readings of its equivalence with resistive (sexual) freedom. We might instead read agency as a facet of complex personhood within larger embedded relations of subordination. Depending on the historical moment, agency emerges differently and operates along divergent nodes of power. Agency then might be seen as a dialectical capacity for pleasure and pain, exploration and denial, or for progressive change as well as everyday survival. Through my close readings of interviews with black performers in the pornography industry, we can observe their differing forms of agency given changing contexts of representation and circuits of sexual economy.

The tension described above between aspiration and inescapable constraint forms the critical spine of this book. Although it is impossible to decipher what early black pornography actors imagined and desired as they performed during the rise of pornographic photography and film in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it is important to think through the foundational nature of early pornography as it set the terms for the later performances, labor conditions, and forms of negotiation deployed by black adult actresses. Chapter 1 examines the fetishization of black women's bodies in early pornography and considers how those bodies served as objects of spectacle, fascination, and disdain within the visual regimes of slavery, colonialism, and Jim Crow. A compulsive desire to sexualize race and to consume sexual images of black women and men intersected with the rise of commercial pornography, creating a distinct genre that I call "race porn." Photographs and films concerning black and black-white sex illuminate how discourses of racial and sexual difference became calcified during this period. Even in the most intimate interactions in early pornography racial-sexual borders are erected, permeated, and then built up again. Deploying what I call a black feminist pornographic lens, I read the archive of early race porn to contemplate the ways in which early black models and actresses may have reached past the confines of porn texts to provide performances that give us a surprising view of black female sensuality, playfulness, and erotic subjectivity.

Chapter 2 explores the performances of black porn actresses, like Desiree