

# Pornification of Transgender Women

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A transgender individual is a person whose gender expression, behavior, or gender identity does not stereotypically conform with the sex to which the individual was assigned at birth (American Psychology Association, 2024). Contrary to popular belief, the idea of a transgender individual is not just a modern creation. The concept of a gender or sex outside the binary has been found across many different cultures, countries and time periods (Public Broadcast Station, 2023). The label transgender however is newer. Scholars can date the use of the term transgender individuals being used around 1960 (Blakemore, 2022). The first European transgender medical reassignment surgery was in 1906 in Berlin where an intersex individual named Karl M[artha] Baer, who was assigned female at birth, became one of the first people to have a “sex reassignment” surgery to masculinize their genitals. In addition, he was the first person to fully legally change their birth certificate to reflect their new gender (Funke, 2011).

Transgender individuals face a wide variety of challenges, including but not limited to, violence, harassment, poverty, and discrimination from jobs or healthcare resources (Role, 2017). One of the few job fields that has been easier to

access for transgender individuals, especially women, is the adult film industry or pornography industry (Role, 2017). Transgender individuals in porn were “revolutionary” as it led to a newfound exposure that had never been there before. The predominance of transgender porn became widespread in the 1960s through pornographic magazine publications, but usually only featured white transfeminine women (Pezzutto, 2022). A transfeminine woman is an individual who transitions from male to a female. However, in the 1960s transfeminine individuals usually would still have a penis and breasts, whether they were fake or surgically implanted. The two most famous names in the beginning of the transfeminine porn industry were white French celebrities, Bambi and Coccinelle (Pezzutto, 2022). The first wave of these transfeminine women in porn had them labeled as “female impersonators” or ‘female mimics’ (Pezzutto, 2022). There were many magazines featuring the erotic publications of transfeminine women. Some key names were Transvestia, which started in the 1960s, Female Mimics first published in 1963, and lastly, Female Impersonators, whose first publication was in 1969 (Pezzutto, 2022). The second publication of Female Mimics in 1963 had Coccinelle featured in an image with text that said, “France’s Most Fabulous She-Male”. The publication of these “female impersonators” led to a rise in the popularity of transfeminine porn over the last six decades. Specifically, in

2022, Pornhub released their Year in Review report which goes through the site's data on trends and top searches in the year. The 'transgender' category grew by 75% and was the 7th most popular category worldwide (Pornhub, 2022). It was also found that, of the profiles created on Pornhub, men viewed transgender porn videos 22% more than women (Pornhub, 2022). However, women were more likely to view "trans male transgender" 115% more than men (Pornhub, 2022).

In their paper, Heck (2020) argues that society has created negative presuppositions about women in terms of them being aroused by being pressured into rape and enjoying said rape due to pornographic depictions. Pornographic categories are created based on popularity of what is searched or deemed popular. Early categories of pornographic materials utilized the idea of women being raped and depicted women in these scenes enjoying being raped instead of fearing it (Heck 2020). This pressure on cis women (individuals whose gender identity corresponds to their genetic and or primary sex characteristics at birth; Merriam-Webster, n.d.) to sexually enjoy something that can be traumatizing can be seen similarly in transfeminine women, if not worse, in regard to their genital parts assigned at birth. In transgender feminine pornography, there is a highly sought after trope called "the tranny surprise" in which there is the surprise of an extra penis in a seemingly heterosexual

encounter (Escoffier, 2011; Ochoa, 2024). This argument will be similar to Heck (2020), more specifically, it will be focused on how porn has led to the fetishization of transfeminine women and their penises, both in and outside of sexual contexts, leading to more violence and harassment by straight men.

There is an increased sexual interest in things that are deviant. Something taboo, strange, new, hidden, or abnormal can be viewed as erotic and can be more sought out based on curiosity or the need to satisfy an urge (Engle, 2020). Sadly, adult homosexuality was considered a disease due to the association with deviant sexual behaviour and distance from heterosexual norms, making it part of the original Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in 1952 (Cabaj, N.D.; Drescher, 2015). However, due to the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York, many activists believed that the current psychiatric theories on homosexuality were a leading contributor to the social stigma of homosexuality (Drescher, 2015). Homosexuality was finally removed from the DSM in its second edition in 1973 (Ault & Brzuzy, 2009; Cabaj, N.D.). Despite this, the removal of homosexuality from the DSM did not fully normalize it. Much scientific research on homosexuality in the early research stages had contained both implicit and explicit beliefs about gender as a binary (Drescher, 2015). This binary belief led to the intersex hypothesis of

homosexuality where it is believed that the brain of a homosexual individual will exhibit characteristics considered normative of the opposite gender (Drescher, 2015). In addition, the removal of homosexuality from the DSM introduced gender identity disorder seven years later in 1980 which only emphasized issues regarding the gender binary and issues of sexuality (Ault & Brzuzy, 2009; Cabaj, N.D.). Within the removal of homosexuality from the DSM, the intersex hypothesis of homosexuality could have been a reason gender identity disorder was added, specifically due to the confusion of a women who is attracted to women having a “male brain” and vise versa (Drescher, 2015). The early pathologization of homosexuality and gender identity led to more people being outcasted in society by their “unusual” natures or desires in a heteronormative world. However, the issues surrounding the out casting of individuals who are of non-heteronormative ideals have expanded itself to additional queer relationships, gender expression, and gender identity in our modern society. There has been a more recent argument about the sexual identity of those who date transgender individuals being labeled as gyandromorphophilic (Ashley & Robertson, 2020). Gyandromorphophilic is defined as transgender fan, a transgender catcher, or someone who has a sexual interest in individuals who have both male and female physical

characteristics (Escoffier, 2011; Hsu et al., 2016). However, there has been research done that has found that those who date transgender individuals who are pre- or post-operation and identify as straight do not see their partner as their assigned gender at birth and instead as their chosen gender (Ashley & Robertson, 2020; Escoffier, 2011). It is saddening to see that this type of research is having to be done to change the current position about straight men or women who are in a heterosexual relationship, but society questions both parties due to one of them being transgender. Furthermore, through the decades the more unusual or taboo a sexual act is to the heteronormative sexual relationship, the more erotic it can become due to the risky nature of being caught doing or liking the act. Many have attributed the false belief of the abnormality of transgender relationships to the realm of issues that have evolved from pornography exposure but also stereotypes of the transgender community.

Though the porn industry has introduced and created a high level of exposure to transgender bodies in an attempt to normalize them, it has also created an atmosphere for them to be judged by the general population. With the transgender porn industry evolving, there are still many derogatory words that are used to search for this type of porn. Transgender feminine creating this explicit material will use terms or phrasings in their

posts like “girl with a dick”, “shemale”, “bitch”, “tranny” and many more in order to attract clientele (Ochoa, 2024). Many within the queer community, specifically outside of the porn industry, see these terms as derogatory and/or in a negative way to describe a transgender feminine individual, but many within the industry take advantage of these terms and see it as “acceptable under the implication of capitalism” (Ochoa, 2024 p. 34). Though some websites have improved and evolved their terminology, there is still push back on the idea of losing revenue or profit by re labeling old content. Grooby is one of the most popular producers of specifically transgender porn (G, 2017). The company was created in 1996 and began with its flagship sites of Shemales Yum, and was followed by many other titles like, but not limited to, Black Shemale Hardcore, Shemale Pornstar, and Ladyboy-Ladyboy (G, 2017). In 2017, Grooby started rebranding their transgender website from SheMales Yum, to GroobyGirls.com, but it was not without its own hesitations and push backs against the change and relabeling of their brand. Kristel Penn, Grooby’s marketing and editorial director, had made comments about the fact that “shemale” and “tranny” are searched keywords that are used significantly higher than transgender, so rebranding could negatively impact the website traffic which could cause a loss in profit (G, 2017). However, this pushback sadly maintains the negative

stereotypes and false beliefs just to continue a pornographic capitalist agenda instead of evolving outdated terminology.

The porn industry has had an effect on society's vision of the "ideal trans women" basing them off transgender feminine porn actors who have not had medical gender reassignment surgery, creating a false belief that this is how all transgender feminine women look. In addition, pornographic media, transfeminine women are depicted with big boobs, large butts and the heteronormative idea of what is a "passable" appearance (Fisher, N.D.). Western culture's idea of a passable appearance causes separation within the transgender community of women who do compared to women who do not have access to particular methods of transitioning, whether that is through lack of finances, safe access, or blatant restriction from medical care from medical professionals (Fisher, N.D.). Some transfeminine actresses are advised or feel as if they are forced to delay their gender affirming surgeries regarding their genitals in order to continue creating specifically shemale type porn (Escoffier, 2011; G, 2017). However, many of these actresses also experience dysphoria with their pre-transition bodies and desire gender affirming surgeries contrary to the standard created by shemale type porn (G, 2017). In addition, the bodies of pre surgery transgender feminine women are viewed as abnormal due to the contradiction between their secondary sex



characteristics and their primary sex characteristics. The deviation from the binary in a cisnormativity world turns transgender bodies into a subject of taboo which also leads to their fetishization. Due to the public fetishization of transfeminine women in porn, many transfeminine individuals are scared or detest the modern Western dating scenes. An interview done by Reign (2018) spoke with different transfeminine individuals to discuss their perspective and experience on modern dating and sexual relations. Many of these individuals discussed their distress in feeling “dysphoric” or “like a circus freak”, while for others their discomfort was created by something as simple as being misgendered by their sexual partner (Reign, 2018). One specific interview discussed how when the transgender participants would vocalize their disinterest in “being someone’s experiment, men would get really aggressive and violent” (Reign, 2018). Similarly, a second interview discussed how the trans individual would vocalize that she does not enjoy when her sexual partners are interested or play with her penis, but the sexual partners always ignore her wish (Reign, 2018). Overall, this behaviour towards their trans feminine partner may be attributed to a perception the individuals had in their minds about what a trans feminine partner should look like and were unwilling to compromise on this.

In conclusion, heteronormative Western society has forced the hand of many transfeminine women into the adult film industry due to easier access and less restriction, especially for those who have not undergone “bottom” gender reassignment surgery. However, this has also created and upheld negative stereotypes about transgender feminine women as being a novelty “woman with a dick”. The porn industry has segregated the transgender community through its use of derogatory terms and pressure to not complete their transition in order to continue making income. The fetishization of transgender women through their penis creates an unsafe dating space in the modern world, filled with those who are more interested in fulfilling their fantasies of being with a shemale.

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