

The Origin of the Faeces: Ten Years of *2Girls1Cup*

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It is difficult to believe that a full decade has elapsed since *2Girls1Cup* found fame. Although it was arguably the glut of YouTube reaction videos to the 60-second clip (rather than *2Girls1Cup* itself) that really 'went viral', the scale of *2Girls1Cup*'s infamy is remarkable given the video's taboo content.¹ Even if many would classify the original source of the footage – the hour-long feature *Hungry Bitches* (Fiorito 2007) – as obscene smut, *2Girls1Cup* is not strictly a porn film; it is a shock video. One distinguishing factor is that although they frequently repurpose pornographic imagery, shock videos are not (at least principally) intended to elicit sexual enjoyment. Accordingly, *2Girls1Cup* reaction videos display little evidence of erotic arousal.

Although *2Girls1Cup* represents perhaps the most famous incursion of scatological fetish into 'the mainstream', its notoriety does not indicate that such material is culturally acceptable. *2Girls1Cup*'s propensity to shock derives precisely from the recontextualization of *Hungry Bitches*' pornographic footage into a mainstream context. Typically, people do not openly talk about scat porn, let alone show it to family members or broadcast such discussion via YouTube. The prevalence of reaction videos may have thus disarmed those who viewed *2Girls1Cup* without any prior warning about its content; quite reasonably, such viewers would not expect to encounter scatological imagery without actively and consciously seeking it.

As a niche fetish production, *Hungry Bitches* was made for a select audience who find such depictions appealing. The original pornographic footage was not intended for consumption outside that community. Given that shit and vomit are common disgust elicitors, it is unsurprising that the acts depicted in *2Girls1Cup* would be considered gross by a majority. Although a majority may not agree with or understand the appeal, some people clearly enjoy scatological imagery. Thus, the material is not absolutely or intrinsically sickening. Yet as a shock video, *2Girls1Cup* is laced with intolerance for the 'abnormal' desires implied by the existence of such material. The reaction videos disavow the minority's 'disgusting' desires, acting as public declarations of the responder's 'normality'. This normativity is evident in the homogeneity of the documented reactions, which mainly consist of laughter, screaming, covering one's mouth, and flinching away from the screen. Again, however common these reactions are, they are not strictly universal ('natural') physiological responses to the stimuli, since some individuals are presumably aroused by scatological imagery. Yet repeated iteration of shock reactions re-inscribes the norm qua norm, bringing majority values into unified opposition against the minority, whose responses are not represented in the dominant cultural sphere (here, represented by YouTube).

The stigma surrounding scat-play is at odds with the revelry that accompanied *2Girls1Cup*'s distribution, as well as the volume of uploaders who did not seem concerned that her or his reaction video was a public admission of having viewed scatological imagery.² That said, the typical *2Girls1Cup* reaction video provides the responder with some defence against a charge of engaging with and/or distributing potentially obscene material. A shocked reaction is a declaration of enjoying the footage in a manner that concurs with and upholds norms regarding sexual desire. *2Girls1Cup* clearly has some social value since it was shared widely (see Cusack 2015, 48), but it is more accurate to say that the sharing culture surrounding *2Girls1Cup* manifests and anchors majority social values, while simultaneously excluding and disparaging a minority's desires.

Sharing such videos allows the individual to feel kinship with others who are also disgusted, and permits the individual to distance themselves from their own revulsion (concentrating instead on provoking similar reactions in others by distributing the clip). The public, collective response is a way of diffusing one's own shock, as well as any ethical or legal responsibility for circulating the footage.

Moreover, by concentrating on one's own or others' reactions to *2Girls1Cup*, viewers can avoid reflecting on the production itself (see Paasonen 2012, 208), including any implication that the performers, for example, did not attain sexual gratification from the scat-play involved in making *Hungry Bitches*.

My description of the reactions as homogeneous does not imply that they are simple, then. Shock videos do not only appal; they also evoke pleasure. Partially, this pleasure is egoistic; affiliating oneself with a normative majority can feel empowering. Other kinds of pleasure stem from playfully engaging with materials that contravene dominant social, political, or cultural norms, particularly those relating to bodies. Jovial reactions to *2Girls1Cup* abound, and that mirth is informed by collective anxieties about the threats posed to dignity by our physiological functions, by our pursuit of lust, or (in *2Girls1-Cup's* case) by both simultaneously.

Shock videos embody seemingly paradoxical sensibilities and conflicting properties, being horrific or upsetting as well as alluring or entertaining (Jones 2010). *2Girls1Cup* is no exception. It was wildly popular despite being 'unwatchable', and people felt compelled to share it despite commonplace warnings not to search for the video or declarations that those who had seen the video wished they could 'un-see' it.³ *2Girls1Cup* received an unprecedented amount of exposure despite being somewhat invisible (its presence was typically signalled by reaction videos rather than the scatological footage itself). It combines adult sexual scenarios with an immature sensibility insofar as the humour viewers found in *2Girls1Cup* is somewhat akin to laughing at a juvenile 'poo' joke. Its depiction of coprophagia and vomiting blurs distinctions between ingestion and expulsion. Watching the *2Girls* (Karla and Latifa) lick, chew, and swallow excrement activates an affective gag-response for many viewers (including myself), thus collapsing the boundary between on-screen and off-screen; as the performers regurgitate partially ingested turd into each other's mouths, I retch too. As Crosbie (2008) notes in an article for *The Globe and Mail*, '[m]erely recounting the video's content can trigger a gag reflex'. As an object, excrement is mundane (it is a universal aspect of everyday life), yet the reaction videos attest to how upsetting shit is for many people. *2Girls1Cup's* fixation on crap – along with the video's popularity – is at odds with prevailing socio-cultural embarrassment about defecation, and the dominant desire to distance oneself from bodily waste (by flushing it away). The latter sensibility is also captured in attempts to repudiate the authenticity of *2Girls1Cup's* faeces by citing Fiorito's (2006, 5) statement that he used chocolate as a shit-substitute when making scat porn, or even by suggesting that computer graphics were used to simulate corporeal expulsions.⁴ Such proposals indicate that some viewers seek to mitigate their shock by grasping for alternative explanations, however improbable.

Although one might find *2Girls1Cup* distasteful, then, revulsion ought not to occlude the complexities embedded in its content or in reactions to the footage. Shock videos are not typically subject to serious intellectual scrutiny because their content or the visceral reactions they evoke are presumed to be 'simple' or 'obvious'. As *2Girls1Cup* demonstrates, shock videos reveal much about normative values, the extent to which those norms inform our attitudes towards bodies, and the implicit ways sexual desires are policed.

Notes

1. Indeed, popular news outlets struggled to address the phenomenon; see, for example, Agger (2008), who declares that *2Girls1Cup* is 'too disgusting to write about', meaning that reporters had to instead discuss the reaction videos ('we must study the faces of those who have seen it').
2. It appears that no one has faced charges for distributing the clip (see Kjar 2011), despite its prominence and abundant evidence that the video was being distributed (the YouTube reaction videos).
3. For example, the description accompanying the video 'Reaction to 2 Girls 1 Cup. Kill Us' (Coreilly 2012) captures both sentiments.
4. The claim regarding CGI is documented in Diebelius (2017). However, Diebelius appears to draw much of her information from a Wikipedia article, and the Wikipedia citation for this point does not support the claim made. Although it is certainly part of *2Girls1Cup*'s mythology, I have not witnessed this particular reaction first hand.

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