

HOW SHOCK PORN SHAPED AMERICAN SEXUAL CULTURE

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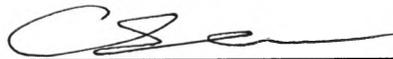
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HOW SHOCK PORN SHAPED AMERICAN SEXUAL CULTURE

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2017

This paper is about the lasting impact of “2 girls 1 cup” on American sexual identity. I analyze reaction videos focusing on three key themes; Fame, fear, and humor to understand how shock porn and internet culture came together in 2007. Centered around the creation of viral video, internet stardom, and a deep investment in American sexuality I focus very specific moment that allowed for viral stardom and the multitude of reaction videos recorded. The pop culture controversy surrounding “2 girls 1 cup” is part of a long history of abjection and censorship for explicit content.. I outline the widespread preoccupation and fascination with shock porn, as well as its lasting impacts on Americans’ sense of sexual self.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.



Chair, Thesis Committee

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Introduction

Shock porn and internet culture came together in a specific moment in 2007. "2 girls 1 cup" became an internet sensation and part of American pop culture centered around the creation of viral video, internet stardom, and a deep investment in American sexuality. The very specific moment that allowed for viral stardom and pop culture controversy is part of a long history of abjection and censorship for explicit content. In watching reaction videos, I identify three key themes: fame, fear, and humor. These themes were instrumental in shaping reception and reaction videos, shoring up "2 girls 1 cup's" place as part of American sexual culture. Using an interdisciplinary approach, I aim to understand "2 girls 1 cup" as part of the preoccupation and fascination with shock porn as well as its lasting impacts on American sexual identity. "2 girls 1 cup" needs to be understood in relation to the rise of YouTube and video sharing sites, the internet being a source of news and entertainment, and America's need to connect with something shocking.

While this video does not fall into normative ideas of pornography, I choose not to exclude "2 girls 1 cup" from the category of porn. While many scholars do not classify "2 girls 1 cup" as a pornographic film, instead calling it a work of shock and torture porn, this classification undoes the intent of the creator and the widespread reception of "2 girls 1 cup." In its exclusion from pornography, scholars do a disservice to non-normative interests and to pop culture reception, where "2 girls 1 cup" was discussed as pornography for both good and bad. Further, if I choose to understand "2 girls 1 cup" outside of the scope of pornography, I am reinforcing American cultural values that I'm

attempting to analyze. Those values are defined by the cis het white desire for homeownership, 2.5 kids, and very normal sex.

“2 girls 1 cup” is the graphic trailer for the full-length film *Hungry Bitches*, a fetish scat pornographic film. Because of its explicit nature, the number of times “2 girls 1 cup” has been viewed is incalculable, but a website registered in 2015 featuring only the clip has more than 7000 comments. I describe the video in detail in the following paragraph.

The video starts with two women, one white, the other black, kissing emphatically when the black woman begins to kiss and suck on the breasts of the white woman. The scene cuts, and we see the white woman hold a pint glass while the black woman defecates into it until the cup runneth over. The scene cuts again and we see the women’s faces close-up licking and eating the feces. The scene cuts yet again and the camera is close-up on the white woman playing with the feces in her mouth. The next cut is a close shot of the women making out again with the feces in their mouths. Next, we cut to the black woman holding the cup while the white woman forces herself to vomit onto the cup of shit, and the black woman licking it. The next cut takes us to a shot of both women, the white woman squatting pants-less on the floor and the black woman standing, also pants-less, above her, vomiting into her open, waiting mouth. The roles switch in the next cut, allowing the camera to push in on the women’s faces and torsos. The final cut is the black woman with feces overflowing from her mouth and the white woman eating it. A classical song called “Lover’s Theme” by composer Hervé Roy plays for the duration of the video.

This film became a viral video sensation, spawning a host of reaction videos, comedic parodies, and moral outrage. Arguably, “2 girls 1 cup” is the first viral video,

though it was not the first instance of shock porn making the rounds in pop culture. This moment was made possible by the proliferation of the internet and video-sharing sites, enabling “2 girls 1 cup” to leave a lasting mark on the cultural imagination with far-reaching and enduring implications.

Shock porn did make its way to the ivory tower, but its viral appeal came from its massive reach and spread on the internet. YouTube, Esquire, Lil Wayne lyrics, and even women's lifestyle websites like PopSugar covered the viral sensation, creating its legacy. “2 girls 1 cup” continues to be discussed by academics and used in comedy bits, ensuring its relevance in American and Western culture 10 years later. The wealth of reaction videos, from venerated porn veterans like Ron Jeremy to a high schooler and their grandmother, become part of the same canon. This inclusion of high and low culture illuminates the far-reaching implications of shock porn.

The ability to share, comment, and reject “2 girls 1 cup” shored up notions of what is enfolded in American sexuality. While “2 girls 1 cup” becomes an abject formulation of sexuality, the sharing of it as a vital piece of information of what constitutes as “too far” informs sexual policies and practices. This alienation underscores what becomes the exception and what is exceptional in the American imagination. Homonormativity, as defined Jasbir Puar, became paramount in the accessibility of “2 girls 1 cup.” The cultural moment that enabled “2 girls 1 cup” to be a viral video was emblematic of what constituted as patriotism, understood as the ability to endure and outlast the “other” as a means of unlocking American strength.

YouTube was instrumental in the spread of “2 girls 1 cup” reaction videos. YouTube, the video-sharing site, was created in 2005, initially intended to be a dating

website (Koebler). After Janet Jackson's Super Bowl halftime wardrobe mishap, YouTube was able to capitalize on the need to find a video of the event to share. From its inception, YouTube was a sexually charged site, created for dating and becoming relevant through the spread of sexually suggestive content. While this history isn't necessarily well known or indicative of YouTube's current attraction as a video-sharing site, it still functions as a platform that brings people looking for a wide array of content together.

YouTube is video-sharing website that brings together homemade videos, bloggers' professional videos, and network clips a la Super Bowl performances on the same hosting platform. The sheer volume and concentration of videos provides space for anyone to upload a video, especially in the early days before bloggers were paid for trafficking ads. Almost any video, excluding X-rated content, is available on YouTube, making it the perfect site for reaction videos to "2 girls 1 cup," arguably the first online viral video.

In the early days of the internet, video media was extremely difficult to pass around, as the bandwidth and infrastructure did not yet exist. Fast forward to the birth of YouTube, when digital cameras are becoming the norm and are readily available to the public. YouTube simplified the process of uploading and sharing videos, both home movies of visits to the zoo (YouTube's first upload) and badly animated tales of the end of the world. This sudden explosion of video media, paired with the steadily growing speed of home internet connections, created a paradigm shift in how video media was consumed by the public (O'Neill). YouTube created the platform for the modern viral video. Viral videos, much like pornography, are unable to be defined clearly, but

understood when encountered. "2 girls 1 cup" broke out at the perfect time, early in the modern viral video craze.

After ten years, "2 girls 1 cup" has not faded into obscurity, left for the deepest, saddest parts of the internet. It instead helped to shape America's interest in YouTube, reaction videos, and gross-outs, proving how integral "2 girls 1 cup" was and is to American sexual ideals. The goal of this work is to understand the complicated interlocking web that created the perfect time and moment for "2 girls 1 cup" to have lasting historical significance. Through fear, humor, and rejection of non-normative sex, "2 girls 1 cup" consolidated American sexual identity into something easy to discuss and share.

Literature Review

Since its release in 2007, “2 girls 1 cup,” shock porn, and torture porn have been written about extensively. The literature ranges from American identity to the policing of fantasy and exclusion of non-normative sexual identity and desire. Work not expressly about “2 girls 1 cup” deals with sexualized identity of people of color, humor in pornography, and neoliberal capital. Together, these works form the backbone for my work and form my understanding of how “2 girls 1 cup” shaped American sexual culture.

Feminist film scholar Linda Williams arguably pioneered the field of porn studies. The field of study and scholarship owes her a debt of gratitude in legitimizing porn as a site of study. I use her critical view of pornography and seek to further this legacy in my work with “2 girls 1 cup” and shock porn. Williams argues that the sheer volume of pornography created and viewed “is emphatically part of American culture” (Williams, 2). With new forms of digital participation in internet reaction videos and commenting, “2 girls 1 cup” found traction as a legitimate crowdsourced and widely received video.

Queer theorist Jasbir Puar’s theory of American sexual exceptionalism defined in *Terrorist Assemblages* serves as a key framework by which I came to understand this project. Her work focuses on modes of surveillance for the queer body, queerness as a regulatory norm, and the ascendancy of whiteness. Homonormative ideologies replicate the same hierarchical ideals concerning maintenance of dominance of race, class, and gender to maintain a concrete American identity. Together, this informs my thinking about the racialized, gendered, and classed reaction videos to “2 girls 1 cup.”

Puar inspired my thinking about a national sexual identity and the collective, shared moment of sexuality that “2 girls 1 cup” produced. Puar put forth Assemblage

theory as a way of understanding how bodies are organized and understood through material objects. According to this theory, through assemblages and visible identities, bodies are marked as enfolded into American norms and ideals. Bodies are marked abject through this book, as it illuminates what Americanness looks like and a fascination with non-American sexualized bodies. This text undergirds my work in examining “2 girls 1 cup” and its ability to reinforce American ideals through its abjection.

Abjection, as defined by Julia Kristeva in her essay *Powers of Horror*, is the ability to touch desire, then reject it. The idea that abject is “what disturbs identity, system, order” (Kristeva, 4) informs my understanding of the widespread popularity and enormous onslaught of reaction videos, including but not limited to the use of humor, fear, neoliberal capital, and racialized identity. Reactions from “2 girls 1 cup” all function within the framework of Kristeva’s theory of abjection in that they are a work of fascination that is “dependent upon a dialectic of negativity” (Kristeva, 7). The simultaneous fascination and rejection undergirds the saliency of “2 girls 1 cup.”

Kristeva links fear and the object to understand perversion, fear, and abjection. She discusses the need to keep consciousness from defilement and the collapse of the two creating the abject (30). This formulation helps in the understanding of how the abject is created and functions in creating and maintaining boundaries around identity, systems, and order (4). This text undergirds the understanding of body horror as something to entertain but also reject through its visible apprehension that produces a bodily response. Shock porn, and “2 girls 1 cup,” are allowed to exist in the realm of the abject, titillating and terrifying but ultimately something to be rejected and reviled.

Race and neoliberal capital in participation with “2 girls 1 cup” are formative for American identity. Interdisciplinary feminist scholar Lisa Duggan posits in her 2003 book *Equality for All?* that there is a consolidation of power in the hands of elites. This consolidation of power does not separate political and cultural forces, but rather consolidates them in an attempt to create a fully formed American ideal. Further, Duggan asserts the interlocking relationship between race, capital, and patriarchy. Duggan’s work supports my assertions of fame, belonging, and moral panic as key tools to shaping and supporting American sexual ideals and values. In the same vein, feminist sexuality scholar Laura Kipnis discusses fantasy and its role in forming American sexual subcultures.

Kipnis uses the case *United States v. DePew* (where the United States government intervened and encouraged Daniel DePew further into his gay BDSM fantasies, ultimately charging him with a crime he did not commit but rather fantasized about) to highlight the ways in which sexual fantasies outside the norm become “panic-button” (Kipnis, 9) issues. Kipnis asserts that the Global South is already understood as a place where life is cheap and it’s not uncommon for its citizens to be exploited. Kipnis frames pornography as existing differently than other forms of entertainment. Pornography, for Kipnis, is regarded as a form of propaganda, with the ability to change the world where other forms of entertainment are understood automatically as fiction. I argue that pornography stands in as an icon of perversity, and “2 girls 1 cup” is marked as non-belonging by virtue of it being made in Brazil. This fundamentally shapes the ways in which “2 girls 1 cup” is understood and made legible by American audiences. From its inception, “2 girls 1 cup” was understood as something other, cheap, and not

American. Although it was key that “2 girls 1 cup” was made in Brazil, both for its release and reception, it became very much a part of American culture. Additionally, like other pornography, “2 girls 1 cup” was taken seriously and never understood as something made to be entertainment; rather, it was sexually exciting.

With a pop culture reception and academic discourse, torture and shock porn became part of American culture. Aaron Kerner’s 2015 book *Torture Porn in the Wake of 9/11* argues that shock and torture serve to replace pornography as eliciting a bodily response. Using the *Saw* films as an example, Kerner creates space around ideas of displacement of sex in torture and shock porn, arguing that these films serve a cultural role that porn once did but no longer has the ability to do due to its normalcy and spectators’ desensitization (Silverman, 49). While I disagree, I choose to understand what Kerner calls “displacement” as a non-normative sexual practice still being an act of sex. This book offers ideas about new opportunities available for content sharing as the internet becomes a prolific space of knowledge and self-production, something crucial in the viral sensation that was “2 girls 1 cup” and its long-lasting impacts on American sexual identity. Kerner argues the displacement of sex is a new kind of porn (Kerner, 182). This new definition of pornography suggests Americans have become the very thing we are fighting (Kerner, 3), including the affinity for non-normative, queer sex.

Much like Kerner, women’s studies and media scholar Helen Hester argues that “2 girls 1 cup” moves outside the realm of pornography into something far more sinister. While the bulk of her research is conducted and based in the U.K., it still functions as part of the Western and arguably American discourse. Hester engages in work surrounding what she argues is the displacement of sex within pornography, using “2

girls 1 cup” as an example. She centers a chapter of her book, *Beyond Explicit*, around abjection, arguing that “2 girls 1 cup” is not pornography. While she makes an interesting claim about the displacement of sex in favor of “authentic bodily experience” (Hester, 60), I argue that her reading of the reception of “2 girls 1 cup” is a function of normative sexual expectations. Hester’s claim that “2 girls 1 cup” is not porn marginalizes non-normative sexual interests into solely functioning as a work of disgust and abjection in popular culture. This ignores the context in which this film was made and the reception into American pop culture, where it was understood as pornographic — horrific, but pornographic nonetheless. In making this claim, Hester is following in the tradition of Williams and the “visible frenzy” of the explicit. Hester uses “2 girls 1 cup” to argue for a radically expanded definition of pornography. Pop culture reception dictates that we see this film as non-normative, non-American lesbian sex. I contextualize and reframe Hester’s argument, specifically in its application to “2 girls 1 cup,” as a formative moment for American sexuality and fear.

While Hester argues that “2 girls 1 cup” exists within the framework of sex displaced from porn, I fundamentally disagree. “2 girls 1 cup” is pornography. It was produced by a Brazilian man, Marco Antonio Fiorito, whose “business was producing fetish films” (*2 Girls, 1 Cup: The Real Poop*). The film was meant to push the limits of comfort while titillating viewers. Hester posits that “2 girls 1 cup” is not pornography, arguing that it is not meant to arouse the viewer (Hester, 57). While Hester makes compelling arguments about the use of fear and “2 girls 1 cup,” her limited view of sex reduces the power of her argument. She argues that the social function of “2 girls 1 cup” means that it was received as a new form of pornography, outside of the desire to

arouse. However, because it was intended to arouse, it became a cultural phenomenon where viewers could reaffirm their belonging to American and Western sexuality through fear and abjection.

Humor has long had a place in American pornography, specific to its audiences and catered to their comedic needs. Initially, humor was used to ease tension in a group watching setting. Jennifer Christine Nash writes in her book *Black Bodies in Ecstasy* about the ability to probe cultural tender spots using humor in porn. "2 girls 1 cup" reaction and parody videos did just that, probe and force close examination of tender and culturally sensitive points through the use of humor. Film and media studies scholar Constance Penley points to bawdy humor as a mainstay of pornography, rendering it relevant and digestible in her essay *Crankers and Whackers*. Humor becomes key in unseating prevailing narratives and creating new forms of commentary around porn. Parodies, jokes, and songs about "2 girls 1 cup" function in the same way, shifting the discourse and narrative while creating space to have new kinds of conversations about cultural sensitivities.

Methods

I conducted a detailed content analysis in watching and interpreting reaction videos in YouTube. I stepped away from psychoanalysis and the framework provided by Williams, the pioneer of porn studies, and moved toward a sociological historical understanding of a moment in American culture. I watched videos in an attempt to understand them as fitting into a particular historical moment including the use of fear, humor, race, and class as well as access to technology to understand the lasting significance of “2 girls 1 cup.” In watching and analyzing reaction videos, I aimed not to probe into a deeper psychological understanding of each reaction, but looked at them in conversation with pop culture and American identity.

For this project, I utilized a methodology like the one used by Jane Ward in her 2015 book *Not Gay, Sex Between Straight White Men*. Instead of using human participants, Ward looked to online participatory media like Craigslist and HazeHim.com (“reality” internet porn) to do in-depth content analysis about a sociological phenomenon, finding that white men who had sex with each other could maintain their straightness through anal resilience. Like Ward, I turned to the internet to find videos and media to understand the pervasiveness of “2 girls 1 cup.” Her sampling and use of video supported specific themes outlined in her book, creating a template to follow in my work on “2 girls 1 cup.”

Using purposive sampling, I found 15 reactions, including short YouTube videos, a British television show, and articles on men's and women's lifestyle websites. I looked for already-curated lists put together in the height of the “2 girls 1 cup” craze in addition to individual videos. Purposive sampling enabled me to tailor my videos to best create

distinctive categories by which to analyze and understand types of reactions. In searching, I tried to find an array of race, gender, and notoriety. I found the majority of my videos on YouTube.

The large framework I've laid out allows me to examine the three themes I discovered in my search for reaction videos and content. The three themes of analysis are not discrete categories, but often can be examined and understood as bleeding into one another, and will in this project. I came to my sources much in the same way I did when I passively consumed reaction videos in 2007, by asking friends and colleagues for their recommendations and chasing sources through Google searches. In the following sections, I analyze my sample of reaction videos to center three reappearing themes: race and capital, fear and abjection, and humor. Together these themes demonstrate the cultural importance and long legacy of "2 girls 1 cup."

In the first grouping of videos I selected, I used B-list celebrities to underline the construction of race and capital. In the first of these, Ron Jeremy filmed a reaction video for Playhouse T.V. in which he made sweeping generalizations about the porn industry and the importance of "2 girls 1 cup." In Wyclef Jean's reaction video, also filmed for Playhouse T.V., he remained unfazed by "2 girls 1 cup" and ate during the duration of the video. B. Scott filmed a reaction video in what appears to be the comfort of their own home, where the genderqueer performer reacted with feminized outrage.

To understand and examine the use of fear and abjection, I selected three videos. In the 45-minute-long episode of *The Sex-Education Show*, host Anna Richardson does a segment where she interviews boys about watching "2 girls 1 cup" and films a reaction video with their parents. A young, unnamed mid-2000s alt-girl filmed

a reaction video at home while eating a bowl of pudding. A child named Jackie showed their grandmother and recorded her reaction to "2 girls 1 cup" and shared it with the internet.

Humor and comedy give "2 girls 1 cup" the longest legacy, ensuring it remains culturally relevant and legible. Jon Lajoie wrote a song about "2 girls 1 cup" where he satirized the video with romantic language. Conan O'Brien made two "2 girls 1 cup" parody videos, the first with bowls of soup and Andy Richter, the second with a staffer and 20 pencils in need of a good sharpening. College Humor and Amy Schumer made similar casting-couch-style videos about what happened before the video was shot. Finally, Eric Andre made a reaction video with Krysten Ritter on his late-night talk show without telling Ritter what he was about to do. These videos all function within my framework to provide unique points of analysis that underscore the cultural relevancy of "2 girls 1 cup." Together, these videos underscore "2 girls 1 cup" as belonging to American culture, representing a means to stay culturally relevant.

B-List Stars

“2 girls 1 cup” became an internet sensation in 2007, sparking reaction videos ranging from parodies to songs, and became a cautionary tale of the big, bad internet. Through these various interactions with this grainy, 2-minute-long clip, “2 girls 1 cup” achieved long-lasting cultural significance through racialized expectations, understandings of American porn, and queer disidentification.

Reaction videos work to emphasize the relationship between viewer and subject through participatory engagement. (I am deploying this term to mean participants are engaging in media, undergirding its relevance as it spreads through social media and the pop cultural zeitgeist.) Race, class, and access to technology provide fertile ground to police race, sexuality, and normative behavior, underlining what participation in sexuality looks like in America and who becomes an arbiter of belonging, and provide a set of cultural alibis (Kipnis, 9).

For a brief moment in 2007, “2 girls 1 cup” was everywhere. It was a rite of passage; it was “like the rodeo — see how long you can last,” as George Clooney put in an interview for *Esquire* (Jacobs). That critical moment served a valuable purpose in enfolding groups into American sexual culture. Reaction videos made by everyone from celebrities to grandmas became commonplace. Reaction videos captured reactions of watchers while they watched “2 girls 1 cup,” cameras focused only on their faces and without showing “2 girls 1 cup.” Reaction videos undergirded spectatorship and participatory media. Watchers of the reaction videos had to know the video that was being reacted to, in this case “2 girls 1 cup,” as well as have interest in the reaction of

the person they were watching (Silverman, 55). This excessive participation and spectatorship normalized reaction videos underlining American sexual values.

America's pervert uncle, porn veteran and VH1 reality star Ron Jeremy, watched and recorded his reaction to "2 girls 1 cup" for Playhouse T.V. ("Ron Jeremy — "2 girls 1 cup" Reaction"). Jeremy's first comments are "that is unbelievably disgusting" and "those are not American girls" ("Ron Jeremy — "2 girls 1 cup" Reaction"). Jeremy can ascertain from 16 seconds of a low-resolution clip, without any dialogue, that the women involved are not American, and he's right. His abjection marks their foreignness. Jeremy can say this with certainty due to his knowledge of the pornography industry. The declaration of otherness calls into question the homogeneousness of American sexuality. This marks lesbians, interracial couplings, and non-normative sex acts as distinctly un-American. This simple statement undergirds the expectation that the abject is un-American and that bodies can be understood and organized as belonging or not belonging via their sex acts (Puar, 187), ensuring American sex remains vanilla, white, and heterosexual.

The understanding of porn law means that Jeremy knows these girls are not American and shows that a producer in the United States would violate the law and face jail time for making a film like "2 girls 1 cup." Duggan posits in her book *Twilight of Equality?* that capitalism is a constraining force regarding sexuality. Liberalism and neoliberal politics point to economic sovereignty, and it becomes paramount to understand the limitations of freedom placed upon sex and sex acts through the proliferation of neoliberalism and the consolidation of power. This is made apparent through Jeremy's understanding that "2 girls 1 cup" was not made in the United States. His comment highlights the legal limitations placed on the porn industry, including acts

that can and cannot be shown or filmed. Through this, he highlights the limitations of the free market under the guise of protecting its citizens even when that “protection” directly conflicts with the ideals of neoliberal capitalism (Duggan, XIV). “2 girls 1 cup” becomes a site for capital to reproduce social inequality through abjection (Duggan, XIV). The acts are so far outside of the purview of normal, American laws that they serve to consolidate power through punitive action for the producers and director of films like “2 girls 1 cup,” assuring viewers in the United States that this isn’t happening on American soil. The policing and constraints applied to pornography illuminate the limits of neoliberal capital and its powers of self-determination for profit (Kipnis, 8).

Musician and wannabe Haitian politician turned scammer Wyclef Jean is also shown “2 girls 1 cup” by Playhouse T.V. (“Wyclef watches “2 girls 1 cup”/performs song!”). His reaction sits sharply contrasted to Jeremy’s. While Jeremy is visibly and audibly disgusted, Jean is unflappable; while the entirety of Jeremy’s video takes place in under 1 minute as he comments out loud while watching, Jean’s video, including a performance, is 5 minutes long. When the video launches into defecation and regurgitation, Jean begins to eat his corn on the cob in earnest. He watches the screen while two white men in the background look on, surprised at his lack of reaction. He, unlike Jeremy, makes no comments during the run of “2 girls 1 cup,” but just eats. When the video ends, he reaches “for some fried chicken” as a voice from off camera shouts. Jean performs black masculinity and stereotypical blackness through his reactions.

In this reaction, we see illicit eroticism performed by a black man. While Mireille Miller-Young deploys illicit eroticism to discuss the complicated relationship black women have to porn, I expand her definition to talk about the already-sexualized bodies

of black men interacting with erotic media. Jean falls under the double-edged sword of maintaining credibility as a legendary musician and figure while also playing into stereotyped food and toughness. He falls victim to hegemonic black masculinity that requires an unflinching response while white men watch in wonderment.

While it becomes potentially problematic that I code and understand this reaction as a performance of black masculinity, I am doing so with two things in mind. The first is watching it in contrast to Jeremy, who watched it for the same radio show, who, while watching expressed his feelings; the second is the way the white men in the room reacted to Jean's blasé response to the video, thus enacting a kind of pressure to continue to perform. While Jean may have truly seen sex acts like this in person as he asserts later in the video, the call to and need to continue to be stoic re-enforce his old-school, tough-guy affect. So, while Jean may truly be unaffected by the video, the reactions around the room do little to normalize the sex taking place in "2 girls 1 cup."

B. Scott, mostly known for nothing other than being on YouTube, is a genderfluid T.V. personality who got their start as an early YouTuber. They appear on camera in both feminine and masculine clothing, and in this video show up a curly wig and an off-the-shoulder top. They refer to their fans as "love muffins" and through their work have created a dramatic, drag-esque performance. Through their YouTube following, they were able to host awards on BET and befriend Mariah Carey. They made a reaction video to "2 girls 1 cup" at the insistence of their viewers ("Two Girls One Cup - B. Scott Reaction (S1:76)"). Their video is 3 minutes long, and Scott only begins watching the video more than a minute in. They spend the first minute talking to their "love muffins" and preening in front of the camera at their minimal desk/computer setup. When they do

start reacting, each new act elicits a shriek of horror, accompanied by pearl clutching and broad hand gestures. As the video progresses, their horror becomes more and more pronounced as they continue to repeat the word “no” over and over. Scott defies masculine gendered expectations, both in their appearance and reaction.

Scott's exaggerated response, though seemingly genuine, very much falls in line with expectations of queer effeminate behaviors. While Scott seems genuine in their shock and horror, their reaction underscores the relationship between capital, performance, abjection, and illicit eroticism in creating identity. As José Muñoz posits in *Cruising Utopia*, this hybrid gender defies troubling gender logic within gay spaces (Muñoz, 76). Scott's troubling of gendered performance in watching non-normative lesbian sex challenges codes of and norms by which their life is regulated and reaffirms their position and belonging to American culture through disgust. This becomes possible through complacency in neoliberal politics and participatory engagement in social media.

While gender expression and race are different in each of the videos, the reactions reify American sexual culture. Jeremy's reaction links porn production and liberalism through his deep knowledge of what constitutes “American.” His quickness to point out the non-Americanness of the women in the video, coupled with the comments about how trendy and widely discussed “2 girls 1 cup” is on college campuses, shows the locking down of American ideals and identity. Furthermore, it shows the limits of what is acceptable to produce in the context of American porn, illuminating the link between capital and exclusion from American belonging. Jean typifies and underscores what becomes seen as American black masculinity through his food consumption and

unflappability. What's more, through the story of having walked into a room where he saw sex like this taking place, we see a consistent need for toughness and validation in front of other men. This hypermasculine, unfeeling man becomes reaffirmed as part of American identity through accolades from other men. B. Scott asserts their place as a genderfluid person belonging to American ideals through an appeal to normativity. By reacting with disgust, Scott makes a claim to their belonging by othering "2 girls 1 cup" as too far. Through these videos, American sexual culture and identity is affirmed and redrawn at the expense of the women in "2 girls 1 cup." Collective American fear enables these reactions to enforce the boundaries placed on non-normative sex, enforcing heteronormative values.

Scary Shit

Fear serves as an important tool of social control and group cohesion. The sites of fear mongering and control are always numerous, reaffirmed with the need to protect white children and the nation from perversion (Strub, 8). Examining the British television show *The Sex Education Show* and reaction videos from ordinary people capitalizing on fear, I show how “2 girls 1 cup” achieved cultural significance and shaped American sexuality through fear. I claim that “2 girls 1 cup” made its way into the cultural zeitgeist in part due the spectacle of rejection of non-normative sex in the name of abjection.

The Sex Education Show, hosted by Anna Richardson, a British television personality perhaps best known for her legal dispute with Arnold Schwarzenegger, was a show designed to educate teenagers and get Brits talking openly about sex. While this show come from England, it functions as part of Western and American sexual mores. In an increasingly global world, and with the rise of the internet, particularly when “2 girls 1 cup” came out, information was shared more freely. Information includes viral videos and the many reactions to them, and Richardson capitalized on this digital global sharing. In her segment about pornography, Richardson interviews teenagers about where they see pornography and naked bodies. She goes on to talk about the rise of body dysmorphia in teens, linking it to the ubiquity of porn. Her premise in discussing “2 girls 1 cup” is to explore “how much porn is distorting teens’ perceptions of what real men and women look like” (“The Sex Education Show TV | Season 1 Episode 1 Uncensored”).

Richardson sits three boys down to talk about the porn they watch. She asks the boys to describe the most shocking things they've seen — and quickly one boy starts talking about “2 girls 1 cup.” Capitalizing on the moment, the boys are asked if that kind of video is something they see frequently. Unsurprisingly, the answer is yes, owing to the rise of shock and torture porn (Kerner, 3) and the desire of teenagers to look cool on television. Richardson then brings in the boys' parents to show them the video, thus enacting the kind of fear, abjection, and control over sexuality emblematic of this moment. Richardson capitalizes on the fears of parents from new forms of media. Video sharing and internet porn bear the burden of fear, enabling parents to shame their children and attempt to place restrictions around their sexuality. Richardson then has a screening for the parents and films a reaction video (“The Sex Education Show S1E1”). The camera is behind the screen that she and the parents are watching. Parents are quickly reacting in horror, looking away from the screen and shouting “No!” while Richardson watches “2 girls 1 cup” with a bemused smile. One parent gets up and walks away, saying that it's sickening that teenagers are watching that video. One parent says that he feels he has failed as a parent because his child is watching “that sort of thing.”

Richardson does two things in the moment; she's normalizing “2 girls 1 cup” as viewing fare while also making it function as a catalyst of fear of modern technology and reinscribing Western and American ideals of what defines sexuality. She capitalizes on the fear of parents that they have failed their children by allowing them to watch and be aroused by “2 girls 1 cup.” Through this, she reaffirms British and American sexual culture as exclusionary of non-normative sex acts. After the reaction video made by British parents, Richardson outlines strategies for keeping your children safe from the

horrors of internet pornography. Richardson advocates for a modern panopticon of surveillance for children, reaffirming the need to keep children away from internet porn, and in particular, internet porn with interracial lesbian couplings engaging in non-normative sex.

In a reaction video by a young white woman, she first explains why she is doing a reaction video, saying, "I know they are so yesterday" (to borrow lyrics from a Hilary Duff song), but says she got bored and thought it would be funny ("2 girls 1 cup" while eating PUDDING"). First, this speaks to the participatory engagement that "2 girls 1 cup" used to become part of American culture. People felt the *need* to create reaction videos to affirm their place within American pop culture at the time. But, in an attempt to one-up or outshine other reaction videos, she will eat a bowl of pudding, suggesting that she knows what's in store. As the video progresses, we see her take larger bites of the pudding that she has a difficult time choking down, but nevertheless, she persists. This reaction, while capitalizing on the shock of "2 girls 1 cup," affirms the strength of the viewer. She repeats "Oh my god, oh my fucking god" while finishing her last bites of pudding. In the last four seconds of the video, she looks into the camera, shows us her empty bowl, and says, "I'm going to go vomit now" ("2 girls 1 cup" while eating PUDDING") and the screen cuts to black.

This video affirms American sexual identity in multiple ways. First, it again shows the abject nature of "2 girls 1 cup" and rejects it. Next, it highlights the kind of endurance sport "2 girls 1 cup" became by pushing the "see how long you last" narrative to eating pudding while watching scat and vomit play. Together, these work to highlight American ideals of strength, endurance, and mastery of body and self.

Within the larger grouping of videos that capitalize on fear and shock, we see grandma reaction videos. Arguably, the most popular grandma reaction starts with a black title card announcing that this is a “2 girls 1 cup” reaction video starring a grandmother (“Grandma's reaction to 2 girls one cup”). The grandmother in the video is a white woman 60+ in age. She starts watching the clip, already made visibly uncomfortable by interracial lesbians making out. We see her squirm in the seat, look at her grandchild, and yell “Jackie, what’s wrong with you!” (“Grandma's reaction to 2 girls one cup”). This reaction typifies the kind of fear and shock viewers were supposed to feel when watching, demonstrating the enfoldment of American ideals while working to reject the expectations (of their limits) from older generations. But, sharing a pornographic video with a grandparent, understanding that it would elicit this kind of response, proves that Jackie also rejects this as part of their sexuality. This highlights an important point; Americans across generational divides unify in their abjection and ultimately rejection of “2 girls 1 cup.” The refusal to enfold “2 girls 1 cup” into their sexual identity makes it a part of American culture to reject, thereby recommitting to cis het white sex and sexuality being American.

In both videos, we hear the now-iconic score, signaling to the viewer that they are in fact watching the clip. These videos illustrate how widespread the distribution of “2 girls 1 cup” was and how important this film was in viral video sharing. All three of the videos underscore the importance of capitalizing on fear and control to affirm American values and reshape the boundaries around normal sexuality.

Make 'em Laugh

After knee-jerk fear reaction videos were uploaded in droves to YouTube, comedians hopped on the “2 girls 1 cup” reaction and parody video train. Unlike reaction videos that were all uploaded between 2007 and early 2009, comedy reactions, parodies, and the employment of “2 girls 1 cup” on comedy shows continued all the way through 2013. Like participatory engagement utilizing stardom, racialized reactions, and fear, humor is a useful tool for understanding American sexual values. Humor does the most to normalize “2 girls 1 cup” while mocking the video and thereby rejecting “2 girls 1 cup” as belonging to American sexual identity.

At first, the comedy videos reaffirm the position of American sexuality through clever songs and interesting jokes about “what happens before the video was shot,” but later these jokes served as a platform that needed very little explanation to their audiences. “2 girls 1 cup” was used in creative and interesting ways to launch careers, and later as a crutch for comedians like Amy Schumer to solidify their position as white feminists. These diverse and long-lasting deployments of “2 girls 1 cup” speak to the widespread knowledge of the video and its cultural relevance. I will demonstrate that by analyzing five videos across time and release medium.

The first video is a song by Jon Lajoie, a YouTube comedian who turned his popularity into a role on network television. Simply called the “‘2 girls 1 cup’ Song” it was the first of the comedy videos that I am analyzing to come out, and it was released on YouTube in November 2007 (“‘2 girls 1 cup’ Song”). It starts like a regular reaction video — a nameless friend convinces Lajoie to watch the video in the living room on a laptop. It then fades to him standing in a forest with a guitar where he begins singing his song.

Lajoie's video is very of its time. It's a John Mayer-style video, a single man singing gently with a guitar. The video is grainy with low production value, fitting in with the style of "2 girls 1 cup." Lajoie alternates from being outside near trees to indoors on the couch where the video started while presumably still watching "2 girls 1 cup." The song is written and performed like a love song, slow and melodic, and the lyrics reflect that until the hook. The song includes lyrics like "So many ways to express love, it's hard to choose just one." The hook ends with the line "Some lesbians like eating each other's shit out of cups." The interesting thing about Lajoie's video is the validation he gives to non-normative sex, even as a joke. He normalizes the women as lesbians and then rejects them by making "2 girls 1 cup" an act that any lesbian could engage in. Lajoie compares each of the extreme acts from the video to hugging, kissing, and declaring love.

I want to hone in on his use of the term lesbian. No other video I came across or analyzed used the term lesbian. This unique deployment could be understood in two different ways: as a tool of normalization or othering through abjection. Lajoie seems to be working from a place of abjection or a failure to see these women as related or kin (Kristeva, 5). Through this, we see Lajoie's displacement of lesbian as a recognizable category as a straight man who sings comedy songs on YouTube about having sex with women. Based on Lajoie's body of work, it can be assumed that his juxtaposition between the term lesbian and the phrase "puke semi digested shit into each other's mouths" functions to underscore the absurdity he interpreted from "2 girls 1 cup" and the reaction videos.

Lajoie employs humor to reject “2 girls 1 cup” by comparing it to “normal” sex acts. The use of humor in porn has been long documented, starting in 1896, through stag films, and into the modern era (Penley, 314). This use of humor is transformed in parody and reaction videos to accomplish many of the same goals. Its intentionality in bawdiness and lewd jokes stands in to break the tension and probe cultural tender spots (Nash, 107). Lajoie did just that by doubling down on the cultural tender spot. He took something people were reacting to, “2 girls 1 cup,” and re-examined the overarching joke being made through the plurality of reaction videos to ensure its cultural salience and point to the larger structures of cohesion at play. Through the invocation of jokes, he helped launch his career, while poking fun at mores and taboos (Nash, 109).

In this, humor is used to assert a rejection of “2 girls 1 cup” as normal, underscoring the relationship to abjection as a means to maintain American ideals. Lajoie was adept and proving his worth as an American entertainer and became a series regular on a network television show. This ascension to mild fame came through his ability to other, reject, and make fun of cultural sensitivities through shoring up his belonging to American norms and ideals, as witnessed through the transgression of boundaries through humor (Kipnis, 312).

In 2012, late-night talk show host Conan O'Brien announced the launch of Conan.XXX as a part of the “team Coco web presence.” The first video was of Andy Richter, entitled “1 man 2 bowls.” The video starts with Richter on a couch, being interviewed by a male voice off screen (“One Guy, Two Bowls”). The man asks him “do you know why you’re here?” Richter coquettishly looks into the camera, smiles, and says “I have a pretty good idea.” The scene cuts again to two different types of soup being

held in front of Richter, while he eats from spoons from both bowls at the same time, alternating bites. Richter then says, "I'm glad I wore my glasses so I don't get it in my eyes." This video employs a casting couch, or pre-sex porn interview style, to bring the watcher into the joke, especially as it's the first video on Conan's XXX site. Richter plays into tropes of naiveté, innocence, and inexperience as he struggles to know where to look during the video and answers every question with a bemused shrug and grin. While Richter eats, a piano score plays in the background, much like "2 girls 1 cup." Richter eats the soup rapidly, begins to choke, and declares he needs a minute. The camera again cuts; we see Richter reclined in the casting couch, holding both bowls of soup, looking into the camera, telling the off-screen voice he's finished, full, and has had enough soup.

This clip, unlike Lajoie's, wasn't used as a launching point for a career. Conan employed lazy jokes — naive people on a casting couch, "2 girls 1 cup" (only lazy because it's five years later, not because the joke is empirically poorly constructed) — to launch a new site. This attempt at humor captures the long-lasting cultural impact that "2 girls 1 cup" had. Conan's assurance that five years later the joke would still be so fresh in viewers' minds that it would need no explanation solidifies the place of "2 girls 1 cup" in American culture. It became so integral and ubiquitous that Conan could count on his audiences to understand and laugh at this video as an example of his first XXX video.

Two days after the debut of "1 guy 2 bowls," Conan shares a second video ("One Girl, 20 Pencils"). A staffer is featured in the video, and it employs the same tactics as Richter's video. The same male voice asks questions to Susie, the woman in the video. His questions include, "Do you know why you are here?" and "How old were you the first

time you sharpened a pencil?” Again, we see two sets of male hands holding props, their bodies off camera so Susie can sharpen pencils. The same piano score plays in the background. A comically oversized pencil comes in from off screen, nearly poking Susie in the back of the head. The voice off camera has her attempt to sharpen the oversized pencil before she says, “It’s not fitting in the hole, it’s way too big.” The voice off screen responds with laughter and the comment, “We like to have fun here.”

Here is where we see the laziness of this joke. IN WHAT WORLD CAN YOU MAKE THE SAME JOKE TWICE? Conan again uses the same kind of naming of “number noun number noun” to convey the explicit nature (or in this case imitation of explicit) as a shorthand for erotic content, as lead by the naming of “2 girls 1 cup.” Conan here joins pornography in comedy in an intangible way as Nash argues in her book *The Black Body in Ecstasy*. Conan uses the same joke two days in a row, illuminating the deep investment culturally that was made in “2 girls 1 cup.” He, or the writing team, knew the joke in two different iterations could be so instantly recognizable, understandable, and relatable that the launch of an XXX parody site would be launched with two different “2 girls 1 cup” videos. There were only six videos on the Conan XXX site, so one can assume the site itself was created to make “2 girls 1 cup” parodies. Though from 2007, “2 girls 1 cup” arguably remains so integral to American sexual identity that it becomes fodder for late-night T.V.

College Humor, a collective of comedians making videos, made a three-minute-long “before the porn” parody video called “2 girls 1 producer” that came out in 2008 (“two girls, one producer”). Like Lajoie, it came out quickly and was part of the first wave of comedians (established and struggling) to use “2 girls 1 cup” for clicks. A producer

walks into a room where two women are getting ready to shoot a pornographic film. One of the women is white, the other black. The producer begins to ask questions and goes over a checklist of sex acts they are comfortable with. He starts with fare considered normal in a girl-on-girl scene. Kissing, hugging, cunnilingus, and fake orgasms are all passed over and consented to. Quickly, he then says, "Shitting into a cup, making out with the shit, making out with the shit in your mouth. More hugging." The women get visibly uncomfortable, and the producer then asks them to play icebreaker games, instructing Ro, the black woman, to defecate into the pint glass on the table. After expressing her discomfort, the producer talks quickly, describing what the women will be doing in the film. Janelle, the white woman, says it all sounds good for \$200. The producer keeps quickly talking, mentioning they have a doctor on staff and that they will look like a mud bath when it's all done. He walks out and the clip ends.

This short again shows again the ways "2 girls 1 cup" was understood as pornography through the larger cultural lens. The acts are constituted as part of a list that makes up what is understood as lesbian porn. The women are expected to be comfortable with lesbian sex, and by extension coerced into scat play by a producer. This joke helps illuminate the non-normative sex that is happening in "2 girls 1 cup" by assuming the women in the video were forced into appearing in the film. By cracking this joke, we see how "below the belt" humor helps to poke fun at middle class American life (Nash, 109) and the inescapability of "2 girls 1 cup."

Financial compensation comes up in this parody in a way that speaks to the delegitimization of women in pornography. The white woman in the video expresses surprise that she is being offered \$200 to appear in scat porn and claims it's a good

price. While this video is a parody and a joke, it speaks to a broader cultural understanding that sex workers and women are part of classed institutions of society (Duggan, 83).

Five years later, Amy Schumer, white feminist comedian extraordinaire, made the same casting-couch-style joke on her show. In her version, she and another white woman are sitting on a couch, being told they are auditioning for a marketing video that they hope goes viral called “2 girls 1 cup” (“Inside Amy Schumer - “2 girls 1 cup” – Uncensored”). The producer then describes what we know becomes “2 girls 1 cup.” While the producer explains the film, the other woman on the casting couch eats something in a takeout container with a fork that she later offers to Schumer to share. Schumer then attempts to whitesplain the clip, asking, “Is this going to be an art film?” and “But it’s like commentary, kind of meta, right?” The producer insists that it isn’t. Schumer once again asks, “Is it art?” and is met with a resounding, “No, it’s scat porn, basically the opposite of art.” The joke ends with Schumer being told the final condition of her appearing in the video is that she lose some weight.

This is almost a direct rip-off of the College Humor joke, except it was made in 2013, not 2008, and it ends with a twist of white feminism. Amy Schumer! Being told to lose weight! How funny! The retelling of the “before the video” joke, much like Conan’s deployment of “2 girls 1 cup,” proves its usefulness in easy comedy. While in 2008 this kind of reaction or parody video could be understood as part of its pop-culture moment, in 2013 Schumer needs to twist the ending to render it legible as relevant. These jokes again serve to remind us that “2 girls 1 cup” is so instantly recognizable to American audiences that it still serves as a backdrop for normative identity (even if they look

particularly similar) more than five years after the initial video was released. The use of humor can be understood as alleviating guilt for consumption of pornography (Penley, 318) and here it exists as a means of rejection. Actions being discussed in “2 girls 1 cup” are recognized as abhorrent; they reify cis het white American family values (Puar, 61). These jokes are seen and viewed on mainstream comedy platforms and reassert the non-normative nature of scat porn, thereby transgressing boundaries and aiding in molding social subjects (Nash).

Eric Andre, actor and experimental comedian, used “2 girls 1 cup” on his Adult Swim show. In the style of late-night talk shows, Andre has Krysten Ritter, an actress best known for her roles on *Breaking Bad* and *Jessica Jones*, on as a guest, where he plays a part of her new film. Unfortunately, there was no new movie and Andre plays Ritter a clip of “2 girls 1 cup” (“The Eric Andre Show, Krysten’s new movie”). Ritter starts gagging and demands that Andre turn it off. This video serves as a throwback to the original reaction videos, but on a network television platform. Ritter reacts normatively, with horror and disgust, while Andre uses the video to reaffirm his position in comedy as a “weirdo.” Ritter announces that she has successfully avoided “that video” until Andre showed it to her on T.V. in 2013. Her interview segment ends after the clip is shown without any discussion.

This joke functions very much as an original reaction video, but it’s two-fold. Ritter is shocked and upset, while Andre calls it “a great movie.” This reaffirms his position in comedy as someone who makes people uncomfortable, while asserting that Ritter is normal and employable. In 2013, six years after “2 girls 1 cup” was released, it still can be used as a tool in establishing American identity. Both stars are able to

leverage their brand and their belonging to American comedy and T.V. and movie production. We again see “2 girls 1 cup” deployed as a joke when there’s no new material. “2 girls 1 cup” became so intrinsic to American humor and identity that when it’s shown to make an actress uncomfortable, even with the announcement that this is a new film for Ritter, the audience is in on the joke. These jokes play into pornography and being in porn as part of a “stigmatized other” (Penley, 319), but “2 girls 1 cup” functions so far outside normative pornography that Ritter doesn’t need to assert that the video isn’t her.

Comedy is utilized in normalizing then rejecting “2 girls 1 cup.” Comedians were able to effectively leverage their brands, make jokes, and entrench themselves in American pop culture through the use of “2 girls 1 cup” jokes, parodies, and reaction videos. Through these jokes, they establish themselves as belonging to and representing American values, legitimizing their brands and identities.

Conclusion

Ten years later, "2 girls 1 cup" is still culturally relevant. A part of pop culture history, "2 girls 1 cup" is recognizable and serves as a quick tool to remind Americans what we should fear, what could be worse, and the ways in which sexuality is intrinsically entangled in our everyday lives. "2 girls 1 cup" functioned in pop culture as a form of American sexual exceptionalism. Through reaction videos, fear, and comedy, we see and understand the ways in which "2 girls 1 cup" functions to assert an all-encompassing American sexual identity that left out queer, nonwhite, non-normative subjects.

Reaction videos, thanks to the proliferation of the internet and YouTube, became something anyone and everyone did. Before YouTube was a form of media that people could get paid for, before it was polished, it was a platform where people uploaded low-quality webcam videos. Grainy reaction videos launched careers and solidified social standing through rejection, horror, and humor. The Western world made "2 girls 1 cup" something to be afraid of, something for parents to fear their children were watching, and something to revile. "2 girls 1 cup" was a tool used to underscore family values by its rejection.

Early internet and media personalities like B. Scott created reaction videos for their fans, feeding into the frenzied craze, allowing "2 girls 1 cup" to grow legs as a career maker. It guaranteed clicks and shares, everyone trying to out gross, withstand, or make a better joke about what was happening in the video. Jon Lajoie made a song out of it and found himself on a network television show, successfully deploying his comedy through creative songs and YouTube videos. Helping these people become

successfully employed in American media proves how integral the taking down and disgust over “2 girls 1 cup” was. The idea that a man and a genderqueer person of color were able to watch something that is arguably porn on a public forum speaks to the importance of rejecting scat play and shaping American values around the value judgments placed on women partaking in non-normative sex.

This paper attends to the pressure of an increasingly technological world in understanding the shifting terrain of sexuality. Scholars of sex and sexuality need to keep up with the technological advancements that are changing the ways people access and interact with sexually explicit content. To say that pornography is dying rather than looking at the new ways participatory media allows performers and viewers to engage and generate capital is short sighted and ignorant of the adaptability of media and intrinsic links between sexuality and technology.

“2 girls 1 cup” was a viral video, something easily forgotten as time passes, but because it was taken up by venerated comedians, it will never not be seen and understood as a part of a specific moment or be understood as a long-standing joke about internet culture and American sexuality. Five years after “2 girls 1 cup” was released (and five years before I sit writing about the lasting impact), Conan O'Brien and Eric Andre featured the clip on their shows. They serve very different audiences, but show how lasting “2 girls 1 cup” is. Through this avowal, “2 girls 1 cup” becomes even more deeply entrenched in American sexual culture. Even though we haven't seen any “2 girls 1 cup” jokes made after 2013, I expect the ten-year anniversary will bring a few choice articles and shock a whole new generation of viewers.

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