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Exploring the Erotic
in
Honey & Hot Wax



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- Why Study Erotic Games?
- Expand understandings of sexuality in games studies.
- Critical Sexuality Studies: games as sites for meaning-making about sex, sexuality, and the erotic. (Epstein 2002, Foucault 1990, Irvine 2002, Plummer 2012)

- Categories of Sexy Games (Brown 2015)
 - Sexy Brink Play
 - Sexy Board & Card Games
 - Secret Dress-UP
 - Erotic Role-Play: role-play which invokes erotic, sensual, and sexual themes (Brown and Stenros 2018)



- *Sex is...*

...exploring your partner's body like an adventurer in a surreal landscape

...experimenting at a BDSM party in search of your perfect kink match

...helping your lover reach new heights of pleasure...with your vampire bite

...a confusing yet exciting gossip topic for slumber parties

...masturbating with balloons and talking about it in a chat room

...not gay if it's with your bro

...almost everything you do, if you're hosting an alien symbiote

...difficult to describe using only a plate of sandwiches



Honey & Hot Wax

- An anthology of erotic art games.
- Contains 8 games, a foreword by Naomi Clark, and a chapter on safety and consent. The editors of the anthology each contributed a game.
- The collection was made possible in part by a grant from the Effing Foundation for Sex-Positivity.
- **From the Call for Submissions:**
- *Analog games that can be played wholly from the text.*
- *We are looking for projects that are playable, not exclusively conceptual.*
- *All games need to either focus on at least one aspect of sexuality as a central theme (not merely as peripheral “flavour”), or involve the explicit use of sex acts as a game mechanic (and not merely as a byproduct of playing the game).*
- *We are deliberately choosing to NOT explicitly define the term “sex” and “sexuality” and will be taking a broad view of the terms.*



Studying Honey & Hot Wax

- Self-defined and selected as “erotic” games.
- Nine authors and 8 games creates a bounded sample for study.
- Expansive definitions of sex and sexuality allow for the exploration of meaning, exposes the socially constructed nature of sex and the erotic.
- Features games from outside the Nordic larp tradition.
- **Methods:**
- Content Analysis of game texts.
- Literary/ludic analysis focusing on both content, language, and mechanics.
- [Next Phase]: Content analysis of reviews of the collection.



Erotic Games Are About... Exploration, discovery, Learning



A core element of 6 of the 8 games.

Exploring new activities, different ways of being.

This exploration and learning could be diegetic, focusing on the exploration taking place within the game.

Two games had Exploration phases/scenes.

But this exploration and learning was also for *players*:

Kink exploration, different forms of sexuality.

“players will be able to explore new activities and boundaries with their chosen partner while gaining communication skills that may benefit them in the future.”

“This game was created...with the hope that it might teach all sorts of players to interact with literal and fictive anatomies simultaneously.”



Communication: Theme & Mechanics

Core theme of *Feeding Lucy* and *Pop!*.

Several games play with literal silence, while other games restrict communication (particularly around sex).

Feeding Lucy prioritizes frank sexual communication.

While *the Sleepover* and *You Inside Us* focus on the process of learning to communicate desire and interest.

In the Cleft of the Rock emphasizes both very specific rules about the negotiation of touch, as well as the way that bodies can be described during the game.



Sex is...

Awkward!

- 7 of the 8 games mention the potential for awkwardness, nervousness, and embarrassment during the game.
- Five refer specifically to diegetic awkwardness experienced by the **characters** in the game.
- But three of the games: *The Sleepover*, *Pop!*, and *Feeding Lucy*, discuss the awkwardness that **players** might feel while playing the game.
- In all three cases players are assured that these feelings are natural, particularly given the subject matter:
 - “Sex is ridiculous, with or without balloons”
 - “Don’t be afraid to laugh or be silly. Sex should be fun.”



Sex is...

more than genitals and orgasms

- Emphasis on expanding definitions of sex and sexuality beyond normative expectations:
- Kink is explicitly thematized in *Follow My Lead*, *Pass the Sugar*, and *Pop!*
 - It is also an optional element of *You Inside Us* and *Feeding Lucy*.
- Two games (*Echo of the Unsaid*, *The Sleepover*) explicitly interrogate queer identity.
- Six of the eight games have content that encourages players to think of sex beyond bodies, specific erogenous zones, or orgasms.
- *In the Cleft in the Rock* specifies that players cannot describe bodies using human anatomical terms, rather players describe fantastical landscapes.
- *Feeding Lucy* and *You Inside Us* both include pre-game discussions about how to refer to the body parts being referred to during the game.



Setting the scene: Alibi and the Magic Circle



Provide alibi for
players through:

Characters

Context/Situation

Play Space:

Consent and
Safety Mechanics

Music

Set-up ritual

Costumes

Props



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