

Let's Talk About Pornography: An Interview with Shine Louise Houston

by JILL on 4.7.2009 · 7 COMMENTS
in GENERAL

A guest-post by [Umayyah Cable](#)



It's Pride season again, and in addition to the usual queer brouhaha, there are some truly substantial things to be proud of this year. California's legalization of gay marriage (and subsequent illegalization) aside, let's talk about pornography. For the past three years, San Francisco has been home to the Crash Pad Series, a queer, woman-run, internet-based porn program that has been steadily building up steam in the alt-porn arena. Look out, homos, she's gonna blow! Literally. After the Crash Pad's cult-film debut in 2005 and three grueling years in the erotic interweb trenches, Pink and White Inc., your locally owned and operated porn company responsible for producing the Crash Pad Series, is finally starting to get the publicity it deserves. With major funding from Blowfish Inc to produce a feature film this summer, and national press coverage from the likes of Tristain Taormino and Perez Hilton, PW Inc is poised to blow its celebratory wad in the name of alternative queer porn, which is good news for queers, feminists, and basically anyone who's got a boner for homo sexcapades.

But on a more serious note, supporting PW Inc is not just about satisfying your specialty needs. It's also about supporting your local community and it's economy. For the most part Crash Padder's, and all those who work behind the scenes for PW Inc., are Bay Area residents. Some work in the industry full time, some just in passing, but the majority people involved with PW Inc are local sex worker heroes. What's more is that in an industry dominated by degradation and objectification, PW Inc is actively working to reclaim real eroticism in a healthy and sex positive way. Allowing the models to essentially script their own scenes, PW Inc's model-empowerment strategy is revolutionary in its approach to porn. And revolution is damn sexy. For all intents and purposes, PW Inc has all its PC bases covered: local, sex positive and queer friendly. What more could you ask for in your quest to fulfill your porntastic desires?

I recently met up with the brains behind PW Inc, Shine Louise Houston. Here's what she had to say about her work.

UC: Why and how did you start this crusade to create Pink and White Inc?

SLH:I was working at Good Vibrations and we had a lot of women and straight couples come in looking for lesbian porn. And they were looking for good lesbian porn. We didn't have a whole lot of selection. There's not a lot of queer-made, lesbian porn out there, it's very limited. So, I had a film degree, I was interested in making porn, and I was also interested in making money. But you know, believe it or not there's not as much money as you would think in pussy. So this whole project is more a labor of love

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than a get rich scheme. I'm really in it for my artistic purposes.

UC: And what year was this?

SLH: This was early 2005.

UC: And when did Crash Pad come out?

SLH: Late 2005.

UC: So, what are your driving principles behind PW Inc? What are your core values?

SLH: The core values are to stay true to my ideals of sex-positivity, so both on screen and off screen we are extremely respectful of the models. We really work with them to make them feel comfortable, we don't ask anybody to do anything they wouldn't otherwise do in their normal sex life. We have a mission to show different types of bodies: queer bodies, natural bodies. And also to do something in higher production value, you know, really paying attention to craftsmanship. Especially with our recent film, Champion, we're really turning up the heat.

UC: You wanted it to be more cinematic?

SLH: Yeah, way more cinematic. Looking back on the golden age of porn in the 70s, how they were real movies with lots of sex. So I'm coming back to that idea that I'm an independent filmmaker and the films that I make happen to have a lot of sex in them because that's also an aspect of humanity that really interests me.

UC: Kind of like if Nan Goldin made a movie.

SLH:[laughs] right!

UC: I love it! So who would you think your main audience is in that respect? Queers? Hets?

SLH: Well actually we have a lot of heterosexual men who watch our porn.

UC: Do you have stats on who your subscribers are?

SLH: Not from the subscribers but basically from sales of the movies. So it's probably about 50% a male audience, which probably a high percentage of that is heterosexual couple-based. And then a lot of it is kind of "not too sure, this could be a man, this could be a woman, not too sure from the name," and then we've got a lot of queer folks who buy it. Not many queer men...

UC: It's not their cup of tea... So how many subscribers do you have?

SLH: Right now we're close to 300. Which is not too shabby.

UC: And are they scattered across the country?

SLH: There's a high concentration in SF, there's a high concentration in Brooklyn (thank you, Brooklyn). There's a good amount in Canada, in the Vancouver area. There's a little in Australia, Germany, a couple in Japan. We're getting pretty international, but really east coast, west coast, and Canada is our big market.

UC: Veering away from that, you guys have a very different approach. Just judging from the post sex interviews, I hear repeatedly, "This is great because...." Can you speak to that a little bit?

SLH: We don't have the same formula that mainstream has. There's definitely a set formula in mainstream that's like "We want to see some oral, we want to see this, yadda yadda yadda." And there's a whole lot of direction in mainstream porn. Basically our formula is just do what you want to do and our cameras will follow you. We've worked out a pretty decent system that allows us to shoot continuously and just follow the couple and their natural progression. And then through the magic of editing putting it all together to make coherent sense. But really our formula is we follow the couple and we match our camera work to the couple, we're not telling the couple what to do.

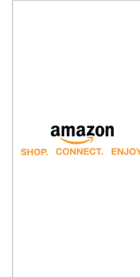
UC: Kind of like reality porn.

SLH: Yeah. kind of like reality porn!

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UC: So do you feel like now with Champion gaining some momentum with Blowfish Inc that this could be like a whole new venture?

SLH: Well for me on an artistic level it's a whole new venture because, you know, when I started off in Crash Pad I only wanted a container for the sex. I didn't exactly want a story or a plot, I just wanted a container. And also it was good to start small and start simple because I had been out of college for years and years and years and hadn't done a major project in a long time. So now I've got my sea legs and I'm ready to do what I really want to do, which is actually to do major features. So this is a major endeavor for myself because it's a full script –well actually if there wasn't so much sex it'd be a twenty minute short—but for porn wise it's a full script and an extended period of shooting for us, with an almost real budget. Well you know, real for lesbian porn. So in a sense this is more fulfilling the dream that I wanted for Pink and White, and hopefully part of my goal is to deliver something that the audience didn't even know that they wanted.

UC: Ooh, you're good.

SLH: [Laughing] So, I'm taking a risk and a leap of faith with this, but I have a feeling that it might not be the cult favorite that Crash Pad has become, but I think that it's going to open the door for a lot of other projects.

UC: I'm really excited, I can't wait. And I think you guys are gonna blow up.

SLH: I hope so. I really hope so.

Umayyah Cable is a freelance documentary photographer and writer based in San Francisco, California. Her dedication to her work is fueled by her passion for political and social justice. She is a self professed Polaroid junkie. She is available for editorial, documentary, portrait and event assignments. www.UmayyahCable.com

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4.8.2009 at 7:31 am

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PabloK 4.7.2009 at 8:07 pm 1

In my ignorance, I don't think I've ever heard of a porn project like this.

Is non-exploitative alt-porn a genuine movement? And how non-exploitative is it? Unionised? Run as a co-operative?

Polymorphous Perversity 4.8.2009 at 11:47 am 2

@ PabloK

PW Inc is definitely indicative of a significant movement within the industry, although there would inevitably be argument about which production companies and directors should be considered part of that movement.

I don't think you can map the sorts of measurements of progress you're suggesting based on the typical scenario of full-time employment with a

suggesting, based on the typical scenario of full-time employment with a single employer, onto the porn industry. Mainstream porn performers have applied for membership with the Screen Actors Guild and been denied. I could imagine an "Adult" SAG working, especially for full-time performers, but people in indie porn are generally not full-time performers. For example, Ms. Houston notes that "the majority people involved with PW Inc are local sex worker heroes." Short of unionization, measurements of how "progressive" or "exploitative" a company are a little harder to come by.

UnFit 4.8.2009 at 9:26 pm

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But as far as I know, the US industry has something like standard wages? Over here in Europe, it's all over the place.

I must say... I've only seen one Pink and White movie, and a lot of the scenes seemed surprisingly heteronormative. Scenes where one woman would already be wearing a strapon under her pants (at a birthday party, riiight) an from there on it's pretty much teh straight vanilla hardcore scenario. Blow job (whetever that's supposed to do for the receiving rubber part) and then on to penetration, and so on and so forth.

Maybe I got the wrong sample, but I had expetcted something more outside that pattern.

Umayyah Cable 4.9.2009 at 10:16 pm

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Hi folks
Thanks for your comments.

If you would like to hear it directly from the horses mouth, I would like to encourage you all to subscribe to the Crash Pad Series (www.crashpadseries.com) if not to watch the porn and judge for yourselves (there are forty something episodes up and running right now), but to watch the *Behind The Scenes* interviews that follow each episode. In those clips (each interview is about 10 min) you can hear directly from the models about their views on PW Inc, why they chose to shoot Crash Pad, their thoughts on working mainstream, and other such interesting tidbits.

Regarding the comment about heteronormativity... With all due respect, I don't really think that's a fair analysis. Would you call a mainstream girl on girl scene "homonormative" just because it portrays homosexual sex acts?

Anyway, just food for thought.

Thanks again for reading!
UC

VeganElle 4.9.2009 at 11:32 pm

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@ UnFit

I think you got the wrong sample. I've seen all of Houson's films (except Champion) and I'm also a subscriber to the crashpadseries site. From fisting to rimming, tickling to rope play, the sex in Pink and White's productions is incredibly diverse and everything but heteronormative. Pink and White films feature diverse casts without fetishizing any aspect of the casts presentation or orientation.

"There is power in creating images, and for a woman of color and a queer to take that power... I don't find it exploitative; I think it's necessary."

- Shine Louise Houston

Cyd 4.18.2009 at 8:27 pm

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I've been in a couple of the episodes and unless fisting, bondage, electrical play, single tailing, and chest punching have weaseled their way into standard hetero sex since I last was stationed there I would not describe my, or many of the other shoots on CPS as 'heteronormative'. I also like to think about how re-contextualizing acts that might be seen as such within queer settings would also probably have different meanings for both the models and the viewers - sometimes referencing standard boy-girl sex can be hot because of how much it is NOT considered to be part of the sexuality or genders of the participants involved.

Also, at least with CPS, I don't think anyone receives any direction of what type of fucking should be in the shoot – usually it's with people you know from before and you decide before even getting there what you are going to do. Some people have sex that I would want to watch in porn and some people don't. I guess that's what I like about pink and white...the diversity of sexualities, genders, and desires that are represented.

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