

The following excerpt is from a biographical sketch of pornography actress and feminist, Bobbi Starr. Sources are listed; endnotes are not included.

Bobbi Starr: Classical Oboist, Junior Olympian

by

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*“I had just found porn and was entranced by it. Didn’t
feminism say I could have the life I wanted,
and to do with my body what I wished?
I wanted a life of sex . . .”
Veteran Porn Model and Feminist,
Nina Hartley*

She says she’s looks like an ordinary California girl, that she has few “distinguishing features” and appears “too average” to be noticed in airports when on her travels to conventions, film assignments, or vacation spots around the world. Though her personal assessment of her beauty is modest, Bobbi Starr is rapidly becoming widely known in pornography beyond whatever self-imposed limitations she puts on her physical appearance. She is confident, articulate, intelligent, and has a reputation as one of porn’s most entertaining actresses whose performances are the hardest of the hard core. And above all, she is one of the few spokespersons for what feminism means in the adult industry today.

Unlike most 21st century porn girls, Bobbi’s filmography includes every fetish that is legal to put on DVD and some that can appear only on the internet. In expanding her video resume, which includes a heavy dose of rough sex, the indictment by anti-porn feminists that she is degrading and humiliating herself is difficult to deny at first glance.

But a closer look, and a reminder that the once closeted pornography industry has now become standard fare in our society, reveals another side to the story. As film professor Linda Williams contends “pornography is emphatically part of American culture and it is time for criticism of it to recognize this fact.” She argues that the old feminist debate about the “propriety or danger” of porn ended in the 1990’s along with issues concerning censorship. What was “once deemed obscene” has come “on/scene” and our culture has brought sex “to its public arena.” Bobbi Starr is part of this seismic shift in American attitudes and proclivities. But what makes Bobbi, and a handful of others in porn, remarkable are their adherence to feminism. Her response to anti-porn feminists is the declaration of her individualism. She is doing what she wants under her own terms, for her own satisfaction. She boldly puts her sexuality into public view for applause or condemnation, understanding that it generates both. Though she suggests her career may seem paradoxical in the traditional sense feminism, she affirms, “I call myself a feminist. It sounds like a contradiction but the thing about feminist is that the entire movement was created by people who wanted to support women and their choice to choose for themselves.” In her “on/scene” performances Bobbi is re-birthing the soul of the original New Left politics and sexual expression of early 1960’s feminism which celebrated a woman’s right to her own sexual agency, a time when the women’s movement was not yet aware that its idealism was destined to be splintered by competing factions.

She relishes sex in ways that many women cannot understand, appreciate, or personally accept in their own lives, a brand of “in-your-face” sexuality that can offend those who dislike pornography, but also enlighten, for it addresses hidden fantasies many women possess. In one of her films she did a scene she describes as “Alfred Hitchcockesque” in which a rape-like sequence was shot. Porn people know that rape scenarios are taboo and ripe for obscenity prosecutions. Justifiably the director worried that the scene was too graphic in its depiction of sexual assault, but Bobbi’s response was empathetic, “you can’t rape the willing.” She participated in her own imaginative fantasy and did it within the secure confines of her own mind and acted it out in the “community” of a porn set, surrounded by friends and colleagues. We should all be so fortunate to

participate in the well of fetishes and fantasies we carry within us, unashamed and supported by our lovers.

Bobbi embraces pornography in a way that is also reminiscent of the bold declarations of third wave feminism. She takes terms such as “slut,” “trashy,” and “nasty” and holds them as her own in true third wave style. Yet for some Bobbi represents a debased society that is far from Middle America’s small towns, college campuses and corporate boardrooms, reflecting a bygone era when the myth of the abused teenaged runaway, pimped into the unsavory life of adult film, dominated the discourse over porn’s evils. Feminist writer Susie Bright believes “the very word *pornography* is a class barrier that keeps many women from looking at erotic expression seriously.” (**Emphasis in original**) Bobbi Starr crosses that divide. She is well-educated, solidly middle class, artistic, and creative. She is a bridge for any woman who wants to consider the exploration of her own sexuality in a third wave “do-it-yourself” attitude that satisfies a *woman’s* desire for adventure, not a man’s. She’s a feminist who looks back to the second wave’s sex wars but also moves into the third wave and its declaration of equality in which girls can have the “best of both worlds” that embrace “an engagement with difference,” what feminist Melissa Klein calls “contradiction and duality.” Bobbi is porn model and musician, BDSM performer and athlete, claiming seemingly contradictory identities as her own. She can be the “slut”/“whore” persona and play oboe in a chamber music ensemble or embarrass the best of swimmers with the power of her backstroke. She can demand satisfaction and scream “fuck me” on a porn set and be articulate and thoughtful afterward. Bobbi Starr is a remarkable dichotomy that would baffle even the staunchest of radical feminists, and most astoundingly, she combines feminism’s second and third waves into a single package of energy, intelligence, artistic expression, and business savvy.

Sources

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