



Would you dare indulge in a little show-and-tell or explore your exhibitionist side? Marie Claire examines the world of amateur porn and questions whether it's more risky than risqué. **TEXT RENYILIM**

Once upon a time, there was a couple—let's call them Pam and Tom (and perhaps you've already guessed where this story is heading)—who decided to have a little fun in front of their home video camera during their honeymoon. Unfortunately, the video was subsequently stolen and posted online by an internet pornography company. The movie quickly reached the height of notoriety and generated a profit of over USD 80 million, of which the mortified couple only received a fraction when they took the company to court over invasion of privacy.

The 1998 incident involving Pamela Anderson and her then-husband Tommy Lee is arguably the most famous sex tape scandal to have emerged in the public sphere. You would have thought it would be a lesson to them and to other people not to risk recording any strictly adult action that they didn't want viewed by anyone else, but no—Paris Hilton swiftly followed suit with *1 Night in Paris*, as did Hollywood bad boy Colin Farrell, reality

screen queen Kim Kardashian, and (gasp!) former US Senator John Edwards. Tut tut.

Of course, being celebrities, you could argue that everyone wants a piece of them, especially if it's X-rated. As for us ordinary folk, need we be so paranoid about having something similar happen to us? And who does that kind of stuff for kicks, anyway?

Well, prepare to be surprised.

### CLICKS FOR KICKS

"One evening, I was exchanging flirty texts with this guy," a girlfriend told me recently, "And he asked me to send him a dirty picture. I'm not an idiot—there's no way I was going to send him anything with my face in it—but I messaged him an artfully-shot photograph of myself in my underwear. It was actually quite fun, especially when I received a picture back from him. It was also a little thrilling that only he and I would be able to tell that it was me in that photo."

She isn't the only one doing it—quite a few other women I know have at one point made reference to sending their significant others (or even fairly insignificant

PHOTOS CORBIS AND NYMPHO NINJAS



others) photographs of themselves in various states of undress. Some women are happy for anyone and everyone to take a look: numerous amateur pornography websites exist online, including I Shot Myself, "an erotic, web-based, self-portraiture project" where women can submit nude photographs of themselves for online display, while adult versions of YouTube allow you the opportunity to broadcast yourself if you want to try the full pornstar experience.

Amateur pornography has traditionally been framed within a narrative of controversy, scandal and sleaze, but times are changing. It's no longer viewed in mainstream culture as something to be embarrassed of—in fact, people appear to be taking matters into their own hands and engaging in the production process with enthusiasm. Photo flirting is almost compulsory in the dating world, while celebrities to the girl next door are getting their kicks on camera. In short: everyone seems to be doing it.

### CALLING THE SHOTS

From the earliest convenience of Polaroid instant film (enabling you to avoid those awkward moments when you had to get your photos developed) to the invention

of the Internet, digital cameras, camera phones and webcams, the tools to produce, record and share our homemade pornography are ready if you are.

"This is a movement that arrived with handheld devices and started since Usenet groups appeared on the Internet," explains Dr. Katrien Jacobs, author of *Netporn: DIY Web Culture and Sexual Politics*. "There is an Italian critic, Sergio Messina, who has labelled this new

## "REALCORE" STRIVES TO BE MORE AUTHENTIC, HOLISTIC AND INTIMATE"

fascination with digital technology and sex as 'realcore' pornography. These sex images are neither hardcore nor softcore but 'realcore', as they strive to be more authentic, holistic and intimate for the people involved."

Authenticity and intimacy are arguably the main attractions of amateur pornography—after all, mainstream pornography is essentially a business, and the performers are paid professionals. Ninja, whose blog Nympho Ninjas became vastly popular when he and his (now ex) girlfriend started posting photographs of themselves online, expresses a similar view: "I think it's the passion, and obviously, the reality aspect of it: two real people who actually care about each other.

"I think what is so good and beautiful about it is that the sex would be happening just as it is, whether the

camera was present or not. When I have sex, I notice how beautiful it is, and that inspires me to document it. With mainstream porn, the focus is on something different—it's not about the passion or the intimacy of the moment, and the actors wouldn't even be in the same room if it wasn't for the sake of documenting it." Many other viewers also refer to the spontaneity, creativity and lack of convention or choreography in amateur pornography, which some feel mainstream adult movies often fail to capture.

In the amateur world, Katrien points out, the concept of a singular ideal body type and a set view of what can or cannot be erotic falls by the wayside: "Some of it involves people exploring a certain fetish or a specific sexual underground, but it is also open to body types that were previously ignored by mainstream pornography, such as fat women or older people. It is not uncommon for people to get turned on by imperfect bodies, once they realise that their own bodies are imperfect or average as well."

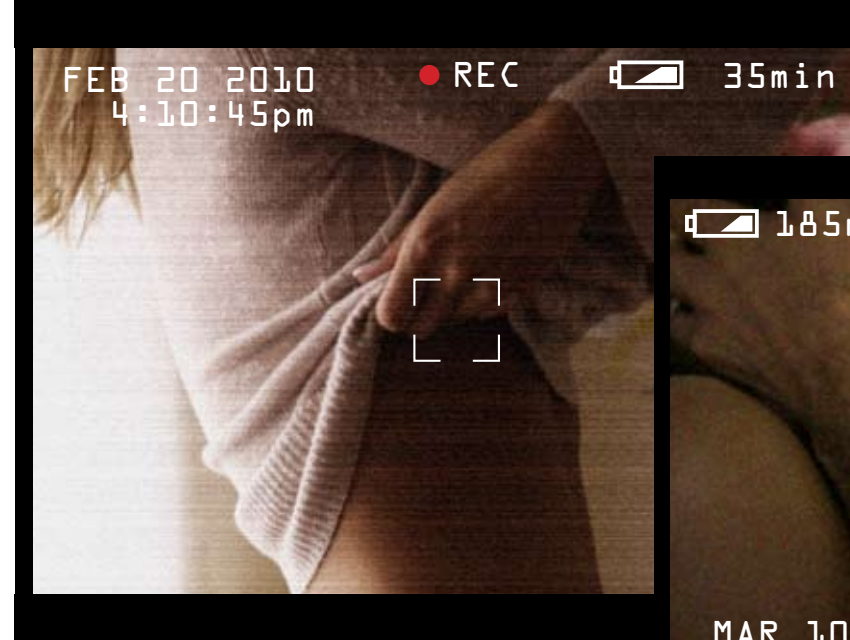
For those who decide to turn the camera on themselves and become the star of their own show, it can be a liberating and exhilarating experience that teaches you to celebrate your body, not criticise it. "It is not easy to stare at your own sexual body and its imperfections,"

## “POSTING PICTURES OF MYSELF ON AN AMATEUR PORN SITE DID MORE FOR MY SELF-ESTEEM AND CONFIDENCE IN DATING THAN ANYTHING ELSE I’VE TRIED”

Katrien reminds us, "But that is one of the aims of amateur pornography: to have a more authentic depiction of sexuality and add a touch of humour or art."

On sites which boast supportive amateur communities, viewers are often more than ready to respond positively to images they like. Having a random stranger compliment you on what an amazing body you have might make you uncomfortable in a face-to-face situation, but on the Internet, it can be a huge ego boost while allowing you to maintain a sense of security—you're not obligated to respond to them and you can keep your identity hidden.

The fact that anyone can submit material online rules out the necessity of having to be platinum blonde with F-cup silicone assets, promoting the idea that anyone can be desirable and attractive; as one online enthusiast testified, "Posting pictures of myself on an amateur porn site did more for my self-esteem and confidence in dating than anything else I've tried."



### DOWN AND DIRTY—AND DANGEROUS?

Should all this come as a shock to us Malaysians? After all, without naming names, this country has seen its fair share of caught-on-camera scandals. Remember the furore in 2006 caused by 17-year-old Singaporean schoolgirl 'Tammy NYP', whose antics with her boyfriend were leaked from her mobile phone to the Internet? "The surprise wasn't so much that she had recorded herself doing it," one viewer was overheard saying, "But it was because she looked so professional." It was a revelation that anyone with a camera and a wild streak could become a triple-X sensation if they wanted to (or perhaps more worryingly, even if they didn't).

As quite a few people have learned the hard way, the problem with technology is it can publicise what was once intended to be exclusive. "It's a completely different thing once you bring your picture to the Internet—it takes on a life of itself," Ninja warns. The same rule applies to photo messages or video clips transferred from phone to phone—they can spread like wildfire, and you won't be able to put a stop to it. You will never be entirely certain who's looking at your images and who might be passing them on to others.

Admittedly, the risk factor of amateur porn is arguably its main drawing point—it's the thrill of making public what should, according to social convention, be kept private—but Katrien acknowledges that producing or participating in amateur pornography is a risky activity, citing the example of Indonesian rockstar Ariel, who was recently sentenced to over three years in jail after an explicit homemade sex tape of him was leaked onto the Internet.

"It beckons people to participate and in this way, it can spice up your sex life or become a hobby. Of course, it is a dangerous hobby in countries such as Indonesia and China that have very porn-unfriendly legislation. If somebody finds your collection of DIY photos or videos and leaks them, it could get you into huge trouble. I regret this tendency when people search for other people's sexual pleasure and then report it. This is the 'dark side' of pornography. It has nothing to do with the original goals of amateur pornography, which is about looking inward for personal pleasure and intimacy in a new technological environment."

Therein lies the problem—if you're not savvy enough to protect your most intimate photographs and keep them under lock and key, then it's game on for any malicious individual with a penchant for hacking computers and ruining reputations. It means you're going to have to be extra cautious about who you lend your camera to, or who you ask to help repair your laptop, or else you might find that your audience has swelled from one person to a thousand.

### THE DARE GAME

For most people—Kim Kardashian and Paris Hilton aside—your career and personal life may not benefit from the exposure if someone recognises and identifies you once you've been caught in a number of compromising positions. Even Ninja, despite his enthusiasm, has remained careful to preserve his anonymity: "I have an entire life outside of this blog, and if people knew it belonged to me, they might think differently about me as a person or an artist. I've been very honest on my blog about my life, and my sex life—only as honest as I have been with my closest friends, so I am kind of allowing anyone to discover this information. But I do my best to be discreet and responsible about it. I try not to have the

two worlds collide."

When it comes to sharing your personal images with another person, your trust is at stake—you have to be certain they won't share your photograph without permission, and that they respect your limits. One woman became increasingly uncomfortable with one so-called gentleman's requests: "He started asking me for topless photos and kept pushing me to reveal my face. I refused." She later found out that he actually had a large collection of self-portraits from women on his phone. "I felt pretty used and duped when his friends started referring to his 'library' of dirty pictures over Facebook," she told me. "It made me wonder just how many people he'd flashed my photo to."

Another tricky minefield to negotiate is what happens when you're in a relationship and you break up. Do you collectively agree to destroy all incriminating evidence, or cross your fingers and hope that your ex won't get drunk, get angry, and then decide to distribute your photographs to your colleagues and family out of spite? It's something you need to think about before whipping out the camera in the heat of the moment.

"I think it is absolutely possible to be safe, discreet and responsible," argues Ninja. "Just be aware of the risks. I certainly encourage people to document their sex life, but I hope that you do it in a happy and healthy relationship. Even if you are not at the point where you want to share them, I still think everyone should experience documenting it—if you're interested, of course."

Would you then dare to try your hand at it? To dismiss amateur pornography as wholly unhealthy and dangerous would be the obvious conclusion, but if it is created and distributed on each individual's own terms, then it is no more and no less risky than other adult material out there. And perhaps that's what makes it interesting—that it celebrates difference and individuality, where you can be as coy or as naughty as you want, and where you don't have to be perfect to be sexy. In the end, the camera is in your hands, and it's up to you where or when you use it. **iii**