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Susanna Paasonen

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## Time to celebrate the most disgusting video online

Susanna Paasonen 

Media Studies, University of Turku, Finland

### ABSTRACT

It is 10 years since *2Girls1Cup* first went viral. This forum contextualizes the video within the attention economy of social media to examine whether this particular one-minute video, by now markedly stale in its novelty appeal, is relevant in terms of online pornography, social media or the field of porn studies.

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### Introduction

There is little doubt that the 10th anniversary of Pornhub (est. 2007) will be the most widely remembered of the online porn birthday celebrations due this year. The site has, since its humble beginnings as an amateur porn site emulating the platform principle of YouTube (est. 2005), grown symbolic of the era of video aggregator sites, the fall of pay porn and the ever-increasing, unprecedented centralization of porn distribution: the company MindGeek (previously Manwin) owns not only Pornhub but also other key tube sites with the exception of XVideos (est. 2007) and xHamster (est. 2007).

Ten years ago, it was nevertheless not Pornhub but the viral shock porn video *2Girls1-Cup* that more visibly captured the attention of myriad groups of internet users, and continued to do so for some time to come. While the video's 10th anniversary is unlikely to be a celebrated affair, it is one that these three forum pieces focus on. In addition to this introductory text contextualizing the video within the attention economy of social media, Steve Jones explores its capacities as shock porn while Daniel Cardoso looks into young Portuguese people's experiences of the clip. But why would this particular one-minute video, by now markedly stale in its novelty appeal, be relevant in terms of online pornography, social media or the field of porn studies? This is what I set out to outline.

### The classics of viral shock porn

For the record: *2Girls1Cup* is a trailer for a Brazilian scat fetish porn film titled *Hungry Bitches* (Fiorito 2007), produced by MFX Media, that features two female performers, Karla and Latifa, a cup and one compact minute of coprophilic play (see Declercq 2017). The narrative is as follows: the two women kiss and fondle each other; one of them defecates in a cup; the other eats the faeces and then vomits in the first woman's mouth. Lacking dialogue, the video is accompanied by the unabashedly romantic 'Lover's Theme' by Hervé Roy,

also known as the composer of *Emmanuelle's* (Jaeckin 1974) theme song in 1974. Shared through links to the now defunct domain 2girls1cup.com, *2Girls1Cup* was connected with so-called proto-trolling practices (Phillips 2015, 19) where users were led to open a link of shock porn when they had expected to encounter content of the humorous and titillating sort. The overall aim was to drive users to diverse states of surprise, disgust, amusement and embarrassment, and, in some instances, the recipients were asked to document their reaction on camera for future sharing. The reputation of *2Girls1Cup* was largely built on YouTube reaction videos showing the clip's content making people grimace, gag, whimper, hold their noses, cover their eyes and turn away from the screen. Accumulating over the years, these affectively animated reaction videos fed interest towards the original clip while remaining a source of entertainment in themselves and their pronounced, and often markedly exaggerated, performances of disgust. Fascination, let alone arousal, displayed vis-à-vis scat porn – independent of whether the substance was scat, or chocolate fudge as some have claimed – would have no room in such publicly shared displays of affect.

Although only a decade old, *2Girls1Cup* represents a stage now already past in the development of online attention economy and meme culture based on pranks. Around the new millennium, links to a website ending in 'nimp.org' were circulated through email. The link opened up a blinking image alternating between a rainbow flag and gay pornography on the user's desktop, accompanied by a three-second clip of a male voice amped up high in volume shouting 'Hey everybody I'm looking at gay porno!' The nimp would routinely freeze and crash the user's computer by opening up new pop-up windows with the same content much faster than these could be closed, and the sound card could keep on playing the file even if windows were no longer open. The prank's effect relied firmly on the social embarrassment caused by loudly calling attention to the (accidental) consumption of pornography – and not just any pornography, but that of the male homosexual kind during a time when online access took place via desktop computers, rather than with the current range of smart personal devices, often in spaces of work involving their own realms and forms of sociability.

The 2005 'Meatspin', a short loop set to the 1985 Dead or Alive song 'You Spin Me Round', involved a clip from the transgender porn film *TSBitches* (Anon 2004) featuring anal penetration while the partner on top spins their penis round and round in circles in a perpetual, endless loop. As 'Meatspin' plays, a counter marks the spins made and, after 45 of them, text appears stating 'YOU ARE OFFICIALLY GAY : -)'. As was the case with the '2 Girls 1 Cup' website, links to nimp.org and meatspin.com were circulated for the effect of shock, amusement and social embarrassment. The framing of gayness in these two instances came rife with homophobic overtones meshed with the overall frame of grossness that helped to cut off the content from sexual titillation while also demarcating the boundaries of bodies, desires and sexual acts deemed desirable. At the same time as grossness allows for a safe barrier of distance and humour, it in no way automatically forecloses or excludes a broader range of titillations, homosexual ones included (see Ward 2015).

So-called shock porn used in proto-trolling drew its appeal from bodies, acts and desires deviating from the white straight norm in terms of their age, sexual orientation, ethnicity or race. In addition to nimping and videos, trolling made use of still images, as with *Goatse* (1999), *Tubgirl* (2001) and *Lemon Party* (2002) – all examples of viral

pornography predating social media shared similarly to domain names specifically dedicated to the images in question. *Lemon Party* featured three senior men engaging in oral sex while *Goatse* showed a man stretching his anus and revealing a broad expanse of his rectum. The sole character of *Tubgirl* was a young Japanese woman squirting an orange enema onto her face in a bathtub (see Paasonen 2011, 222–223). As was the case with *2Girls1Cup*, the two latter images involved the blurring of the boundaries between the insides and outsides of bodies, while *Lemon Party* displayed elderly gay men's sexual practices for the purposes of humour and shock, 'rendering the (homo)sexualized, elderly, or overweight body in terms of disgust and amusement' (Jones 2010, 128).

The aim of circulating the images and videos in question revolved around the affective registers of amusement and disgust. As that which sticks to things seen as morally objectionable, disgust is linked to both figurative and material filth, such as bodily emissions (Cohen 2005, viii and xi). Viral porn content videos brought these forms of disgust together by depicting acts deemed as somehow shocking in their kinkiness, and hence figuratively filthy, as well as by revelling in things deemed materially filthy, such as faeces and rectums. If *2Girls1Cup* was crowned as the most disgusting of all, this was due to its display of excrement turned into nourishment – or even into a delicacy of sorts. Writing on disgust, the historian William Ian Miller (1997, 118) identifies eating faeces as an act so vile that it is hardly imaginable: 'People do not eat feces as a joke, even as a sick joke; what they do is talk about eating it or ridicule people who do eat it'. Jack Sargeant (2006) points out that sexual coprophilia is practiced in secrecy due to its perceived extremity:

Even the few that confess to enjoying 'brown showers' do not admit to eating raw shit, either their own or that of somebody else. The practice is considered to be too dangerous, too unhealthy, and too disgusting. Even amongst the radical sexual communities many find that it stinks of excess, as if desires and fantasies had limits.

*2Girls1Cup* clearly owed its appeal – and its degrees of continuous infamy – to the hyperbolic transgression of such limits, then, as its performers do not merely eat shit, but enjoy it when vomited.

## Porn and the attention economy of social media

Contextualizing the video, its production history and fame, journalist Marie Declercq (2017) dismisses the theory of the shit being fudge and argues that 'The horror of watching actual human feces being consumed by actual humans forever changed the internet, and gave us the classic reaction video genre.' The websites dedicated to *2Girls1Cup*, *Meatspin*, *Lemon Party* or *Goatse* may have become defunct, or given way to other domain names, and links to them have long ceased their intense circulation. It is further noteworthy that, with the exception of shock porn connected to trolling, pornographic online imagery has, despite its broad volume and perennial popularity, rarely become viral as such. The appeal of porn among users of all kinds is obvious, yet its public visibility has – independent of recurrent claims over its saturated presence across the media and contemporary culture more generally – been curbed to specific platforms dedicated for the purpose. This curbing, or fencing off, of porn has grown ever more pronounced during the past decade, marked by the rise of social media, initially discussed as Web 2.0. The community standard of some social media services, such as Twitter and Tumblr, allow sexually explicit

or NSFW ('Not Safe for Work') content, whereas many others, from the current market leader Facebook to YouTube, Instagram or Pinterest, do not and actively try to weed porn and other revealing bodily displays out from the data streams that users generate (Paasonen, Jarrett, and Light, forthcoming 2018).

The content likely to attract extensive attention on contemporary social media platforms revolves in the registers of humour that can intermesh with cuteness, be offbeat, vitriolic, heavy with sexist and racist overtones, nostalgic or absurd (Phillips 2015, 96–97; Highfield 2016, 17–18). Independent of its particular edge or resonance, humour plays a key role in how online content catches attention, spreads and prospers. Pornography fits uncomfortably together with laughter, as it is not routine to laugh at that which turns us on. At the same time, the sexual bents of others may be a source of great amusement, especially when they clearly differ from the normative palate of straight vanilla – as in the viral porn examples discussed.

Writing on affect and social media, Jodi Dean (2010) argues that a search for intensities drives the movements of users across platforms. From the perspective of the platforms in question, content that grabs attention through the intensities which it affords is valuable in its stickiness that makes users pay attention and engage. The visual economy of social media is elaborate, finely tuned, operates at expansive scales and speeds, and revolves around the imperative of capturing and optimizing user attention. As the mantra 'if it doesn't spread, it's dead' (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013, 1) has come to orient the operating logics of online advertising and social media services, content deemed obscene or offensive has taken a back seat to cat videos, Doge memes and reaction GIFs. Much of the meme production that has characterized platforms such as 4chan – the home of not only Anonymous but also Pedobear and myriad other strands of controversial humour – fit ill in the social media landscape as advertisers, as the key source of revenue, are likely to veer away from such content.

The anniversary of *2Girls1Cup* then reminds us that links to content published in order to bemuse and shock have been shared via email and discussion forums throughout the history of the web, also in ways unlikely to occur today. Memes, in general, live off their participatory possibilities of sharing, remix and modification, and their appeal is centrally dependent on their ability to amuse (Shifman 2013). If the content in question cannot be shared without automated filtering or peer flagging intervening in the process, the viral circuits will obviously be severed, to the degree that they can even come about. In addition to giving rise to the now ubiquitous format of a reaction video, as Declercq suggests, *2Girls1Cup* helps in mapping out the recent web history in terms of its shift to social media platforms and their strategies of content management, as well as the move of online access from desktop computers to personal devices allowing for the consumption of all kinds of content without the risk of social exposure. Shock content continues to live on in decapitation videos, shots of animal torture and forms of porn considered extreme even as growing armies of commercial content moderators are deployed to identify and remove it (see Roberts 2016). Like all viral content losing the stickiness that keeps it in circulation, *2Girls1Cup* has moved to regions of online ephemera as oddities that linger on in both data archives and the embodied memories of users: as such, it is unlikely to completely rest in peace.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## ORCID

Susanna Paasonen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6319-9155>

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