

Between Pleasure and Power: Game Design Patterns In Clickbait Ludoporn

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ABSTRACT

Despite its pervasiveness and prosperity in online spaces, the genre of playable online pornography, or *ludoporn*, has received little scholarly attention both in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), Games Studies, and Porn Studies. In this paper, we discuss *clickbait* ludoporn as a hybrid design genre bridging games and pornography as they are offered for free on online platforms. We develop a tentative taxonomy of common design features, analysing game mechanics in terms of the libidinal investments and sexual pleasures promoted to players. Our analysis is based on a sample of 18 games retrieved from three different platforms. We suggest that the design of clickbait ludoporn mechanics incorporate mainstream approaches to sexuality, intimacy, and corporeality with fundamental consequences on how pleasure is culturally produced, articulated and normalised. We close on a call for game researchers and designers to claim the space of clickbait ludoporn with transformative intent.

CONTENT NOTE: This paper contains graphic and sexually explicit visual as well as textual material. Hence, reader discretion is advised.

KEYWORDS

porn; games; play; ludoporn; game design; clickbait

Free online porn games are a widely popular phenomenon shared on the internet via suggestive domains like <https://playsexgames.xxx>, <https://www.sexyfuckgames.com>, or simply <https://porngames.com>. These sites contain long lists of cheaply produced games, usually freely accessible directly via the browser window and framed around sexually explicit advertisement. Said sites are also among the top entries for casual online keyword searches on “*sex*, *games* and/or *sexgames*”, implying that they comprise the first point of contact for people interested in playing ludoporn. Despite its inferrable popularity (see, in analogy, for free

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online porn and its commercial viability, for example, Tyson et al. 2016) and pervasiveness on the web, this kind of *clickbait ludoporn*¹ has received little scholarly attention. Given the steadily growing research available on the intersection of porn and games (e.g. Krzywinska 2012, Paasonen 2018, Apperley 2016), we found this surprising for several reasons.

First, as a free to play browser-based game genre penetrating the internet, clickbait ludoporn is a hybrid medium blending user interaction with porn contents. Nevertheless, ludoporn has been hardly mentioned in the context of “sensationalist rhetoric” around virtual sex in games (Krzywinska 2012). This is the case even though ludoporn is played rather than merely watched – a distinction hailed as essential by ludologists (Spiel and Gerling 2019). The formal feature of playability also distinguishes ludoporn from the popular gaming-adjacent genre of Nerdcore porn (Apperley 2016). Ludoporn requires a player to carry out a set of ludic interactions (however simple) towards a predefined goal. In principle, this would make clickbait ludoporn a prime object of game scholarly interest.

Secondly, ludoporn marks itself as porn through its explicit theming and its graphic portrayals of sexual activities. In its distribution logic, ludoporn mimics conventions of online porn sites with anonymous web hosts offering collections of clickbait ludoporn for free. This would suggest the genre as a prime subject of interest for contemporary porn studies.

Despite matching the formal criteria of both disciplines, clickbait ludoporn remains currently conspicuously absent from both games and porn studies. We argue that this absence is in itself suggestive about the kinds of social meaning, affect, and taboo associated with this kind of ludic pornography. Its abject status is indicated by the fact that no ‘serious’ discipline has so far wanted to touch it. This puts ludoporn in a paradox position where it explicitly provides objects of desire for players to interact with (Wood et al. 2017), while also being the least desired subject for game scholars to engage with (Müller et al. 2018) – similar to a general shyness of Human-Computer Interaction to engage with physical pleasures at all (Kannabiran et al. 2012). Hence, the study of clickbait ludoporn can inform us about current stigmas, fears, and taboos in game culture, technology design, and contemporary culture more broadly. As an unwelcome, yet widely circulated genre, a “brink game” (Poremba 2007), we suggest that clickbait ludoporn is brimming with critical potential. It has something to say “back to games, or something to say to society” (Poremba 2007).

This is why in this article, we explore the clickbait ludoporn phenomenon through two related questions: First, what are the commonly shared design elements and features found in clickbait ludoporn? Second, how do the technologies and mechanics of ludoporn construct sex, pleasure, power and desire?

ON (LUDO)PORN

We define *ludoporn* as playful interactive pornography. With this specification, our term is more restrictive than used previously (e.g., in Pedercini 2013). The overall genre contains a broad set of games ranging from commercially produced titles (e.g., *My Forest Home*, *Faulty Apprentice*) via artistic explorations (e.g., *Awkward Sex* (Riva 2013), *Queer Power* (Pedercini 2013), *Lapis* (Kelley 2013)) to freely available browser games (as the ones we discuss here). The latter are often aggregated in platforms offering a large collection of sex-themed mini games surrounded by advertisement for commercial (ludo)porn or sexwork. We specify these games as *clickbait ludoporn* since the platforms are conceptualised as an

entry point intended to eventually lure players into engaging further with paid content.

Within Porn Studies, porn demarcates the distinction between low and high culture, e.g. the difference between artistic and “debased” versions of nudity (Attwood 2002). This distinction sits more uncomfortable with the context of videogames and their inherited stigma as a low entertainment media (Williams 2003). The scholarly silence around clickbait ludoporn suggests that “debased”, taboo versions of play exist here too, despite the tendency that game scholars focus on “good” playful objects, positive impacts (Granic et al. 2014) and learning (Bellotti et al. 2009, even in relation to sex, see Wood et al. 2015).

Nevertheless, pornographic features in games have received some attention in games scholarship, including the history and aesthetics of interactive porn since the Atari era (Brathwaite 2006; D. Brown 2008; Krzywinska 2012; Mills 2015; Payne and Alilunas 2016). Such research has especially documented the sensationalist, moralising discourse around sex in games as it relates to specific titles or scandals, like the Hot Coffee mod in *Grand Theft Auto* (Brathwaite 2006; D. Brown 2008). At various points, it has also been suggested that sex is a fringe phenomenon in game design, e.g. Krzywinska 2012 underlining the rarity of games which use sex explicitly. On the other hand, Krzywinska 2012 also contends that defining sexual explicitness in via game mechanics can be problematic since “sex is more complex than an “act” and that it might be regarded in ways other than as governed by a quantifiable drive.”. Grace’s content analysis of affection mechanics in games signals the importance of looking more specifically at the relationships between larger cultural contexts, game mechanics, and player experiences (Grace 2013).

This passage indicates that interactive porn as mechanical, goal-oriented, and quantifiable (Pedercini 2013) is not appreciated as a legitimate form of sexual expression. Rather, Krzywinska hopes that the “democratization of the tools used to make digital games results in greater diversity in the way they treat sex” (Krzywinska 2012). Gallagher 2015, like Krzywinska, deplores the expressive quality of sex games, suggesting that this might be due to such games’ concern with fulfilling users’ wishes instead of withholding them. The potential of erotic excitement lies less in what games permit the player to do, but how they “balk, baffle, or obstruct” them (Gallagher 2015).

Besides porn as design feature, a broader range of work exists around social aspects of sexuality and play (Harviainen et al. 2018), including role-playing (A. M. Brown 2015; Stenros 2013; Waern 2011; Wachowski 2007) players’ sexual desires (Sundén 2012; Eerikäinen et al. 2014), and sexual playful practices at the margin (Harviainen 2015; De Vries and Mint 2011), re-appropriation of sexual stimulation as input devices (Weinstein and Sarafan 2011a, 2011b) and queer artistic interventions (Harrer et al. 2019; Kirman et al. 2015). This focus on “libidinal investments” (Krzywinska 2012) is also echoed with a lens on sex as play which “makes it possible to take pleasure, and the quest thereof, as an analytical point of entry” (Paasonen 2018).

When it comes to Game Studies more broadly, there is an important body of work which has troubled epistemological boundaries around the notions of ‘game’ and related practices, including studies on diverse makers (Shaw 2009), players (Chess et al. 2017), and representations (Passmore and Mandryk 2018). Such work has successfully problematised videogames’ centres and their priorities by looking at its contested margins, critiquing Game

Studies’ tendencies to form selective traditions and canons, and by providing constructive alternatives in the shape of critical game design models (Flanagan 2009; Westecott 2013) and game research priorities (Ruberg and Shaw 2017). We situate our investigation of clickbait ludoporn as a queer curiosity² project in line with such traditions. We aim for the study of clickbait ludoporn to contribute to a collective effort at challenging hierarchies within game studies by focalising its least prestigious, ”debased” aspects (Brophy 2010).

Overall, what we find in current porn and games scholarship is a vibrant interest in sex (in) games leading to nuanced explorations of expressiveness, critical articulations of pleasure and playful engagements with sex toys as input devices. Dedicated work discusses the potential of ludoporn for the design of sex-positive, transformative, novel, and self-determined experiences—mainly within artistic settings. However, previous work so far has (beyond few exceptions, e.g., Pedercini 2013) largely set aside deeper investigations in clickbait ludoporn. In this space, we provide a threefold contribution: 1) a descriptive analysis of game design features in clickbait ludoporn, a genre at the margins of ludic sex, combined with 2) a critical discussion on how pleasure is articulated through the genre which we then augment with 3) considerations on the potential for transformative design in this space.

CORPUS

Our sample includes games from three websites which we selected due to their explicit URLs; <https://porngames.com>, <https://www.sexyfuckgames.com>, and <https://playsexgames.xxx>. All of them are top entries on popular search engines when searching for ’sex’, ’games’ and/or ’sexgames’. For each website, we narrowed down the search to categories suggesting popularity among users. These were, respectively, “top rated” (playsexgames.xxx), “sexiest games” (sexyfuckgames.com), and “popular” (porngames.com). For each of these categories, we collected the first six games on display upon our first visit in July 2019³. Note that most games were available at more than one platform, however, they were ranked differently. Occasionally, when a game turned out to be unavailable, we collected the next game in line, arriving at 18 titles in total. We included one further game from sexyfuckgames.com as it seemed to offer a unique set of play features, and excluded one from playsexgames.xxx as a duplicate.

Two of the chosen websites seemingly provide statistics on popularity ratings along “sexiness” (sexyfuckgames.com) and views (playsexgames.xxx). In Table 1, we illustrate the numeric values the platforms offer to rank the games, which point to a significant audience⁵. Rather than provide a comprehensive picture of the entirety of ludoporn, the aim of this corpus is to create a suitable starting point from which we perform a close reading of popular contents indicative of larger trends in this genre (see methodology section below).

While all platforms contain advertisements for paid (ludo)porn and sex work content, some games are developed or commissioned directly (e.g., *Totem Pole* occasionally produces games for porngames.com) or offer separate dedicated websites with extending offers. For example, holdemstripem.com or nicky.xxx specifically provide the opportunity to pay for online interaction with sex workers, thesexgame.com (largely producing narratives slapped onto a set of porn clips) distributes more involved porn content on their website. *3D Fuck House* and *Meet and Fuck Games* distribute lower quality or shorter games on free websites while supplying higher quality (and for pay) games in alternative, dedicated venues.

| Source | Title | Rating | Engagements | Studio/Creator |
|--------|-----------------------------|--------------|---------------|------------------------|
| SFG | Strip Poker With Aleska | 89% positive | 1763 votes | holdemstripem.com |
| | A date with Nicole | 90% positive | 3766 votes | Nicky.xxx |
| | Gardevoir’s Embrace | 90% positive | 2215 votes | EroPharao |
| | Harley Quinn Arkham ASSylum | 90% positive | 2001 votes | AE Collaboration |
| | Rainbow Round | 90% positive | 2407 votes | Fatelogic |
| | Super DeepThroat | 90% positive | 1246 votes | unknown |
| | Fuck The Plumber | 89% positive | 3193 votes | gamesofdesire.com |
| PG | Tales of Steam | n.a. | n.a. | Totem Pole |
| | Super Swingers | n.a. | n.a. | thesexgame.com |
| | Kick-Ass Girl | n.a. | n.a. | porngames.com |
| | Whore Island | n.a. | n.a. | thesexgame.com |
| | Hot Beaches | n.a. | n.a. | Totem Pole |
| | Double Tunnel | n.a. | n.a. | thesexgame.com |
| PSG | UFO | 3.5/5 | 616,045 views | 3D Fuck House |
| | Digital Adventure | 3.5/5 | 550,730 views | gamesofdesire.com |
| | Mutant Leopard Man | 3.5/5 | 535,695 views | 3D Fuck House |
| | Get Laid with Jasmine | 3.5/5 | 575,739 views | Meet and Fuck Games |
| | Huntress of Souls | 4.5/5 | 963,469 views | StudioFOW ⁴ |

Table 1: Popularity of the chosen games. SFG (sexyfuckgames.com); PG (porngames.com); PSG (playsexgames.xxx)

We also found that some games are commercially viable through separate revenue streams managed by independent developers. For example, *StudioFOW* funds games on kickstarter. Their recent game *Subverse* has received 1.6 million British Pounds in funding (from more than 58.000 backers with a goal of 100.000 BP)⁶. Individual creators discuss their content on newgrounds.com (*EroPharao* with 7.9k fans⁷, *Fatelogic* with 12k fans⁸) or run a *Patreon* crowdfunding profile. (*Fatelogic* is supported by 190 patreons donating a sum of 321\$/month⁹). Hence, we observe a community of independent auteurs actively soliciting regular payment from a vibrant player community while understanding their works as crafts (in line with Westecott 2013).

The games in our corpus come from a broad range of production contexts that span across different forms of commercial viability and creation. As we discuss below, they also cover a broad range of game types allowing us to identify common design features within click-bait ludoporn and further draw out the potentials for transformative, sex-positive design interventions in this space.

METHODOLOGY

In the present study, we analysed 18 games to discuss the emergent design properties of clickbait ludoporn. Our analysis focused both on the gameplay text in isolation, as well as paratextual elements, such as the composition of the websites hosting clickbait ludoporn. We expected that, in conjunction, these elements would allow us to explore some of the defining features and "game feel" (Swink 2008) of this genre.

Our methodology is inspired by third wave Porn Studies' "close analysis of pornographic texts as texts" (Attwood 2002, p.92). Paasonen 2011 has referred to this approach as *focalization*, the observation of sensations, thoughts, and perceptions pornographic texts inscribe. To do so, we conducted "close playings" (Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum 2011) of ludoporn texts, ascertaining what they do to move bodies (Dyer 1999). We then critically analyse our findings along notions of pleasure and players to identify potential avenues for transformative design opportunities in this space. This perspective continues the study of porn in relationship to feminisms and the public sphere (Lumby 1997), and investigates the interrelation between notions of porn and technological development (l. o. l. 1999).

In making sense of the games, we do so from a first-person position (Lepselter 1999) as queer researchers and our respective affective involvement during play (Sundén 2012). Porn in general, and ludoporn in particular, requires the consideration of players' hands-on interaction with a computer (Spiel and Gerling 2019). When identifying design patterns in the sample, we consider our capacity for double physical engagement, as well as other players' potential interest in switching attention between computer hardware and the human body. However, this also means that we have to acknowledge a difference in how we expect common players to interact with the game (in search of pleasurable experience) and our discomfort in playing these games as queer scholars who found them deeply problematic and lacking connection to our personal pleasure preferences. That said, our engagement was driven by curiosity within this smutty sphere and an appreciative interest in the potential of the particularities of the clickbait ludoporn design space. Subsequently, we epistemologically position our knowledge as situated and within a "privilege of partial perspective" (Haraway 1988) meaning we acknowledge the limitations of our position within a notion of feminist objectivity. Our rigour stems from deep engagements with clickbait ludoporn and the specific critical lenses we bring to our analysis.

DESIGN FEATURES OF CLICKBAIT LUDOPORN

We conducted an analysis of the 18 games and focus here on design patterns along paratext and game mechanics, first focusing on the contextual settings of play before engaging with the elements facilitating it. Both these aspects offer a descriptive delineation of the design space before we move towards a more critically driven engagement.

Paratext

In Game Studies, paratext has been used to refer to the range of peripheral activities and products which introduce players to a game, frame circumstances of play, and monetise player experience (Consalvo 2017; Rockenberger 2015). In clickbait ludoporn, too, paratextual features direct players' ludopornographic gaze, and monetise their attention through an assemblage of advertisements guiding players to paid-for (ludo)porn content, dating websites, or sex work offers. Hence, the locus of play is rarely the site itself, ludopornographic content is largely offered to guide players *elsewhere*, contrary to the interests of the majority

of conventional and/or commercial games.

Three paratextual features are shared among the games. First, they are displayed inside a browser page framed by three or more ad banners displaying moving bodies engaging in sexual activities. Unlike the dominant framing of mainstream games, there is no demand to focus on one particular game, scene, or source. Requests, pop-ups, the need to download a file or expand the browser to full screen continually disrupt the ludopornographic focus (Consalvo and Paul 2013). In this multi-banner assemblage, player attention is not expected to invest in one game or scene at a time. Switching to new stimuli more in line with emerging tastes or states of arousal are encouraged over immersive or author-directed intentions. This characterises the ludopornographic gaze as ephemeral, player/agency driven, and encourages task-switching. Players are given the opportunity to enjoy different inputs on a whim, in parallel, simultaneously or in quick successions. In this sense, ludoporn operates in an interaction paradigm more similar to social media than to AAA games, fostering quick engagements aimed at instant satisfaction as opposed to deep investments with long lasting impacts tailoring to specific experiences.

Secondly, we observed that all games in analysis are accompanied by a teaser text which summarises both premise and sexual actions. Unlike the common concern with spoilers in other media (cf. Johnson and Rosenbaum 2018), ludoporn paratext gives a full summary of what a player can expect. For example, in the game *Tales of Steam*:

“He was all alone until a beautiful naked girl walked in and sat down. He took a quick nap and she sucked his cock until he was ready to fuck her tight pussy hard. She give (sic!) great oral and she loves anal poundings too.”

Instead of preventing spoilers, this text reveals what actions a potential player can expect to happen between “him” and the “beautiful naked girl”. Notably, more information is given about her actions, desires, and skills (walking in, sitting down, sucking, fucking, giving great oral, loving anal). By listing all available interactions upfront, the game gives an priori guarantee that “he” (simultaneously referring to the in-game protagonist and the presumed player) is given permission to engage in the sexual encounter with the female character. Notably, this permission is given by a third-person omniscient narrator (“she loves...”) rather than through the voice of the “naked girl” giving enthusiastic consent (“I love...”). Finally, by using distinctly gendered pronouns, the description classifies the situation as a heterosexual sex scene, removing any ambiguity. While it is possible to disregard these prompts to unpack a more genderqueer roleplay scenario, the description fixes gender relations according to the conservative heteronormative formula of “men act, women appear” (Berger 2008), subsequently identifying the possession of specific genitalia as an indicator for gender.

A third paratextual feature is the option to share a game on social media. This feature points to the community aspect behind clickbait ludoporn culture and the already mentioned vibrant network of consumers producers, and crowdfunders online. The circulation of ludopornographic contents on the web, which happens in a more or less unregulated fashion, might also indicate a trend of destigmatisation driven by ludoporn connoisseurs proudly sharing and discussing their favourite experiences with others.

Mechanics

In an attempt to offer players pleasurable porn-themed interactions, clickbait ludoporn employs a range of design features of which we illustrate six recurrent ones in Table 2. These are text choices, dress-up features, sexual progress bars, cum buttons, mechanical sex, and narrative progression. Additionally, we list and discuss the significance of intertextual references in theming these interactions.

First, sex-themed *text choices* are a popular feature represented in nine of our 18 games. Text choices are used both in visual novel style porn, as well as a way to navigate full-motion video (FMV) sequences, mainly to introduce the game setting and characters. Text choices mediate player decisions (see also, Figure 2 (b)), and sometimes introduce the possibility of failure, such as in *Super Swingers* and *Double Tunnel*, where selecting an inappropriate option triggers an instant exit (e.g. choosing to go to the park instead of continuing an orgy). Another function of text choices in FMV games is to change between different video clips, e.g. to pursue sex with a different character or repeat a previously viewed clip.

| Source | Title | Text Choices | Dress-Up | Progress | Cum Button | Mechanical Sex | Narrative | Intertextuality |
|--------------|-----------------------------|--------------|----------|----------|------------|----------------|-----------|----------------------|
| SFG | Strip Poker With Aleska | | | | | XXX | | Texas Hold'em |
| | A date with Nicole | XXX | | | | XXX | XXX | |
| | Gardevoir's Embrace | | XXX | | XXX | | | Pokémon |
| | Harley Quinn Arkham ASSylum | | XXX | | XXX | | XXX | Batman Arkham Asylum |
| | Rainbow Round | XXX | XXX | XXX | XXX | | XXX | My Little Pony |
| | Super Deep Throat | | | | | XXX | | |
| | Fuck The Plumber | XXX | | XXX | | XXX | | |
| PG | Tales of Steam | XXX | | XXX | XXX | | XXX | |
| | Super Swingers | XXX | | | | | XXX | |
| | Kick-Ass Girl | XXX | | XXX | XXX | XXX | XXX | |
| | Whore Island | XXX | | | | | XXX | |
| | Hot Beaches | XXX | | XXX | XXX | XXX | XXX | |
| | Double Tunnel | | | | | | XXX | |
| | | | | | | | | |
| PSG | UFO | | | | | | XXX | Space Invaders |
| | Digital Adventure | XXX | | XXX | XXX | | XXX | Alice in Wonderland |
| | Mutant Leopard Man | | | | | | XXX | |
| | Get Laid with Jasmine | | | XXX | XXX | | XXX | Disney's Aladdin |
| | Huntress of Souls | | | | XXX | | XXX | |
| total | 18 | 9 | 3 | 7 | 8 | 6 | 13 | 7 |

Table 2: Characteristics of Ludoporn; SFG (sexyfuckgames.com); PG (porngames.com); PSG (playsexgames.xxx)

In many games, text introduces a game’s premise or the desires of the main characters, usually a cis-male coded *avatar* longing for a cis-female coded *NPC*. Often, a first person voice is used to externalise thoughts and longings of the avatar through text, inviting the player to imagine themselves and their respective desires articulated through this role. This is sometimes enforced by establishing an explicit link between avatar and gamer identity, e.g. in *Digital Adventure*, where the main protagonist is characterised as a horny gamer on the quest for a CD Rom porn game. This lures the player into the action by symbolically validating their player’s pursuit of kinky sex games.

Secondly, *dressing up* is a common way of modifying a character’s appearance, as in *Harley Quinn Arkham ASSylum*, where the player can choose the skin colour of the avatar and the NPC, albeit limited to a binary choice. Those limited options come with troublesome implication for the representation of skin colour in clickbait ludoporn (Passmore and Mandryk 2018). In *Gardevoir’s Embrace*, a similar mechanic is used to change the Pokémon NPC’s breast size, nipple colour (to green), and accessories mid-copulation.

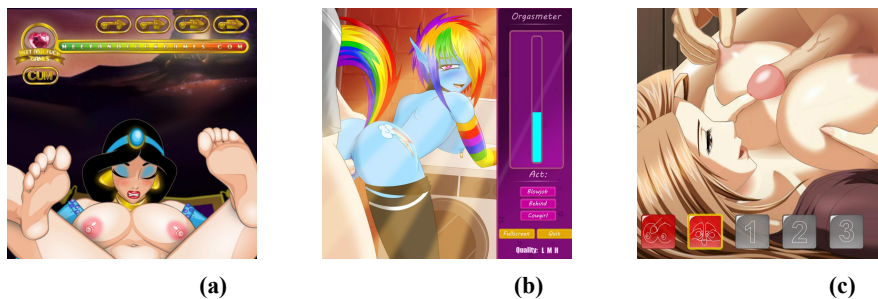


Figure 1: Stills illustrating different visual features, styles and controls from *Get Laid with Jasmine* (a), *Rainbow Round* (b) and *Fuck The Plumber* (c).

The orgasm meter as a *progress indicator* (see also, Figure 1 (a) and (b); Figure 2 (a)) is a design element in seven of the 18 games. It accompanies a series of sex animations and is used to visualise the avatar’s increasing level of arousal and matching the NPC’s projected state. Most commonly, the orgasm meter is used in conjunction with other UI elements, such as buttons triggering different types of actions, and sometimes dress-up mechanics. Most commonly, progress bars are displayed only during penetrative sex animations, and, when filled, trigger the appearance of a cum button, thus quantifying a specific ‘goal-oriented’ sexual experience (Krzywinska 2012).

The progression speed of the sexual progress bar is used to indicate different intensities of arousal. In all games where oral sex is an option, it is consistently modelled on a lower intensity rank than vaginal and anal sex, constructing it as a less pleasurable, potentially less desirable sexual act. Framing sexual stimulation in terms of a ludic progression arc suggests that the player work themselves from easy/”beginner” mode of light oral stimulation towards an hard/”expert” mode of high intensity anal sex. This treatment of sexual acts in terms of difficulty levels creates a progression of sex acts, where penetrative anal sex is hailed as most difficult to achieve, and therefore most desirable to gamers.¹⁰ The progress meter, hence, makes a rhetorical statement on implied hierarchies of desire as well as the coital imperative (McPhillips et al. 2001) with orgasm being articulated as the climactic goal and

core expected outcome. It also begs the question how these aspects of current ludoporn culture relates to toxic masculinity and endemic misogyny in the games sphere (Vossen 2020; Butt and Apperley 2016).

The *cum button* tends to show up on screen whenever an orgasm bar has been filled. The button always triggers a *money shot* animation loop by the avatar. In most cases, players can control the time at which the animation is triggered. One exception is *Tales of Steam*, where a player can choose between “cum inside” and “cum outside”. If the player manages to click either of these buttons, they are rewarded through a respective animation loop. If the player does not make this choice in time, the avatar orgasms inside the NPC by default, indicating a loss of bodily control, a presumably lust-filled overcoming of faculties determining physical autonomy. Most commonly, however, players are invited to “becum” the avatar by controlling the time until orgasm. Since an animation continues infinitely until the player decides to click “cum”, most games invite players to engage with their bodies until their embodied state of arousal might match the projected pleasure on screen and they are ready to click.

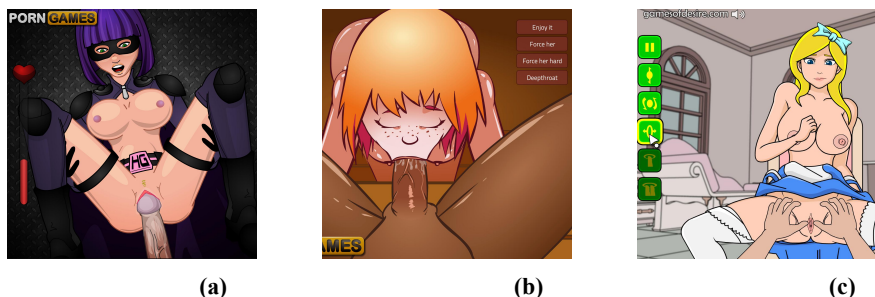


Figure 2: Stills illustrating different visual features, styles and controls *Kick-Ass Girl* (a), *Tales of Steam* (b) and *Digital Adventure* (c).

Using classical game mechanics such as intense interaction with input devices or repetitive gameplay actions framed as sexual occurs in six of the analysed games. Such *mechanical sex* is probably most vividly represented in *Super DeepThroat* where players’ only action is to change the position of a head to a penis by moving a mouse or sliding across a track pad, or in *Strip Poker with Aleska* where players need to advance in poker to fulfil their presumed desires. These are often games without a detailed narrative, while asking for more embodied commitment of players towards the game compared to allowing dedicated on-body interaction (see for implications, e.g., Spiel and Gerling 2019).

13 of the 18 games contained a more or less refined *narrative* that players could explore. This category operates on a range between character introduction only (e.g., *Huntress of Souls*), loosely tied together pieces (e.g., *Super Swingers*), or elaborate details (e.g., *Rainbow Round*). Even though the quality and length of storylines differ, this seems to be a prevalent design feature of ludoporn, particularly when they take on the form of exploring well known popular narratives in a sexualised context.

When it comes to *intertextual* references (Allen 2011), seven games play with links to other popular cultural text, usually by using settings and characters appropriated from existing

popular media franchises. In *Get Laid With Jasmine*, the player interacts with a pornographic version of Disney's *Aladdin*, where a big-boobed version of Jasmine can be caressed and eventually fucked on a flying carpet. In *Harley Quinn Arkham ASSylum*, a kinky dom version of Batman's villain Harley Quinn seduces a first-person avatar in Arkham. *Gardevoir's Embrace* re-imagines the embrace of the titular Pokémon in terms of an ongoing sex session in the forest, featuring the option to gag her with a Pokéball. In all these scenarios, intertextuality taps the collective memory of gamers, transforming nostalgic childhood objects into pornified expressions of cis-male coded sexual domination. Intertextual references thus indicate a "cumming of age" story of the normative gamer, whose taboos become a source of cognitive and sexual arousal (Mitricheva et al. 2019).

FOCALISING LIBIDINAL ATTACHMENT IN CLICKBAIT LUDOPORN

One of our pressing concerns surrounded questions of power and control. In our sample, spanning across three websites, the vast majority of games embodied highly normative notions of pleasure and climax. This is especially enforced through the orgasm progress bar, gendered (not sexed) arousal targets and patterns, representations (both those present and absent), and the cum button, which exclusively refers to the buildup and discharge of pleasure as represented through phallic ejaculation.

Hence, we now dive deeper into discussions around clickbait ludoporn as the genre articulates and conceptualises not just what pleasure is within the game context, but also who it is for. This critical analysis allows us to feed into deliberations surrounding design considerations regarding transformative pleasure potentials of clickbait ludoporn.

What is Pleasure in Ludoporn?

Ludoporn employs a closed teleology of pleasure. The whole experience, from paratextual features toward sex mechanics and completion are constructed with mutually assured experiences, from beginning to end. Spoiler mechanics service player expectations, combining anticipatory pleasure of known and selected ends with relatively linear click-based game mechanics. "Cum buttons," linear exhaustion of available sexy text choices, final states of undress, and/or escalating sex acts: Players know their point of completion and the game's prior to play.

In terms of agency, players are given relative choice over their speed of advancement, echoing previous critique on how sex games tend to over-service player wishes (Gallagher 2015). Though some games delay and frustrate completion, edging the player toward arrival at the cum button through cognitively demanding interruptions (as in *Rainbow Round*), most games from our sample jackhammer completion home. With no save states and low-risk buy-in, ludoporn from our sample is uniquely single-session, casual, and repetitive. For games like *Strip Poker with Aleska*, sex and NPC nudity exclusively exists to shore up engagement and arousal in otherwise familiar games.

Across all cases, sex and NPCs are objectified, used by the avatar to players' assumed desired ends, raising questions of around missing enthusiastic consent (Barker 2016; de-Fur 2016). Even when characters explicitly agree to sexual activity (the case in *Fuck The Plumber*, where the NPC seeks consent from the avatar, albeit fairly relentlessly), sex acts are dominantly framed as power play. The unidirectionality of pleasure facilitates a sense of dominance, control, and use. The disposability and consumerism of libidinal attachment is

established from game outset. This is epitomised by the ample use of pleasure bars, characterising sexual pleasure as measurable commodity to be ‘scored’. Completion both serves as a starting point for yet another quantifiable loop designed to cater to wish fulfilment, and as a way to earn the promised sex acts. The failure to fulfil external progress criteria stalls a guaranteed end. However, this end is only temporary, since any sex act can be reinitiated through a single click, thus rendering failure inconsequential. This low-fidelity, low-commitment buy-in for ludoporn games supports low risk trial and commitment. Following Maiocchi et al. 2013, players are interpolated to view and treat pleasure and (virtual) partners similarly.

Another instance of objectification emerges from the use of NPC expressions as ornamentation with little relevance to gameplay. For example, NPC faces and moans usually exist as proxies for progress tracking, representing pleasure and discomfort relating to player-directed choices. The pleasure of NPCs is thus used in terms of a feedback mechanism, baked into the reward systems that service the avatar. In ludoporn card games like *Strip Poker With Aleska* the sexualised body of the NPC is utilised as a supplement for the sole purpose of stimulating a motivation to continue. Close-ups and zoom-ins on individual body parts dismember (and en-member) situations of play. Thus, NPCs exist as characters-cum-sexobjects, instead of potentially equal, consenting partners.

Ultimately, player pleasure occupies the same position, again and again: sex is quantifiable, linear, objectified, completionist, and, for both gameworlds and characters, a disposable act of mechanised consumption.

Whose Pleasure?

Given the gender division of who is inscribed as agent of play and whose bodies are put on display, our sample reveals a consistent pattern in who is framed as the recipient of “pleasure” in our clickbait ludoporn sample; white heterosexual cis men. Considering the systemic under- and mis-representation of non-white, non-heterosexual, non-male game characters (see, for example, Malkowski and Russworm 2017; Passmore et al. 2018; Shaw 2009) we see this trend pronounced in the clickbait ludoporn subgenre. Where characters of colour do appear in our sample, they do so several skin tones whiter than their reference material (e.g. the skin-tone of Disney’s already white-washed Jasmine is further lightened). More options are made available for alien species and nipple colours than for skin tone. In wanton suit with Dyer’s reading of *The Crying Game*, the misogynistic and racist depictions from our sample, “function as a side-show for white people who look on with delight at all the differences that surround them.” The function of these representations are given a unique power in the context of pornography as a commonly private media: “More than other representations pornography articulates tensions between public and private behaviour.” Clickbait ludoporn’s norms racism and misogyny intercourse with the security of privacy, framing systemically violent depictions as safely enjoyable (read: acceptable) within the private intimacy of one’s home. With the player socially hidden and visually tucked behind little more than what is often a digitally represented white cock, whose pleasure and power ludoporn currently serves to is transparently clear. We read this as a function of socially challenged power (e.g. white supremacy, patriarchy, etc.) maintained through invisibility, as Easthope shows, “The masculine myth has always tried to perpetuate its power by feigning invisibility. As soon as masculinity can be seen as masculinity, its power is challenged; called into question.” (Easthope 1990: 167–168).

In lieu of diversity in pleasure, social progress, knowledge exchange, relationship formation, or player education, consent-based explorations or kinky curiosity, player dominance is prioritised over NPCs' self-determination. Options like idea play, bonding, kinship, or appreciation of a desired partner are absent. The omission of relations like these may be due to their involving critical self-reflection and self-control, which rely on cognitive executive functions often seen as conflicting with sexual arousal (Suchy et al. 2019). However, building clickbait ludoporn with omissions like these has implications for the experience it targets: One that is not encouraged to engage with self-reflection, trauma recollection, discomfort or insult by these norms in sexual representation. The targeted experience is one of being comfortable with such norms of self-centered, consumptive, objectifying, colonial control (Andrade 1994; Arvin et al. 2013; Loomba 2007).

In the majority of games in our sample, players are obstructed from failing in digital courtship or initiating with characters. Thus, mechanics, narratives, and representations pander to sex as framed by rape culture (Herman 1994; Attenborough 2014). Considering the transactional, commodified portrayal of sex as a disposable, consumptive act in clickbait ludoporn, sexuality, pleasure, and power are framed in distinctly colonial ways (Andrade 1994; Arvin et al. 2013; Loomba 2007). There is a low-fidelity throwaway pop aesthetic (Ross 1989) among many ludoporn games—containing themes and representations potentially “so bad it’s good” (Sontag 1964). The cartoonish, two-dimensionality of characters combined with the simplistic decision-making evoke an atmosphere of “base” lewdness borrowed from norms in cis-male-targeted pornography (Mikorski and Szymanski 2017). Nuanced fetish engagement, transgressive displays of taboo, and consent are eschewed for a more disposable form of pleasure. Theoretically, this lack of criticality—or comfort in normalcy—may reduce cognitive load through bypassing executive functioning (thus focusing neurological resources on uninhibited, non-critical pleasure-seeking, see Suchy et al. 2019). However, for those who derive such casual pleasure from context (Sylva et al. 2013) nuance, reciprocity, consensual power relations, and foreplay (Jones and Lopez 2014), clickbait ludoporn mechanics have less to offer. Its pleasure mechanics largely hit the right buttons only for those pleased by cis-male-heterosexist eurocentric and colonial sexual norms.

Together, the dynamics, mechanics, and paratextual features we identified show an unadulterated pleasure on the part of ludoporn designers in capital production. Compared to other games, most clickbait ludoporn from this sample is relatively cheap and fast to produce, featuring limited stock graphics, repetitive mechanics, and poorly edited dialogues. Across textual and paratextual levels, the overall goal of clickbait ludoporn is full frontal in its transparency, which is to generate money through ad revenue, and seducing players to purchase additional content.

Investigating the gender of ludoporn creators is a potential avenue for future studies. The libidinal dynamics we identified in this study suggest that this might be a mainly heteronormative white cis-male cohort, given that gendered differences in arousal commonly translate from creator to consumer: “[M]an-created films [sic] involved no foreplay and focused almost exclusively on intercourse while the woman-created [sic] film had four of 11-minutes devoted to foreplay” (Rupp and Wallen 2007).

Ludoporn’s paratextual assemblage of ads, pop-ups, banners, and buy-ins lay bare developers’ prioritisation of revenue production over deeply meaningful game design. Definitive

claims warrant further investigation, however clickbait ludoporn designs suggest developers may be leveraging a unique combination of otherwise distinct (even competing) psychological reward systems to accomplish this. Where cognitive studies of game mechanics show benefits to select executive functions (such as working memory and inhibition control) (Granic et al. 2014; Connolly et al. 2012), pornography studies show arousal negatively correlated with working memory and inhibition control (and positive correlations with pleasure and attentional focus) (Janssen and Bancroft 2007). Mutual engagement of reward systems common to game mechanics and sexual arousal are shown to globally increase cognitive load, attentional focus, decrease inhibition and encourage submission to impulsive reward cycles (Kane et al. 2019; Huang and Tettegah 2010). At least theoretically, ludoporn designs may be leveraging the combination of these reward systems to increase the likelihood of prolonged play despite repetition and low quality (Georgiadis and Kringelbach 2012) or greater revenue generation from ad-exposure, clickbaiting, and impulse purchases (Rupp and Wallen 2007)). The underlying cognitive effects from combining game mechanics with sources of sexual arousal are yet unknown; however, *whose* pleasure is centred by ludoporn is clear. Pleasure is articulated as a linear coital imperative (McPhillips et al. 2001) to (white, cis-male, heterosexual) presumed players, and, in return, is subjugated to profit-maximising modes of exploitative mechanisms luring players into quick satisfaction for profitable commercial engagements without particular care for said players' wellbeing.

TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIALS IN CLICKBAIT LUDOPORN

Lessons from the many design choices in current ludoporn apply to game design more generally: This is a genre in which supporting non-transactional, consensual relationships across design (between developer and player, player and advertisers, players and non-objectified characters) is fundamentally rare. The systemic lack of meaningful failure mechanics misses opportunities for educational and transformative experiences in interpersonal relationships; from obtaining consent to negotiating kinks and exploring personal desires. As with most criticisms of digital gaming norms, ludoporn characters need not be virtually collectable objects or colonisable achievements limited in gender, agency, embodiment, and skintone. Ludoporn's "throwaway pop aesthetic", in fact, potentially associates it with camp, whose queer principles challenge social norms by resisting aesthetic refinement, and insisting on transgressive irony (Malla and McGillis 2005). In our sample, this link to camp remains merely hypothetical, however. Our results show instead that current ludoporn conventions shirk off camp's queer principles. Precisely these principles, however, can offer guidance on creating alternative ludopornographic experiences in clickbait environments.

Similarly, popular characters (often from childhood) are placed in fantasy roles that, at times, shock and repulse, though never transgress or transform norms. In doing so, even those disinterested in ludoporn for sexual gratification are granted free play in focus on cognitive arousal, curiosity-sating, or nostalgic fantasy. Designing with these transformational aspects of camp in lieu of exploitative money-shot clicksturbation creates space for modelling sex-positive relationships, fetish, and the warm embrace of camp's critical queerness.

Current practices for selective reduction of executive functions in ludoporn is enslaved to developers' financial pleasure. However, inhibition loss is a central aspect of arousal (Janssen and Bancroft 2007; Au and Tang 2019). With theoretical ties to increasing player attentional focus, engagement, and immersion (Chang et al. 2017), the theoretical benefits from coupling cognitive reward-systems in gaming with pornography's sexual reward systems has

promise for wide scale player benefits. Achieving this does not require the “base lewdness” described earlier; there is an underexplored cavern for sophisticated smutty play, echoing previous calls for more experimental engagements with the genre. In Paolo Pedercini’s words: “This is such a missed opportunity. We have this medium that can really push the boundaries of what is imaginable and fuckable, and we constrain it within the rigid barriers of mainstream porn. ... Why can’t games be initiator of contacts between real bodies? Why can’t they be part of the date or foreplay like a romantic movie or a nice dinner? ... There can be video games that allow us to experiment with desire and gender performance. We just have to design them” (Pedercini 2013, p.176f.).

Although games research has coyly blushed from studying ludoporn, the mechanics, textual, and paratextual elements discussed show a host of potential interventions currently underdeveloped and under-utilised across both digital games and pornography. Player selection of specific ludoporn games through spoiler-like descriptions can readily serve a double-ended purpose: fully-informed, enthusiastic consent (whereby pleasures are selected, tailored to player interests and fetishes, without surprise or disruption) and facilitating engagement through anticipatory arousal or playfully subverting expectations. Potential applications of this design choice extend to games where control and consent over the entirety of experiences is both therapeutic and educational (Frazier 2003; Girelli et al. 1986; Resnick et al. 1999). Providing a wider, queerer, more inclusive series of representations, sex scenes, fetishes, and player options can open ludoporn’s closed *telos*, provide an exploratory spread of options for play and experimentation, and even cater to sex disinterested players (e.g. achievement- or curiosity-based players) to explore avenues of fetish and asexual play.

Presently teased but largely unfulfilled, wider ranges of possible interactions exist as optional choices without being required for game completion. Characters may have specific fetishes or interests which shape interactions and narrative progress. Design features such as text choices, rates of progress, narrative plurality, expectation formation and delivery, and intertextuality facilitate player-controlled arousal. These place otherwise variable arousal patterns and arousal preferences back in player hands. With social interaction highly correlated with sexual arousal measures, engaging players in ethically modelled sexy social scenes (Georgiadis and Kringelbach 2012) has a range of personal and social benefits. Given more diverse and accurate social-, sex-, and person-positive designs, clickbait ludoporn has great potential to combine arousal systems, lower inhibitions and increase impulsivity without the social and personal risks that can be present in experimental casual sex.

Where traditional porn binds viewers to selection of individual pornographic material, ludoporn’s design permissions cater to players’ self-service of types of represented fetishes and sex scenes; in quantity and pacing; in types, lengths, and limits of sexual activities (Mitricheva et al. 2019; Rupp and Wallen 2007). Though largely untapped, ludoporn permits queer experimentation, including avatar preference, sex partners, contexts, and duration of (a)sexual play. Based on our analysis, we imagine carefully designed ludoporn spaces in the future can support players in stroking their right balance between wants from sexual arousal due to pornographic content and cognitive arousal from game mechanics. Collectively, current mechanics and our outlined design considerations have potential to deliver satisfaction to a wider range of players with variable preferences, facilitating safe, potentially transformatively exploratory and educational pleasures hitherto unknown.

Hence, in future work, we intend to expand our discussion in two directions. First, by working towards a larger sample, we ascertain the robustness of our current ludoporn taxonomy as well as to more critically contextualise content and presentation of the genre. Secondly, considering the untapped potential for consensual, enjoyable yet appropriately smutty clickbait ludoporn, we will work towards a speculative design angle on queer ludoporn. This line of inquiry prioritises research through design along the question how ludoporn mechanics, aesthetics and pleasures can be transformed to serve currently underrepresented audiences.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we investigated game design patterns in clickbait ludoporn by looking at 18 online games and their paratextual elements, providing a first look at the characteristics of the genre. We identified six defining design features which, on a deeper level, negotiate what can be considered desirable, and what modes of satisfaction are deemed available and appropriate for players. Our critique was focused around notions of pleasure, how it is articulated, and whom it addresses. This allowed us to identify critical omissions and potentials to be tapped by critical clickbait ludoporn researchers and designers in the future.

Entering this space, we had no intention to moralise players or stigmatise engagements with these games. Quite the contrary, our curiosity and scholarly interest is driven by an appreciation of what the space currently does (combining cognitive and sexual arousal in intricate ways) and excitement about the potential that can arise from taking the space around clickbait ludoporn more seriously. We also deem it a designerly duty to engage with critical appreciation towards the status quo: “As interactive media creators, we cannot afford to ignore the power of gameplay; we can’t leave it in the hands of marketers, or groups with even less benign intentions” (Kelley 2013, p.148).

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ENDNOTES

1. We use the term *clickbait* to refer to ludoporn offered for free in environments that are commercially sustained by related advertising for pornographic and sexwork offers. For more on the distinction, please see the following section.

2. We like to think of it in terms of queeriosity.

3. As the entries of these categories seemed either very static or entirely random for each visit, we do not assume that there is a consistent algorithm behind assessing the games’ popularity. However, we tried our best to deal with what we were handed.

4. Tagline: “Not Your Average Smut”

5. At least as long as we are assuming the provided statistics can be trusted. This seems unlikely as the numbers are encoded as static text within the respective platforms.

6. See <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/990500595/subverse> (accessed December 8th, 2019)

7. See <https://eropharaoh.newgrounds.com> (accessed December 8th, 2019)
8. See <https://fatellogic.newgrounds.com>, (accessed December 8th, 2019)
9. See, <https://www.patreon.com/fatellogic> (accessed December 8th, 2019)
10. Rare exceptions include *Fuck the Plumber*, which treats different sexual interactions as equal.

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