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Jenna Jameson turned up at last year's Sundance Film Festival

XXX-ceptable

Porn has gone mainstream. Today's adult-film stars are writing books, making movie cameos and hitting prime time. When did America get so comfortable with hardcore?

By B. J. Sigesmund
NEWSWEEK WEB EXCLUSIVE

July 2 — Sometimes Bill Asher can't believe what he hears. As the president of Vivid Entertainment Group, the biggest name in pornography, Asher makes a living lucrative enough to send his 16-year-old daughter to one of Los Angeles's most expensive private schools.

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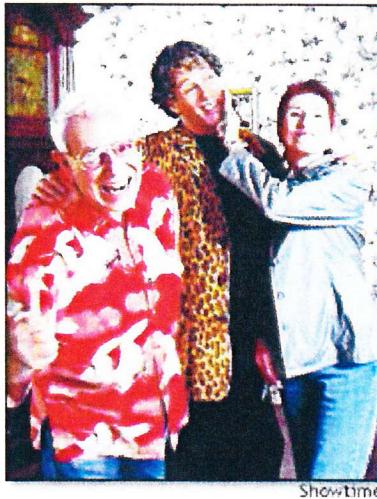
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AND HE'S NOT AT ALL intimidated by the school's other parents—lawyers, CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, even Andy Garcia. "It's not seen as an odd thing that I'm a pornographer," he says. "They know what I do, and they talk to me about it, it doesn't faze anyone." When he drops off his daughter at her friends' homes, he says, parents open up to him. He estimates that an amazing one quarter of them have asked him for work. But what stuns him most are the reviews he gets. "They talk about my movies like you'd talk about Julia Roberts," he says. "They say, 'My favorite is Jenna Jameson,' or whatever. A lot of the women will say they'd like to see more plot. It's nice to hear the advice, but it always feels strange to me to have someone's mother give you her take on our porn movies."

OK, that's L.A. But 30 years after men first dragged their wives to the seamier side of town to see "Deep Throat," pornography has gone mainstream all over America. From movies to television shows to music videos and magazines, porn stars and porn iconography are everywhere, pointing to a national comfort level that few would have predicted even a decade ago. Just a few current examples: Jameson, perhaps the biggest adult female star of all time, played herself this season on NBC's "Mister Sterling" and has hosted "Wild On ..." on the E! channel. Porn star-producer Seymour Butts (real name: Adam Glasser) has a reality show on Showtime, "Family Business." Playboy playmates have appeared on a special episode of "Fear Factor," and the "Friends" gang once got obsessed with an all-porn channel. This fall, Fox will premiere a new series, "Skin," which features Ron Silver as a porn mogul. Val Kilmer will play the porn legend John Holmes in the movie "Wonderland," due

this September. In the coming weeks, former underage porn star Traci Lords plans to promote her autobiography, "Underneath it All." Three "Vivid girls" were featured in *Vanity Fair*'s Oscar issue and this September, their images will start appearing on Sims snowboards. The numbers, meanwhile, are huge. In 2001, Americans rented 750 million adult films on video or DVD alone. Total industry revenues now stand at between \$5 billion and \$10 billion.

Adam Glasser (a.k.a. porn star Seymore Butts) stars in 'Family Business,' a reality show broadcast on Showtime on Friday nights



How'd we get here? Adult entertainment initially entered America's homes in the 1980s, with the first videocassette recorders, and blossomed in the 1990s with video-on-demand, phone sex and of course, the Internet. "We've also become more comfortable with sexual information in the general culture," says sociologist Pepper

Schwartz, author of "Everything You Know About Love and Sex Is Wrong." "But it's not a change in our basic values. We're just lightening up a little bit about sex."

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Besides the VCR, other factors helped win America over to porn. A more explicit sexual dialogue emerged, brought about by the AIDS crisis, and pop culture has pushed the boundaries of what's acceptable. In the 1980s, rock bands such as Motley Crue started putting porn stars in their videos; now they're staples in videos by Eminem and others. Howard Stern's radio program has turned many porn players into household names. John Wayne Bobbitt became famous for having his penis cut off in the early 1990s, then parlayed his notoriety into a short-lived career in adult entertainment. Who can forget the infamous Pamela Anderson-Tommy Lee tape, which only added to the two stars' allure? The 1997 film "Boogie Nights" told the story of one man's journey in the business. And with the 1998 Monica Lewinsky scandal, life imitated porn.

In the coming weeks, we'll see Traci Lords promote her



More than anything

autobiography, 'Underneath it All'

else, however, the Web is responsible for porn's increased visibility and acceptance. Because of the anonymous nature of Internet surfing, porn sites have proliferated since they first started appearing 10 years ago. As the technology advanced and high-speed access became more available in people's homes, the business boomed. Analysts estimate that the Web's 100,000 adult pornographic sites now take in \$1 billion annually. Similarly, as with the Internet, satellite systems and video-on-demand now allow users to order up skin flicks without leaving their sofa—or their hotel room. Adult titles are estimated to be viewed 10 times as often as standard fare by business travelers, and they're often more expensive, too (\$6.95 compared with \$3.95, for instance).

As some aspects of porn have taken off, others have fallen apart. Many porn magazines have seen their circulations drop by 10 percent a year since the mid-1990s. Longtime adult magazines Playboy and Penthouse have lost millions of customers. Penthouse, which once sold 5 million copies a month, now has a circulation of well under 1 million and hasn't had an issue on newsstands since April. "You gotta keep changing in this business," says Legs McNeil, whose book, "The Other Hollywood: The Uncensored Oral History of the Porn Film Industry," is due in January. "Wherever the new technology is, that's where porn goes."

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This fall, Fox will premiere a new series, 'Skin,' featuring Ron Silver as a porn mogul



McNeil says the business itself, most of which is done in Los Angeles's San Fernando Valley, has gotten more mainstream, too. "Girls line up and audition to be in these films now," he says. "If they're not on drugs and they're smart about it, they can exploit themselves the way they want to be exploited." Jameson, he points out, has set a new standard for career management. Besides doing films, she's CEO of ClubJenna Inc., an Internet management, production and licensing company. Jameson has written a book, "How to Make Love Like a Porn Star," that will be released next year. She's also been profiled on "Entertainment Tonight" and has even debated Bill O'Reilly on Fox. (Though here's one example of porn crossing over that didn't work: Jameson was to be featured in a line of Pony shoe ads this year. The company has since pulled the ads in favor of a different style launch next spring.)

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NBC Live Vote

What factor has most influenced pornography going mainstream?

* 4883 responses

Home video/video on demand

25%

Boundary pushing in films, music videos

17%

The Internet

55%

America's post-AIDS sexual dialogue

3%

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Survey results tallied every 60 seconds. Live Votes reflect respondents' views and are not scientifically valid surveys.

A porn producer and actor who's also making the most of his infamy, Adam Glasser (a.k.a. Seymour Butts) stars in "Family Business," Showtime's reality show about the daily life of a porn mogul. "This series is an opportunity to show people that the industry is filled with normal people," says Glasser, whose program also features his mother, who does his company's accounting, and his (much) older cousin Stevie, Glasser's right-hand man. The mini-mogul thinks America's been ready to have porn stars in their home on a weekly basis for a while now. "It's where we're at," he says. "Plus, to me, it's about demand. Why would somebody put a porn star on a snowboard unless they thought it would sell a lot of snowboards and get them a lot of publicity? They're not going to do it just to get clobbered by the Moral Majority."

Of course, some people don't see any of this as positive. "When you smoke pot as a kid, or get someone to buy you beer, you know it's wrong. Same with porn," says Bruce Taylor, president and chief counsel for the National Law Center for Children and Families. "If you stop thinking it's wrong, it stops affecting your values system. That's dangerous." He says the media

mistakenly falls in love with people like Seymour Butts and Larry Flynt, the Hustler magazine publisher played charmingly by Woody Harrelson in 1996's "The People vs. Larry Flynt." "Seeing bad guys on the screen is part of our culture," says Taylor, a former federal anti-porn prosecutor. "They've got money and power and fancy clothes and big castles. But I think most Americans can see through it."

But what will we see next? How about porn stars in prime time? Paul Fishbein, founder and president of The Adult Video News Media Network, says he's had meetings about taking the AVN Awards show—a gala event dubbed "the Oscars of porn"—to television. In years past, the ceremony has been broadcast, but only on the Playboy Channel. "Now," he says, "we're talking about mainstream TV." As long as Joan and Melissa aren't on the red carpet. That's a merger of porn and pop culture no one cares to see.

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