

## Reflections on Creating the *Game of Porns*

by Anna-Lena Heid

There is not only one kind of porn anymore. Many successful attempts to revolutionize and reinterpret the genre have been made.

*Petra Joy (2017)*

### Idea

Before I attended the seminar “The Pornification of Culture”, I had neither a strong interest in nor a great knowledge of pornography. My idea of porn was restricted to one or two porn movies I had seen, a lot of “call me”-ads after midnight in TV, and an abundance of spam e-mails, I constantly delete from my mailbox. And it looked all the same: a lot of nude skin, genitals and penetration as far as the eye can see, and loud, artificial moans combined with annoying elevator music.

I was interested in what Prof. Olson would tell us about porn and the pornification of culture in the seminar I picked as one of the last classes in the course of my studies. And already after the first session, I realized that what I knew about porn was only the (malestream) tip of the iceberg. With every week and every little digression into the world of porn – and especially with Madita Oeming’s guest talk on Feminist Porn –, I became more aware of the partly huge and partly slight differences between different kinds of porn. Those differences can be found in every imaginable respect: production, contribution, distribution, reception... I was fascinated and decided to investigate a little closer into that topic.

Of course, I could have written a term paper on the similarities and differences between porn genre ‘A’ and porn genre ‘B’, but I wanted to grasp the exciting opportunity to hand in a piece of creative work. The idea for *Game of Porns* was born.

### Aim

My aim was to create a fun game that shows how diverse the world of porn is and, thereby, facilitates learning more about it. I wanted to include as many facts and aspects, which I have learned and we have discussed during the course of the seminar, as possible. Some of these are: different porn tropes we identified in popular culture; the dependency between porn and culture, law, and politics (historical developments); terms and techniques such as ‘male gaze’, ‘money shot’, ‘objectification’, and ‘consent’; pro- and anti-porn arguments, and much more.

## Phase 1 – Brainstorming

At the very beginning, I needed to decide on the different kinds of porn I want to examine and present in the game. Right from the beginning, it was clear that Malestream porn, on the one hand, and Feminist porn, on the other hand, suited my purposes very well. We often discussed the many differences between these two genres (the inequation of malestream  $\neq$  feminist/queer/alternative porn is a thing to be found frequently in my notes from class). For a time, I was considering splitting the second genre further up, as in Feminist Porn and Queer Porn, but, eventually, I opted against it and took ‘Feminist Porn’ in concordance with other scholars and, for example, the hosts of the *Feminist Porn Award*, as an umbrella term for all porn that expands

the boundaries of representation in film: more diversity of bodies, sexes and gender expressions, desires and sexual acts. Rather than espousing the same old stereotypes and scenes, especially of women and marginalized communities, it reflects many more types of people and pleasure in its films. [...] In essence, feminist porn strives to appeal to those left out by the mainstream as well as mainstream viewers, create positive business practices with its performers and reflect the diversity of desires and pleasures experienced in the population in general. (*Feminist Porn Award* n.d.: n.p.)

But which genres could I additionally include? I quickly decided for amateur porn, because I felt that it displays many differences to the other two categories. Especially with respect to the ‘media triangle’ of Eddie Dick we often discussed in class, I realized that amateur porn, in fact, differs very much: producer, director, (leading) performer, and audience can build an intersection, so that the triangle becomes a straight line. Having this in mind, I reconsidered our class talk about webcam porn, which again displays other characteristics. In contrast to porn produced and distributed as already completed movies, webcam porn is live porn. Webchats enable dual communication, so that the triangle can become a kind of circle. With the last category, BDSM, I had a tough decision to make, since BDSM is only one group of the billion of imaginable erotic practices. But since the umbrella term BDSM itself comes with a wide range of practices – Bondage & Discipline, Domination & Submission and Sadism & Masochism at its core – and also practitioners, I felt that this could be the kind of niche-porn that is representative for many other ‘exotic’ erotic practices that are around.

After I had determined the 5 genres, I had to identify the aspects in which they differ. Since I wanted to avoid to compare apples and oranges, I thought of essential categories every genre comprises, of things that are indispensable for producing a (porn) movie, and came up with 6 categories, that later became the Basic cards in each set: director, lead performer,

supporting performer, setting, plot and target audience.<sup>1</sup> By having the same categories for each genre, but ‘filling’ them differently, I tried to make obvious my initial thought: Although they all belong to the field of porn and are produced similarly (including directors, performers, etc.), the genres differ significantly from one another. However, I also wanted to take additional things, such as camera angles/perspectives, technical equipment, toys, practices, and other ‘accessories’ into account. So, I created the second card category: the Extra cards, which present the player with some ‘on-top’ gear.

A crucial part of this conceptual development was a delightful evening with good friends of mine, with whom I discussed the genres and categories over a bottle of wine – or two. I am most thankful for their help, not only because they came up with great ideas and put their fingers on problems I could (and would!) encounter this evening, but also because they advised, supported and encouraged me all the way. *Thank you guys!*

The next step was to think of the actual details, the things with which I would ‘fill’ the 6 basic and 1 extra categories in each genre. I started to compile a first list and very quickly recognized something: Not only because of my lack of an extensive porn knowledge, but also because I could only depict a very limited selection from a vast amount of things (possible practices, settings, plots, etc.), my game would need to get along with clichés. I would have loved to show how diverse every genre can be, to show that Malestream porn not always objectifies women, to refute the widespread prejudices that Feminist porn is always ‘soft’ and Amateur porn of bad quality, and that *Fifty Shades of Grey* is not a realistic (or at least: not an exhaustive) representation of kinky sex and BDSM. But presenting a small selection always comes at the expense of diversity; a pill I just had to swallow, I guess.

Because I also wanted to present the player with different external situations, such as laws and public attitudes that can affect the production and distribution of porn, I included the last category of cards, the Action cards. Since most external situations (can) affect only certain genres, they simultaneously develop the differences and similarities between them further. The difficulty with these Action cards was to create a fair chance for every genre to be positively (or negatively) affected. But once puzzled out, the positive and negative Action cards – together with the Interaction cards I created after the first testing phase – make the game far more interesting, diversified and unpredictable.

The last step in my brainstorming was to answer the question of how the game itself should function. I reconsidered a lot of games I know and finally decided for a kind of rummy, because rummy incorporates the idea of collecting and melding sets, which must

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<sup>1</sup> Here again, the media triangle was central to the creation process.

follow certain rules. The “Skip”-Card of *Phase 10*, which is closely akin to rummy, and the robber of the *Settlers of Catan*-board game acted as models for the negative Action Cards and the “Thief” as well as the “Technical Defect”-Interaction Card, respectively.

## **Phase 2 – Testing**

After I had settled on the concept, the amount and distribution of cards, and very sketchy game instructions, I printed a very first version of the game just to make sure it worked. I got my boyfriend to play it with me several times, each of us also playing two hands at a time to simulate a four player’s round. Lo and behold: the result was good! Except for some trifles, which I could correct after playing the game the first time (e.g. reducing the amount of extra cards, including the interaction cards, fine-tuning the game instructions, etc.), the game worked very well. So now, I could start producing the cards.

## **Phase 3 – Producing**

### Step 1: Card Design – Preliminaries

Firstly, I thought about the card’s design. It would be necessary to differentiate on first sight between the genres and also between the categories, so I opted for a color code for the genres and different symbols for the categories. Since I wanted to give a good overview of which categories still are missing to meld a set, but did not want to prioritize the categories by numbers (1-7), I developed the film strip-symbol, which also refers to the metaphorical sense of the game, namely that of producing a movie ‘from A to Z’.

Another problem I had to face was that of pictures: I wanted to include a pictorial element, but did not want to use real pictures for copyright and citation reasons and because I knew they would be too varying and heterogeneous. It came to my mind that I could add a visual effect, as for example used in pop art, to the different pictures in order to make them look more uniform. After watching some YouTube-videos on Photoshop effects that create an Andy Warhol- or Roy Lichtenstein-like style, and after testing these different effects, I decided for a modern polygonal style I liked very much. Adding this effect had the advantage that I could use real photographs as templates, but would ‘distort’ or ‘alienate’ them, which gave the (at times very low-quality and explicit) pictures not only a uniform look, but also an arty and classy touch.<sup>2</sup>

### Step 2: Material collection and texts

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<sup>2</sup> I am still not sure whether the pictures are alienated enough to ‘evade’ the respective copyright claim. Because citing pictures and texts on a playing card runs into difficulties, I compiled a separate list of links to all texts and pictures I have ‘cited’ on the cards. The list will be provided in a separate document.

What followed were many hours of quarrying through different porn websites for templates with the right size, angles, colors, people, etc. Unfortunately, it was not so easy to find naked people in certain positions who were not real porn performers. So I settled on ‘using’ (also) renowned people involved in porn, such as Jiz Lee, Greg Lansky, Erika Lust, etc., but giving them a different name.

Since I also wanted to facilitate learning about porn, I decided to give some further information or explanation on what is to be seen on the different cards. As with the pictures, I drew on real biographies of people involved in porn, which I complemented with other biographies or fictional elements. For reasons of space and in order to avoid the wagging finger or a too educational overtone, I decided upon short texts in which I would try to combine real information with humorous phrases or witty plays on idioms. Sex, in this respect, is of course a very thankful topic.

### Step 3: Graphic design

Because I had already created another game before – a Christmas present for my mom –, I knew that I could order fully individualized playing cards on the internet for an acceptable amount of money. So I downloaded the template document for skat cards from PrinterStudio.de and created a master document in which I put the different symbols, texts, and pictures I had previously finished, and created the final playing cards. Again, I printed these cards in low quality at home and tested the game, which helped me adjusting small things, such as brightness of the colors, font size, etc. Subsequently, I ordered the cards.

When the cards arrived, I had to discover that some cards showed white lines (‘Blitzer’) at the edges. Although I was very happy with the outcome in general, these lines annoyed me very much and – at least in my eyes – spoiled the overall impression. So, I decided to eradicate this flaw and re-order the cards. This, to my surprise, was unfortunately not possible. The customer service, that apparently only randomly checks the uploaded designs, let me know that they would not produce my cards, because they exhibit erotic material, which would break their General Terms and Conditions (AGB). I tried to convince them of the research interest and the academic context out of which my game arose and in which it will stay, and also pointed out, that their AGB’s explicitly exclude only those “images or text of obscenity, pornography or nudity” from production “that is [sic!] not artistic in nature” (*PrinterStudio* 2014: n.p.) and that my design *is* an artistic one – but it was obviously not artistic enough for them: My objections failed in their effect and I, consequently, canceled my order, because I was not willing to change the pictures they found

too offensive. What irritated me the most was that they were totally fine with the image of “Ty Titan”, for example, but wanted me to change the “Brandi O.”-motif. The only difference between those two cards, both of them showing bare-chested people, is that one depicts a man and the other a woman. This made me so angry that I decided to rather live with those annoying white lines rather than ‘expurgating’ the design, because I, personally, don’t (want to) make a difference between naked male and naked female breasts.

However, I also had a pleasant experience. By accident, I found an online provider of individual game packaging, which solved my problem of how to design and cover an old playing carton. So, after the devastating experience with the playing cards, I decided to invest some extra money for a nice packaging. For the logo, I used all the genres’ colors and tried out what would like nice, until I came up with the ‘star solution’, which I also used for the card’s back and the Jokers.

#### Step 4: Game Instructions

With the help of online game instructions for rummy, *Phase 10* and other games, I wrote the game instructions. After the packaging had arrived, I measured its inner dimension, so that I knew which format I could use for the instructions. For illustration reasons, I also included symbols, colors and other elements I had previously used in the game itself.

#### **Phase 4 – Reflecting**

Creating the game, all in all, was so much fun! I love being creative and I really enjoyed coming up with the idea, the graphics, and the texts. I proudly presented my forthcomings to my friends and family on a regular basis. They were absolutely flabbergasted.

However, I really underestimated the time it would take me to get finished. Every minute I could spare, I spent on creating the game. After all, I estimate, that it took me 3-4 times longer than writing a term paper of 15 or more pages. But it was time I wanted to spend on the game and I feel that the effort was worth it: I am really happy with the outcome and am surprised of how much I learned about porn as a cultural product in the course of the class and also my individual research during creating the game. I found it interesting to get to know different kinds of porn, the fine nuances that separate the different genres, and what people involved in producing porn think and say about it.

My disappointing experience with PrinterStudio really got me down for a while, but in the end, I decided to deem this affair as a prime example of three things. Firstly, it is an

example of the age-old, unanswered – and probably unanswerable – question of “What is art?” Secondly, it illustrates the fact that the male and the female body are still not ‘read’ equally and that the latter is constantly sexualized (especially breasts and behinds), regardless of how it is ‘presented’. And thirdly, it is an example of which ‘status’ the pornographic has in our society. My conversation with the customer service, thus, perfectly reflects what I have already learnt in class and by telling people what I am working on. Reactions vary considerably. Some are fascinated, others repelled by porn, and in order to talk seriously about it, I think we have to change the way of *how* we talk about it. Instead of censoring porn and whispering about it behind closed doors – guilty and ashamed –, we should discuss porn openly as a very popular and diverse cultural phenomenon worth talking about. Perhaps, my *Game of Porns* contributes to such an open talk – if only at a small scale.

## Works cited

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## (Re-)Sources used during the creative process

*A full list of pictures and other sources cited on the playing cards will be provided in a separate document.*

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## Appendices:

“Game of Porns – Instructions”

“Material, Templates and Works Cited on the Playing Cards in *Game of Porns*”

“The Creative Process – Some Images”