



[women's studies]

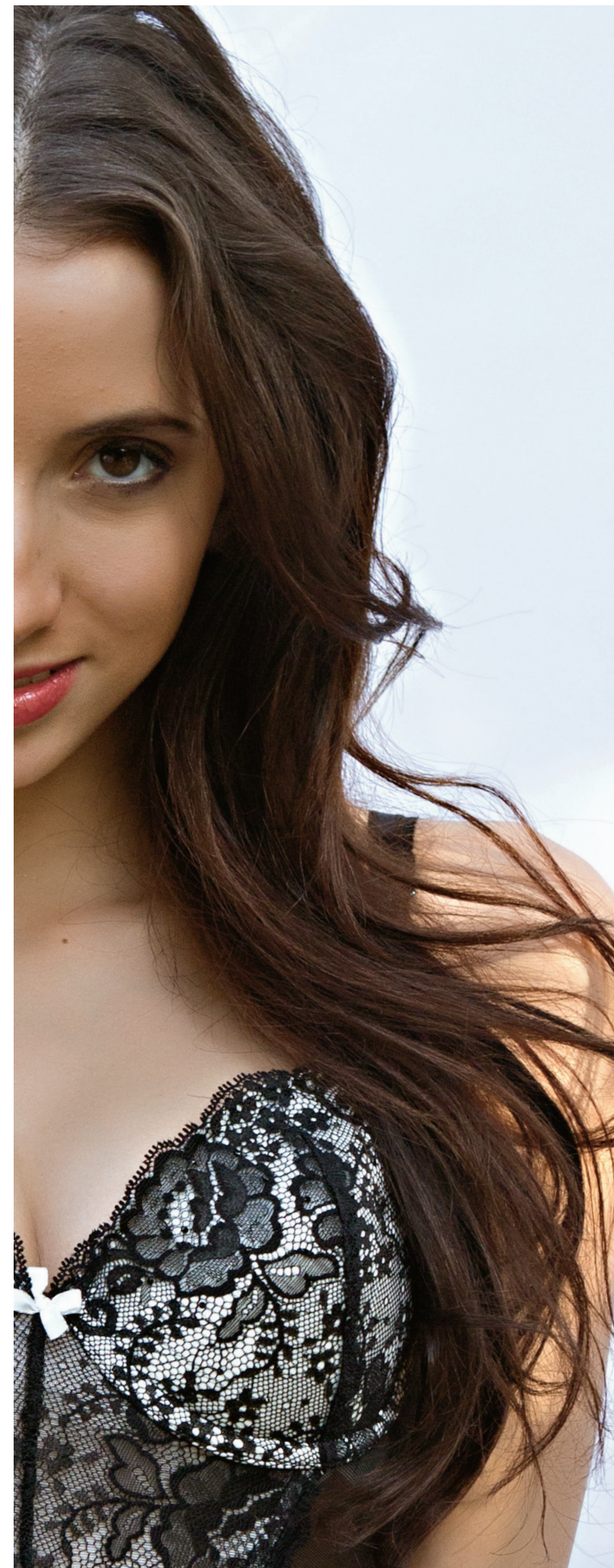
THE SCHOOL OF HARD-BOILED KNOX

Why did the revelation that a little-known porn performer was a freshman at Duke University make national headlines? Besides the obvious “sex sells” rule, society refuses to stop pinning scarlet letters on sexually adventurous women.

The scarlet “A” that 18-year-old college freshman Miriam Weeks/porn actress Belle Knox is riding to ever-increasing levels of fame stands for adult entertainment, not adultery, but the censure from certain quarters—including some of her fellow Blue Devils—has been as vehement as any described in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s 164-year-old novel, *The Scarlet Letter*. Unlike Hawthorne’s heroine, however, who refused to explain herself or point a finger at the person who should have shared in her disgrace, Knox is defending herself in every forum that will have her. She’s even

signed up to host a new online reality show, *The Sex Factor*, which will pick the best new porn star from a field of 16 hopefuls.

And why shouldn’t Knox make the most of her sudden fame? It’s not as if she’s done anything wrong. She couldn’t afford the tuition to the university she wanted to attend, and her parents didn’t have the money for it either. (The fact that a career military officer, even a doctor, doesn’t make enough to ensure he can afford to send his kid to college should be a bigger issue than how Knox decided to fund her education, in our humble opinion.) Knox took it upon herself to earn as much money as possible as





quickly as possible, legally no less—not an easy feat for a teenager, whose usual job options pay minimum wage. She also managed to boost her self-esteem in the process.

“Porn has been a reclamation of my sexuality and a reclamation of my body,” she tells us, adding that her issues with cutting in her early teens were the result of her suffering from depression and a poor body image. “I have never once been told in porn that I needed to lose weight; I’ve never been told I needed to gain weight. I feel like my body has been completely accepted, and that’s a really beautiful thing. It’s actually really helped my self-confidence. It’s made me feel beautiful, and it’s made me feel that I’m accepted for who I am.”

Who Miriam Weeks/Belle Knox is isn’t easily classifiable, and that has nothing to do with the porn pseudonym. She’s a self-described libertarian yet also a member of the College Republicans. She’s a feminist who references porn star Sasha Grey and sexpert/former porn star/former prostitute Annie Sprinkle with as much reverence as she does sixties bra-burners. And she’s a “kinky freak” who enjoys getting choked during sex, having men come on her face, and getting a good, hard pounding. Knox explains the dichotomy this way: “Belle is my alter ego. I think we all have alter egos, whether it’s in the bedroom, who we go to work as, who we come home as. Belle is a fun alter ego for me. I am me at school: I’m a nerd, I study, I wear my glasses, I nap, I have intelligent conversations. And then I go into the bedroom or I go on set and I’m Belle. I’m flirty and naughty and dirty and kinky. I think it’s so fun and it’s so freeing to have that kind of alter ego, that juxtaposition, and I think that girls should try it more often. It’s really fun to have kind of a character you go into.”

The hypocrisy being aimed Knox’s way is less charmingly double edged, and it seriously pisses her off. “It enrages me that the people watching me, the people consuming me, are the same people condemning me,” she says, her voice giving away her anger. “It’s like I wrote in my article for xoJane.com [where she defended her interest in rough sex]: You want to see me naked, but then you want to judge me for letting you see me naked.”

So while Knox may not be the “typical” porn starlet, she’s as typical as any other starlet—since there’s no such thing as a typical porn starlet. She’s also not the only





currently working performer who's matriculating. Penthouse Pets Tasha Reign and Kayden Kross are also in college, and they're not the only ones.

Knox accepts that her story may have been deemed more newsworthy than those of other porn actresses because of earlier sex scandals at Duke, including Karen Owen's PowerPoint chronicling her sexual encounters with 13 top Duke athletes in 2010, and the false rape allegations made against the university's lacrosse team in 2006. Or, Knox suggests, her story might have garnered headlines simply because she's chosen to stand up for herself in the media. "Normally when a sex scandal happens," she says, "a girl gets outed, she gets shamed, and then she goes into hiding. We've seen it before. It happened with Karen Owen. But I refuse to be shamed."

Knox continues, "People don't associate intelligence with being sexual. I've shown that you can be both. You can be intelligent and ambitious, and you can be incredibly sexual and love being naughty. That, for some people, is almost unfathomable. We've been socialized to think that porn is a degrading, slimy, sleazy industry, and that the people involved are dumb and uneducated. But when I got to L.A. and started working, I was around many intelligent, down-to-earth, well-educated people."

Knox also feels as if part of the attention she's garnered is the result of living in a culture that loves outing people, from those who are gay or transgender to sex workers. "As a society, we have a level of disrespect for anybody who in our minds violates this moral code," she says. Knox is angered by how hard people are

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working to out her. "Imagine that your most intimate secret was being played out in international headlines," she says. "It was completely overwhelming, and I felt really vulnerable and really exposed when this attention was all thrust upon me."

Part of that is because her porn career wasn't her only secret. Lately, a lot of that attention has been paid to evidence that she used to cut herself. She explains that depression caused her to have little self-confidence and a poor body image, and to relieve the tension those feelings created she would self-mutilate, something she has in common with thousands of teenage girls. Knox used to cut her thighs, and the scars are still visible. She stopped self-mutilating five years ago, but says some news outlets have zoomed in on her scars and discussed them at length, something she found especially hurtful.

And while the past few months since she's been outed have been "mentally draining," she says she's never considered harming herself again. "I have such a great support system, and I have so much confidence in what I'm doing that I feel fine, and I know that I'm going to be okay."

Knox sees a lot of similarities between herself and Vanessa Williams, the first African-American Miss America, who was famously dethroned after nude photos of her, both alone and with another woman, appeared in *Penthouse*. Williams has been nominated for almost a dozen

Grammys, three Emmys, and a Tony, but *those photos* are still what she's known for. As our founder, Bob Guccione, said, "She's the most well-known Miss America in history, and she has *Penthouse* to thank for that."

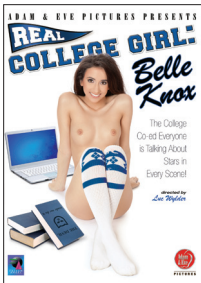
Knox is aware that she's going to carry the weight of her porn career for decades, but she's wearing her scandal with pride in hopes of helping other women. She plans to continue doing porn through college so she can save up money to pay for graduate school, as she wants to become a lawyer and fight for the rights of women and sex workers, whom she believes could use a legal advocate with first-hand knowledge of their situations. And she's ready for the unique challenges of her career. She signed up to spend her summer volunteering at a clinic overseas, but was rejected because, she was told, it would be "inappropriate" for her to work with children.

"I understand that for my whole life I'm going to be dealing with discrimination like that," she tells us. "As for my career, of course there will be people who won't hire me. But would I want to work for them? No. I want to work for people who view my experience as an asset."

As for all the vitriol she's dealing with now, she thinks it's all going to pay off. As she puts it, "I've had to use a lot of my studies on feminism and gender to defend myself, so I think that, in a way, this has been good practice."

Moving Pictures

You've read her interview and seen her photos. You can get an even bigger eyeful of the girl everyone's been talking about in her first films.



Real College Girl:
Belle Knox
(Adam & Eve)



Belle Gets Schooled
(PornPros)



Naughty Cheerleaders 4
(Combat Zone)



Teen Fidelity's
Belle Knox
(Juicy Entertainment)



Facial Abuse:
Missy aka Belle Knox
(FacialAbuse.com)

The View From Behind the Camera

Photographer Preston Geoffrey Parker gives us a behind-the-scenes report.

What did you know about Belle Knox before your shoot with her?

I'd only briefly read an interview with her, but she seemed well-spoken and self-assured. She knew what she wanted to do and was unabashed about her move into porn.

Did you have any expectations about her or the shoot?

I just wanted her to look beautiful. Belle was great to photograph. She gave her all, and was super-professional, extremely funny, and very outspoken. Belle has a huge personality in a small package.

You shot Belle in several outfits and settings. How did you choose them?

The idea was to photograph Belle as the girl next door and then to vamp up her look a bit—the good girl and bad girl, the student and the porn star. I found a location that was neutral—not typical porn and not boring, just a classic, beautiful home with a gorgeous backyard. I had an idea for the look of the shoot and styled it myself. Belle was open to almost everything.

You mentioned there was an outfit that Belle wasn't eager to shoot in. Which outfit was it?

Belle was on the fence about the cutoff jeans we used as stockings. The makeup artist and I both thought she looked hot, though, and she eventually agreed to wear it.

Belle said in our interview that her porn alter ego and the real her are two different people in her mind. Did she seem to be in different mind-sets in one outfit than another?

When she was on set, she was Belle. Perhaps when she is at school and away from work, she is someone else. While shooting her in the shirt and shorts, I made sure she was very girl next door. When she was in the lingerie, I wanted her to vamp it up more. I find that when a woman is in lingerie in front of a camera, she feels sexier and thus looks sexier. The girl next door disappears.



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A lot of your shots of Belle seem very natural—no makeup or excessive hair styling. Is that typical of your style?

My style is natural, beautiful, and organic. I love women to look sensual, sexy, flirty, and fun, and when it looks more natural, it feels more pure. I don't go for excessive hair or makeup; it's just not my vibe.

Belle is just getting her start in porn, having been in the business only six months. Did she come off as a beginner, or was she a natural in front of the camera? How did she compare to more seasoned models?

Most people think that when a model has more experience, they're easier to photograph, but the opposite is true. Even though porn stars are photographed often for content, those shoots seem to be very formulaic. When it's a *Penthouse* shoot, it's a much bigger deal. Especially working with me, it's a completely different process. I work hard at developing a comfort level with my subject so when we start shooting, I'm able to capture their essence. With Belle, it was easy. I connected with her over coffee and the drive to the location. By the time she was finished in hair and makeup, we'd developed a sort of trust, and she just opened up for me.

What did you discuss with her?

Belle just opened up and started talking. One of the stories she told me was about checking into the hotel she was staying in during our shoot. She's not 21, and management wouldn't let her check in without an adult present. The lady at the desk started asking her questions about why she was there and what she was doing in town. Belle told it like it is. She said, "I'm a porn star in town for a shoot." No bs, just straight up. She's proud of what she's doing.

We talked business a bit. She told me about having a 12-inch cock shoved up her ass and having to pretend she loved it, which she said was pretty difficult. Then she just dove in, telling me all about the scenes she's done. It was 8:30 in the morning, and she was trying to shock me.

What was your favorite part of the shoot?

During the shoot an ant bit her vagina, and she got pissed. I laughed so hard. She screamed, "My vagina was bit!" It wasn't funny to her at the moment, but come on, how many times has that happened on a photo shoot?



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SEE MORE OF BELLE AT PENTHOUSE.COM.



UCLA student
Tasha Reign
wrote a pro-
Knox article.



Bonnie Rotten
is not a Knox fan.

Dissenting Opinions

Not everyone in adult entertainment is happy to have Belle Knox as the face of the industry.

Not surprisingly, a number of performers initially spoke out in support of Knox, including Penthouse Pet and UCLA undergrad Tasha Reign, who wrote a pro-Knox piece for the Huffington Post. But as Knox jumped on the media opportunities being offered, she became a de facto spokeswoman for the adult-entertainment industry, which made her less popular with more established performers. The sentiment was, since Knox is only 18 and has been in the business for mere months, she shouldn’t be speaking for them. (Knox says she is always only speaking for herself.) One of the hottest performers in the industry at the moment, Bonnie Rotten, tweeted, “Why put a girl who knows nothing about the industry and is barely in the industry as the voice of our industry. Laughable! Laugh it off!”

The proverbial shit hit the fan, however, when Knox signed on with Pornhub.com as a summer intern and was photographed wearing a Pornhub tank top. Many performers openly criticize the site, claiming it has a history of offering pirated material, and say that the fact that Knox is getting involved with it proves her naïveté about the problems in the industry and the concerns of other performers.