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Policing Islam in a Pornified Culture

Introduction

Pornography is undoubtedly home for many racist beliefs, actions, attitudes, and ideas. Mainstream pornography that may be considered "normal" typically only includes white, cisgender men and women. The absence of people of color in pornography is astounding. If you were to visit a website such as "Porn Hub," people of color are categorized and viewed as fetishes. This fosters and reinforces a problematic segregation between people of color and white people.

Almost every race is racially stereotyped in pornography. A Black man in porn is glorified and fetishized for his abnormally large penis, thereby reducing him to only a part of his body. An Asian man is usually portrayed as a feminine man who is submissive. For Black women, the focus is almost always on their large buttocks and is usually enhanced with oils and close shots of her bottom. Latina women are typically fetishized for their Spanish speaking and many times are told to speak in Spanish during porn scenes.

In a Porn Studies class I took, we discussed these issues that pertain to Black men, Latina women and Asian men. However, we didn't spend a significant amount of time discussing Muslim women and their role in pornography. It is crucial to have discussions about the place held by Muslim women in porn and some of the ramifications that 9/11 has had on beliefs about Muslim women.

Muslim women undeniably hold a prevalent place in porn. In this paper, I explore the ways in which Muslim women are objectified and reduced to their bodies and hijabs in pornography. I examine some of the meanings behind specific porn videos and how they can affect the Muslim community and Muslim women specifically. I research some commonly held beliefs about Muslim women and relate them to how porn can foster and reaffirm these beliefs and ideas through mere "fantasy." I also discuss Foucault and his ideas about self-policing and discuss the threat of patriarchy among men, specifically white cisgender men. Along with this, I analyze how desire can be produced by the porn industry.

Cultural Significance of the Hijab or Veil

In Muslim porn, the indication of the Islamic faith is portrayed through the hijab or veil. This makes it crucial to understand what the veil means to women (and men) of Islamic faith. To understand Muslim porn, we must first understand the veil.

As defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the hijab is "the traditional covering for the hair and neck that is worn by Muslim women." According to BBC, the hijab is "the principle of modesty." It is important to note this contradiction in porn. A woman is not being modest while performing sexual acts on camera, yet she wears the hijab to signify her modesty.

The Quran suggests that both men and women of Islamic faith are supposed to dress and act in a modest fashion. However, in western culture, we tend to think primarily of the Muslim women as the modest individuals. Although many Muslim men are conservative in their dress and actions, Muslim women are typically held to higher standards to maintain their modesty.

In her article, Roberts writes about how Muslim women grapple with how to assimilate to American culture post 9/11, especially regarding their decision about whether or not to wear the veil.

A prevalent question about the veil is whether it represents oppression or freedom. There is no right answer to this. Lughod talks about her experience as a Muslim woman in her article "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?". She explains that many questions about Muslim women in a general sense were proposed to her. However, she cannot answer all of these questions because she is not every Muslim woman, she is just one Muslim woman. Therefore, the veil may represent something positive for some, yet negative for others.

Watching "Muslim Porn"

To begin my research, I watched some porn videos that included women in hijabs. I used Porn Hub as my source. While on Porn Hub, I clicked "categories." There were numerous categories including different races and fetishes. The top categories included Hentai, Lesbian, Anal, Cartoon, Threesome, Mature, Gay, Teen, Bondage, MILF, Big Dick, and Creampie.

While searching through the categories, there were an abundance of sex acts and categories I had never heard before. However, and to my surprise, "Muslim" was not a category. I was shocked because of the fetishizing of the hijab and women of Middle-Eastern descent. The closest category to "Muslim" was a category labeled "Arab," which featured the porn actress Mia Khalifa as the pictorial image representing the category.

The first video I selected and that was at the top of the list was a video where a woman (wearing a hijab) and a man, whose face was never shown and blurred, were eating dinner. The man, without the woman's consent, begins to play with her vagina underneath the table and begins inserting his fingers in her vagina. She appears to be completely uninterested in the sexual act and offers no indications of sexual gratification or fulfillment. This action proceeds for about five minutes.

Based on his voice and color of skin, the man in this video appears to be Middle Eastern. He directs her to stand up and he pushes all the food on the table off to the floor. He then lifts her on the table and begins playing with her vagina again. He removes all of her clothes except her hijab, which remains on during the remainder of the scene. He begins to become increasingly violent and demands that she gets on her knees and perform oral sex on him. The scene ends here.

The stereotype of Muslim women being submissive to controlling Muslim men is clearly portrayed here. The scene reaffirms the western belief that Muslim women are controlled entirely by men. Porn, like this particular scene, reaffirms these stereotypes that Muslim women are oppressed and that Muslim men are abusive and controlling.

As I continued to search under the category "Arab," almost all of the women in all scenes wore hijabs, indicating their Islamic faith. These women are placed on a pedestal as mysterious beings who are conservative and modest. When the clothes are removed, her vulnerability is exposed as she is being exposed. The hijab remains as the one piece of clothing that indicates that she is a woman who is typically conservative and would usually not perform in pornography. The viewer is constantly reminded that this is not just a regular woman but is a Muslim woman. While in real life the hijab can be used to empower these women, it is used in porn to mark them and to reduce them to something less.

The next video I watched again included a woman in a hijab. This time, the man was white. It is obvious that the woman remains in pain and discomfort throughout the video. It is very reflective of a rape occurring. At one point, she takes her hijab and covers her mouth with it. The man forcefully pushes it aside. She was trying to hide herself from him, but he would not accept it. He continuously says to her, "show me how you like it."

This video serves as a way for white men to vicariously live through the male porn actor. He imagines himself as the man in the video, someone who looks like him. Here he fantasizes about what it would be like to have relations with one of these "mysterious" women. In a similar circumstance, many white men watch interracial porn to imagine what it would be like to sexually violate a Black woman. The porn provides a safe space for the man to explore his deepest, darkest fantasies with women deemed oppressed and exotic.

After exploring the category of "Arab," I then used the search bar and typed "Muslim." One video from the website "Teen Pies" struck me the most powerfully. This video includes a young girl playing the role of a foreign exchange student with a heavy accent who is very modest in dress. The white man is allowing the woman to stay in his house if she does some chores during her stay. She repeatedly calls the man "sir" and agrees to do whatever he says.

The scene then cuts to the man in another room on a phone call and there is a loud crash in the kitchen. The young woman drops a few pans on the floor and begins apologizing frantically because, as she says, "men in her country are in charge."

This allows the white man, in not just this video but many videos, to serve the role of a "white savior." Since the white man is not as bad as the man in her home country, he is a hero who cannot do worse to her than she has already endured. Therefore, she cannot be abused by the white man, but only helped and rescued. Any abuse done to her by the white man is therefore justifiable.

In this video, the man proceeds to coerce the young woman into performing oral sex on him. She tells him, "I don't know, sir. I don't want to do this, I've never done anything like this before." He replies to her that it is okay, that it is normal and to "kiss it." The white man in this video is "deflowering" a very vulnerable type of girl, a Muslim girl. Since a Muslim woman is typically modest, it is a fantasy for many white men to be able to reach an unrealistic goal to have sex with a Muslim woman.

She continues performing oral sex on the man, and then vaginal sex occurs. At the end, he ejaculates inside of her and she squeezes it out, in other words, a "cream pie." The scene ends with him asking her, "How do you feel after getting cummed in for the first time?" This is an amazing feat for the white man because he has successfully completed the unimaginable act of dominant sex with one of the most conservative women in a white, racist and colonialist imagination. In this moment, he has triumphantly marked new territory for himself.

A significant number of the videos I watched, almost all of them, represented the Muslim women as "docile bodies," a term used by Michel Foucault. The women must be "managed" and shaped into a sexually submissive being while listening to every command made by a man, especially a white man. Casting the Muslim woman as a docile body through pornography fosters beliefs of inferiority and reason to believe that the Muslim woman should be controlled. Pornography places these Muslim women at the nadir in a hierarchy of people. These views of the Muslim women by pornography do not just exist in porn. They overlap into mainstream society and the fine line between pornography and mainstream values continues to disappear. For the men who watch these videos, they are reaffirmed that Muslim women are beneath them in the hierarchy. For the Muslim women that may see one of these videos, they may succumb to their lower place on the hierarchy.

There was only one video that portrayed sex that seemed consensual and all members in the act participated. This video was called "Mia Khalifa and Step Mom Juliana Vega." Again, both women wore hijabs. The storyline was that Mia Khalifa brought home her new boyfriend and her "stepmom," Juliana Vega, made advances towards him. The two women then compete in a series of sex acts deeming who can "suck" and "fuck" better.

In this video, Mia Khalifa is dressed as young girl wearing a light pink shirt and colorful socks. Juliana Vega seems to school Mia Khalifa on how to please her boyfriend, in a way reflecting an incestual relationship between mother and daughter.

This video was very different from the rest, as the women were much more participative in the sex and more aggressive than the man because they were in competition with each other. The main component that separates this video from the rest is that the two women eventually remove their hijabs. Since these women are being shown as sexually aggressive in a savage way that disrupts their preconceived stereotype as docile women, the hijab being removed represents complete exposure of the woman and sexual liberation. To free the woman from the tyrannical reign of Muslim men, the hijab is removed to represent that freedom. To add to the symbolism, the Muslim woman is acclimated to western culture where most women, especially American, do not wear hijabs. She is then assimilating to the white man's western culture and becoming a docile body in that way. The women in the other videos who were much less active and more violently controlled kept their hijabs on the whole time to indicate the sexual shyness and the submissiveness "typical" of Muslim women in the colonial imagination. conceived by many.

Production of Desire

Pornography can influence our sexual desires. It can foster new fetishes and sexual interests that may be sparked by watching a new video. Many people are able to develop a new fetish by watching a new pornographic scene that sparks interest.

Numerous studies have been conducted with an objective to find a correlation between pornography and brain activity. For example, Steven Pace (2014) has examined neuroplasticity and acquiring tastes for new material. Brain maps are constantly rewired throughout the course of a life span and can be rewired through the consumption of pornography. He discusses how chemicals such as dopamine are released during the viewing of pornography. Much like drugs, the brain can become habituated to images that are no longer stimulating. The person affected may seek new material to give them that sense of euphoria once again.

Habituation is constantly occurring as we become desensitized to material that once stimulated us. The need to search for new material can foster an interest in Muslim women featuring the hijab. We are told what is sexy and what is desirable. Muslim women are people who fit that category yet remain forbidden in the mainstream western world. By exploiting this race and religion of women, desire is conceived by many.

The Threat of Patriarchy

Jennifer Johnson beautifully articulates the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism in her article *To Catch a Curious Clicker* (2010). In Johnson's article, she argues that patriarchy and capitalism thrive and rely on each other. She makes the point that since women were much more dependent on men before World War II, patriarchy was much more prevalent during those times. She writes, "modern imperial capitalism has betrayed patriarchy by no longer guaranteeing the economic dependence of women" (Johnson). Therefore, many men feel micro-disempowered if their patriarchy is threatened. Because of the threat of diminished patriarchal power, many men are more vulnerable to pornography. In this way, the man may develop a dependent relationship on pornography in order to maintain his power.

Watching porn featuring Muslim women is a way for men to feel micro-empowered. Since Muslim women are deemed docile and controllable, they are an easy target for men to display their dominance vicariously through the porn they watch. They may justify their decision to watch the porn because it is not actually them who is inflicting the act on the women. The eroticism of having complete control over a foreign being such as a Muslim woman creates a fantasy for many porn watchers.

Malek Alloula also touches upon the threat of patriarchy in his piece *The Colonial Harem*. In his piece, Alloula discusses the eroticism of Middle Eastern women as they were photographed for post cards by French colonizers. The Middle Eastern women were then fetishized and exploited through the photographs. Alloula describes the images taken of the women as "imaginary revenge" (*The Colonial Harem*).

The French colonizers were imposing their dominance on the women and producing them as docile bodies. As erotic women, they were deemed as less than, and the photos served to maintain control over them and to establish and maintain patriarchy in new colonies. In this way, modern mainstream porn maintains control of Muslim women through videography rather than photography. Mostly white cisgender men are capable of making this domination more violent and demeaning through the horrendous sex acts performed in much mainstream pornography. The stakes to maintain patriarchy are higher as feminist movements continue to fight for equality for all people, therefore suggesting that the abuse will increase. The exploitation of Middle Eastern women in *The Colonial Harem* continues to repeat itself in way that is evolving with the new industry and technology.

Post 9/11

Islamophobia undeniably skyrocketed in mainstream media and American culture after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. According to the FBI, there was a 1,700% increase of reported hate crimes post 9/11. Ecklund and Khan (2012) found in their study that negative attitudes towards Muslims post 9/11 are particularly negative in situations such as boarding an airplane.

A reflection of the islamophobia in our country is evident in rumors fostered by the right regarding former President Barack Obama. During his election, many claimed that Obama was not a natural-born citizen of America and even had dummies modeled of him being lynched in violent ways. Hatred of Obama is often anchored to the belief that he practices the Islamic faith.

Republicans such as Joe Walsh have publicly announced their belief that Obama is Muslim through social media. Walsh writes, "I think Obama is Muslim. I think in his head and in his heart he has always been" (Hensch). As we know, the United States is a country based upon freedom of religion, yet Obama has been demonized because of the rumors about the religion he may or may not practice. If the country is really about freedom of religion, then why is Islam not included or respected?

In terms of pornography, a way to control Islamophobic fears that many white cisgender men may experience is to assert their dominance over a Muslim woman, even if it is vicariously through another man in porn. In a way, if the man faces his fear it becomes less frightening to him. To conquer a fear, you must learn how to manage it and, for some, doing it through the safety of a computer screen gives the comfort and security needed to endure Islamophobic anxieties that undermine the imagined "American superiority."

Referring to Foucault, conquering the islamophobia may entail policing oneself from within. To be in total control and conserve one's patriarchy, self-policing and picturing oneself as existing in a panopticon can motivate a person to overcome their fear or hatred in a safe way. However, this leads me to ask whether this self-policing would help the hatred dissipate or if it would in fact ignite the hatred and reaffirm a legitimization of Islamophobia.

Conclusion

Muslim porn is a category that allows racist beliefs and stereotypes about Muslim women to remain prevalent. Through this constant reinforcement, the ideas about these women are recycled and promoted through a multibillion-dollar industry. Muslim women and other people of color remain as fetishes in the porn industry and foster the racist perspectives and "fantasies."

My experiences watching the Muslim pornography have deeply alarmed me and broadened my horizons on this issue. I can determine that Muslim porn has a distinct characteristic about it, which is, demeaning and controlling the Muslim women into docile bodies. The hijab is a fascinating statement in pornography as it serves as hypocrisy to its true meaning, therefore, disrespecting the Islamic faith and people who are Muslim. These large industries are in control of rewriting the scripts that their stories tell and creating a respectful environment for Muslim women.

The ways in which our desire is produced is also manipulated by what the porn industry produces for the viewers. I would argue that the porn industry is a trend setter for not just the porn world, but also the mainstream world. As our desires continue to habituate, our desires change and sometimes turn into desires that are offensive, misogynistic, racist and even dangerous.

With the threat of patriarchy in the white male cisgender community comes the determination to maintain that patriarchy. With capitalism becoming more independent of patriarchy, the micro empowerment of the individual white cisgender man is crucial to his confidence in himself. He must retain control of his situations and porn is his outlet. Muslim women are the coercible people, in their perspectives, to manage. The Muslim women can make the man feel like his patriarchy is still intact.

After 9/11, the irrational fear and hatred of Muslims spread wide across the United States. As hate crimes increased, so did the stereotyping towards Muslim women. Pornography, again, can continue to reinforce the constant hatred and misrepresentation of Muslim women. One may self-police himself in order to justify the ludicrous beliefs that are imposed not only by personal conceptions, but also the media.

With constant reminders of what Muslim men and women are supposed to be, it is no surprise that the porn industry helps to contribute to these beliefs. My hopes are that with more feminist pornographers and pornographers who are women or minorities, that the porn industry will expand from its racist ways and develop into an industry that is not only fueled by capitalism. I am not sure if the first step is to start with Muslim porn particularly or if this means to completely band together as a society and rewrite the reoccurring script of the porn industry. One thing is certain, that Muslim women are deeply involved in the production of porn that is considered a fetish and that until porn is rewritten, they will continue to be perceived as docile women who cannot refuse a man's order.

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ⁱ Lila Abu Lughod *Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?* (2002)

ⁱⁱ Michel Foucault defines "docile bodies" as bodies that "may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved" in his book *Discipline and Punish*

ⁱⁱⁱ Neuroplasticity: literally flexibility of the brain

^{iv} Habituation is a term used by Rebecca Whisnant to describe the desensitization and acclimation to material that was once stimulating

^v Islamophobia as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary is the "irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against Islam or people who practice Islam"