

A turn on music in online pornography

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Abstract

Online pornography usually starts with music, but continues without it. The development of video cameras, editing software and internet connections has popularized the DIY-aesthetic and sense of immediacy that belonged to amateur videos. This aesthetic leaves little room for music, as it exposes the video as mediated.

Placing music only at the beginning of a video creates a juxtaposition between the non-diegetic sound of music, and the diegetic sound of people having sex. This intensifies the explicitness of the depicted sex. Because the change of sound environment usually happens between the sexual acts that focus on female pleasure and those that focus on male pleasure, the placement of the music signifies how pornography prioritizes male pleasure.

Another important role of music in online pornography is that it acts as a “threshold”, based on the concept of Gérard Genette, and elaborated on by Giorgio Biancorosso and Guido Heldt. The Pornhub Community ident is a musical threshold that acts as a frame that demarcates the diegetic world of the video. It also serves as a peritextual cue that signals the beginning of the video.

Finally, music and paratexts play a key role in constituting the “story” of online pornography. Online video-sharing websites such as Pornhub are saturated with paratexts. These captions and tags provide a large bulk of information that is not addressed in the video itself, except through the music. Here Ronald Rodman’s associative approach to television music is applicable, because the small budgets and relatively short span of television programs are taken a step further by online video culture.

Inhoudsopgave

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Introduction

The vast majority of pornography is consumed online. In *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography* (2011), Susanna Paasonen gives a detailed description of the conventions in, and aesthetics of online pornography. The one remark she gives on music, is that there usually is none.¹ This is only partially true; most videos *do* feature music, but this is limited to the beginning of the video. Within the first minutes (depending on the total length of a video), any form of music will most likely disappear, and not come back. The majority of the scenes are thus not accompanied by music. This lack of music is somewhat unique for pornography, as regular film and television generally use music throughout.

What these older forms of audiovisual entertainment do have in common with online pornography, is that the start of the show is signaled by music. These moments, like company logos or station identifications have often been overlooked by the academic literature, which tends to privilege the kinds of non-diegetic background music that co-narrate a storyline. Similarly, the music you come across on digital community platforms has not yet received a lot of academic attention. Not to mention the lack of musicological research on pornography, with the exception of Bruce Johnson's *Earogenous Zones* (2010).

In this thesis I hope to string together theories and ideas from research areas that are closely related but have not yet been combined, to gain a better understanding of how music and pornography relate to each other in an online video culture. As mentioned above, music in online pornography is usually reserved for the first section of the video. This raises the question: why? Why do these videos start with music but continue without? Why do they use *this* music? And why is it used *how* it is used? I aim to answer these questions with the main research question: what is the role of music in online pornography?

To answer this, I will first provide a short historical overview of how online pornography has manifested itself in the way it has, because this sheds a light on the question of why there is no music throughout a video. I will then focus on two recurring, different ways of using music. First I will analyze is the "Pornhub Community" ident, and then I will analyze a video that uses a non-diegetic "soundtrack" in the first minutes. Each analysis will be preceded by a theoretical framework.

¹Susanna Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography* (Cambridge, MA: Mit Press, 2011), 79.

I have chosen to focus on Pornhub.com because this is currently the most visited website for pornography, and because it is free.² While that makes a suitable starting point, it is almost impossible to ensure that, or trace whether, the working conditions of the performers are legitimate and properly looked after. I have tried my best to take this into account when I chose the case study.

Since there exists no literature specifically on music in online pornography, I will rely on literature that focusses on various sorts of audiovisual media, whether this is film, television or Facebook. After all, online videos are not an isolated medium (is there such a thing?), but are built from a transmedial mixture of conventions.

Historical overview

Linda Williams has stated that “the conjunction of music and sex, as opposed to the presentation of sex acts with little or no music, is enormously important in the history of cinematic sexual representation”.³ The first instances of on-screen sexual behaviour coincided with the musical interludes of 1960s Hollywood films, of which *The Graduate* (1967) is the most famous. It made sense for musical interludes to conjunct with the noval sex scenes, which Williams calls “musical sexual interludes”, because the interlude provides a break with the flow of the narrative, and non-diegetic music could drown out sounds considered inappropriate or tasteless.⁴ The music and editing would distance the sexual action from the storyline, ensuring that “intimate sexual relations reside in a different register of time and space”.⁵

The musical sexual interludes could show sex, but to let the audience *hear* sex was still a step too far. Hearing sex would add a completely new layer of explicitness. Williams explains this by referring to Michel Chion, who states that “the synchronization between a blow heard and a blow seen” is “the most immediate audiovisual relationship”.⁶ Here he talks about violence on screen, but the description makes sense in relation to sex as well. To make audible the sounds of sex would confirm the actuality of the sex. Even the film *Deep Throat* (1972), credited for starting the “Golden Age of Porn” and seen as a symbol of the loosening sexual mores in North America, has an extensive non-diegetic soundtrack that acts as a buffer

² As of July 27, 2019, traffic analysis company Alexa ranks Pornhub on the 29th place on their global list of top sites, making it the highest ranking pornography website: <https://www.alexa.com/topsites>.

³ Linda Williams, *Screening Sex* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 83.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁶ Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 61.

in all sex scenes.

When the pornographic industry no longer shied away from audible sex sounds by the end of the 1970s, it wanted to “seek an effect of closeness and intimacy, rather than of spatial reality”.⁷ Sound was often added in post-production, where it could be recorded with microphones standing very close to the bodies. This meant that sounds could be captured with more clarity and unprecedented proximity, without the microphones standing in the way during filming.⁸ Adding music to this would mean that the heightened sense of closeness achieved by post-dubbing, would be lost. Post-dubbed sounds are now a staple feature of online pornography, which explains the lack of music in current videos.

In the 1980s, the increasing accessibility of video cameras led to a major increase in amateur pornography. The effect that the low production value had on these videos turned out to be a recipe for success, as it tapped into a longing for “authenticity”, according to Paasonen.⁹ Amateur videos gained so much popularity that it became a serious competitor for the professional industry. So, the latter quickly adopted the aesthetics of the first. What previously belonged to the style of amateur videos only, such as shaky images produced by hand-held cameras, close-ups of genitalia, point-of-view shots, and domestic locations, was now part of professionally produced films and videos as well.¹⁰ As digital technology developed it became even easier to make and distribute videos of any sort. Because the internet was associated with directness and immediacy, it was the perfect place for the DIY-aesthetic of pornography to flourish.¹¹ The now preferred “absence of mediation or representation” likely contributes to the loss of interest in music as an artistic tool.¹²

According to Pornhub’s own statistics, the website has over ten million uploads and 75 million daily visitors.¹³ Like many other pornography websites, it is modelled after video-sharing website YouTube.¹⁴ This means that the website has a similar lay-out, and offers functions associated with YouTube, but now prevalent on most social media platforms, such as liking, subscribing, commenting and sharing. Videos with varying degrees of professionalism exist next to each other, from spontaneous clips taken on mobile phones, to

⁷ Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the “Frenzy of the Visible”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 123-124.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 123-124.

⁹ Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance*, 72.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹² *Ibid.*, 74.

¹³ “Celebrating 10 Years Of Porn... and Data!” Pornhub, accessed July 27, 2019, <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/10-years>.

¹⁴ Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance*, 34.

teasers that function as promotion material for larger production companies that want to draw you to their own websites.¹⁵ Original content can easily alternate with illegally downloaded or copied scenes from films, sometimes by just filming another screen on which the original is played.

As has already become clear, the “participatory web” makes it difficult to draw strict boundaries on *anything* that happens online. In ways, online videos are similar to television programs, but in ways, they are not. In other ways, videos on Pornhub are similar to videos on Facebook, but simultaneously, they are not. This is the result of what Henry Jenkins calls “convergence culture”, an online culture where content, conventions and behaviors flow across different media and community platforms, and can intersect in multiple ways.¹⁶ It is important to remember that Pornhub functions within the context of convergence culture. Participation and convergence also problematize binary notions of professional versus amateur and producer versus consumer, but because everyone now makes amateur-looking videos, regardless of the degree of professionalism involved, the distinction is becoming less relevant.¹⁷

Case study I: theoretical framework

Most audiovisual media begin with music. Films start with company logos, television shows begin with a theme song, and musicals open with an overture. In his article “Beginning Credits and Beyond” (2001), Giorgio Biancorosso advocates for more appreciation of the music in beginning credits, a phenomenon that is often taken for granted while it plays an important part in constituting the world of any film. He states:

By cleansing our current auditory field and creating a new sound environment, the presence of the music sanctions *our own* readiness to turn from mere bystanders into genuine appreciators of a representation, to cross the threshold that leads into a world of appearances.¹⁸

When a film starts, the audience needs to be transitioned into the story world, and music helps to ease this immersion. According to Biancorosso, music “prepares, enables and signifies the

¹⁵ Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance*, 34.

¹⁶ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, (New York; London: New York University Press, 2006), 3.

¹⁷ Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance*, 71.

¹⁸ Giorgio Biancorosso, “Beginning Credits and Beyond: Music and the Cinematic Imagination,” *ECHO: a music-centered journal* 3, no. 1 (2001): 2.

perceptual, cognitive, affective shift that marks the spectator's psychic life the moment a film begins".¹⁹ He states that this effect is socialized through a long history of (religious) rituals and traditions that begin with a musical signal.²⁰ He compares the effect that credit music has to the frame of a painting. It creates a "conceptual frame" around the art (the film), and the space (world) around it. By doing this, credit music emphasizes the film's status "as representation".²¹

Referring to Biancorosso's text on the ritual of opening music, Guido Heldt writes that the dominance of Hollywood in the Western entertainment industry has "intensified the ritualistic effect by repetition".²² He similarly states that company logos are not just a "sonic calling card", but have a transitional nature that prepares the audience and leads them into the fiction. They function to demarcate a space for the fictitious world to take place in.²³ The music that accompanies company logos are "extra-fictional", meaning it relates to the fictional, without being *in* it.

Related to these ideas of opening music as a frame or demarcation, is the term "paratext", coined by Gérard Genette in 1997 to describe the additional information about the main text of a book, "functioning at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it".²⁴ He divides paratexts up into two kinds: peritexts, which are physically attached to the book itself (like the name of the author printed on the cover), and epitexts, which are found elsewhere (like a book review in a magazine). In relation to film, an interview with the director is epitextual, and company logos, credits and title screens can be seen as peritextual.²⁵

The Pornhub Community ident can also be thought of as a "station identification" as described by Ronald Rodman in *Tuning In* (2010). User profiles on video websites like YouTube and Pornhub are called "channels", which is of course reminiscent of television channels. You can subscribe to these channels and easily switch between them. On television, channels or networks can use station identifications to identify themselves in between programs and remind the viewer which channel they are watching again. Stations

¹⁹ Biancorosso, "Beginning Credits and Beyond," 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²² Guido Heldt, *Music and Levels of Narration in Film: Steps Across the Border* (Bristol, England: Intellect, 2013), 26.

²³ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

²⁴ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. J.E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

²⁵ Heldt, *Music and Levels of Narration in Film*, 25.

identifications are less elaborate than themes or jingles, but still identifiable musical mottos.²⁶ A station identification is not meant to let people transition into new worlds and narratives, like a company logo would, but works mostly as an identifier in between programs or videos. In the following analysis I will show that the Pornhub Community ident does both.

Case study I: analysis of the Pornhub Community ident

One of many videos that features the Pornhub Community ident is “She moaned so loud the neighbours checked in on us” by BEDGASM.²⁷ The ident consists of a mere two seconds and shows an animation of pictograms that turn into the Pornhub Community logo (see Figure 1). It is not a separate item after which the “actual” video still has to load, like an advertisement on YouTube, but it is already *in* the video. This means the ident can be seen as peritextual. If it appears, it is at the beginning of videos uploaded by users who are registered to the “Model Program”. This is comparable to the YouTube Partner Program, i.e. they can earn money by uploading content. However, not all videos from “Verified Amateurs” begin with the ident. It is unclear whether there are rules for this: maybe you are required to use it in only a certain percentage of your content, or maybe it is not required at all. It is also unclear who made it and since when it is being used.²⁸

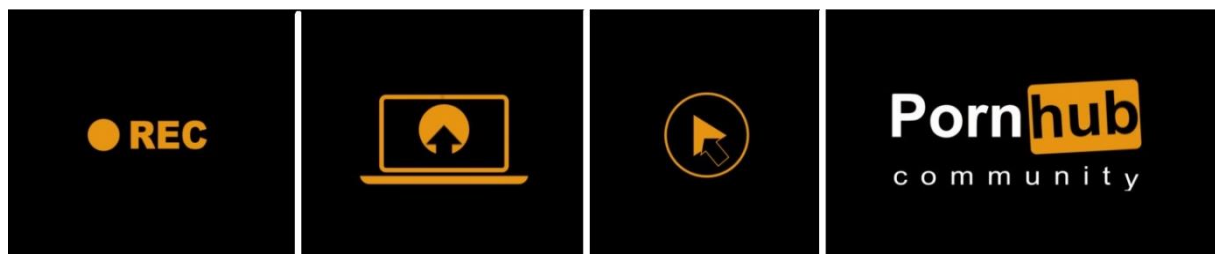


Figure 1

Examples of channels that use this logo are BehindTheMaskk, TightCouple, and BEDGASM. The animation of the ident is accompanied by a drum beat and four bass notes spread over two measures. It is a very small section of music, but the syncopated rhythm in the drums and the laidback playing of the bass - it slides towards the pitches - create a groovy feel. The groove is rather generic as there is not enough time for elaborations, but there is a

²⁶ Ronald Rodman, *Tuning In: American Narrative Television Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 55.

²⁷ “She moaned so loud the neighbours checked in on us,” Pornhub, accessed January 14, 2019, https://www.pornhub.com/view_video.php?viewkey=ph5bf9ad45abd82.

²⁸ Pornhub’s support service has never responded to my question about this.

complete rest on the eighth beat. This is unexpected because it is unusual for a groove to end on the seventh beat. This could contribute to the recognizability of the ident, at least to the people engaging in a popular Reddit thread from January 2019, titled “If you play the Pornhub community jingle in public, everyone will know you’re watching porn but no one will say anything because it will reveal that they know what the jingle’s from”.²⁹ The post has over 93.000 up-votes and almost 3000 replies.

The Pornhub Community ident functions similarly to the company logos described by Heldt. It obviously shows the logo of the company, and it works as a layer between the world of the video and the world outside it, as an extra way of framing the video. I say “extra”, because every video is also visually framed by a rectangular window on your screen, regardless of the device it is watched on. In only two seconds, the animation in the ident shows pictograms that symbolize the process of recording, uploading, and watching (see Figure 1). The simplicity of this animation in combination with the simplicity of the music, conveys a sense of directness and immediacy that is so crucial to online pornography.³⁰

Case study II: theoretical framework

While researching this topic, I have seen many videos that use a non-diegetic song that accompanies the “prologue” of a video. For this thesis I have chosen to focus on one case study, partly because there is not enough space for more, and partly because the analyses would greatly resemble each other. Christopher Zeischegg, a former jack of all trades in the adult industry has written about his experience of writing music for pornography. He writes: “I followed a pattern I had seen in other, slightly-stylized pornography. I would cut the non-sex footage to the beat of a song and then slowly fade the music down upon first hint of on-screen penetration.”³¹ This attests to the fact that the video I will be analyzing is not an isolated instance but part of a pattern, however large or small that may be.

I have chosen to analyze the video “After party with hot young college girlfriend”, which is categorized as “amateur”. The goal is not to draw conclusions that apply to all videos in the amateur category, because the spectrum is simply too wide. Not only is there an

²⁹ “If you play the Pornhub community jingle in public, everyone will know you’re watching porn but no one will say anything because it will reveal that they know what the jingle’s from,” Reddit, accessed January 14, 2019, https://www.reddit.com/r/Showerthoughts/comments/a8x4r9/if_you_play_the_pornhub_community_jingle_in/.

³⁰ Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance*, 74.

³¹ Christopher Zeischegg, “Sex and composition: a personal history of music in porn,” *Porn Studies* 2, no. 1 (2015): 103.

incredible amount of themes for different preferences, like BDSM, public sex, masturbation, or cosplay, there is also a wide variation in the kind of uploaders. As mentioned before, the distinction between amateur and professional has become increasingly elastic. For instance, a large production company might choose to hire unexperienced actresses that are not looking for a career in the pornography industry. This would then be labeled as amateur, next to videos that are uploaded by more “traditional” amateurs. Zabet Patterson’s description of online amateur pornography helps to better understand the vague category of amateur pornography. She says that the videos are set apart from others “by the rhetoric that surrounds them: these women are billed as your neighbor, your boss, your sister-in-law.”³² This again alludes to the idea of Genette’s paratexts.

A platform like Pornhub is heavily saturated with paratexts. Often, the title is the only given “storyline”. Examples of titles are “Vixen model fucks agent to get what she wants”, “Fit amateur young wife back from training – morning sex” and “2 strangers meet for the first time!”. Max Dawson has described how television networks who upload their programs online, hopped on the train of immediacy and directness that is associated with the internet by using synoptic paratexts to help viewers understand what the premise of an episode is with the blink of an eye.³³ Such and other kinds of paratexts indeed are part of any online platform. See for instance how Paula Harper describes “unmute this” videos, a microgenre that circulates on various social media platforms:

Enclosed in relatively standard forms, these videos appeared in feeds as rectangles within rectangles, framed by various material identifying the poster’s username and avatar, the post date, the platform and providing various options for interaction and sharing.³⁴

This description certainly goes for videos on Pornhub as well. Harper discusses how the paratexts surrounding an “unmute this” video play a crucial role in constituting the genre, and are not subordinate to the content in the video.³⁵ I would say the same can be said for online pornography, albeit differently, because the captions on Pornhub generally do not provide

³² Zabet Patterson, “Going Online: Consuming Pornography in the Digital Era,” in *Porn Studies*, ed. by Linda Williams (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 111.

³³ Max Dawson, “Television Abridged: Ephemeral Texts, Monumental Seriality and TV-Digital Media Convergence,” in *Ephemeral Media: Transitory Screen Culture from Television to YouTube*, ed. Paul Grainge (Basingstoke: Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 45.

³⁴ Paula Harper, “Unmute This’: Captioning an (audio)visual microgenre,” *The Soundtrack* 9, no. 1 (2016): 13-14.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

instructions on how to watch a video.³⁶ The paratexts surrounding a video and the music within the video, work together to constitute meaning.

Rodman describes a similar process in television. Because television programs are much shorter than feature-length films and will often not have the same budget at their disposal, they do not have the same means to create meaning. In television, paratextual features and music fill in unmentioned gaps in the narrative, relying on existing connotations that an audience already has with said paratext and music.³⁷ Rodman describes television music as “a process of association or correlation with other texts (...) through which a listener can draw common meanings”.³⁸ The music in online pornography works in the same way, but taken to an extreme. Because of the very limited durations of the videos and the small (if at all) budgets, paratexts and music are often necessary to provide the entire context of the fictional situation that is carried out. The following analysis will illustrate this.

Case study II: analysis of “After party with hot young college girlfriend”

The video “After party with hot young college girlfriend” is uploaded by “Verified Amateur” BehindTheMaskk.³⁹ This was the first channel to appear when searching for “amateur”. I have used Pornhub through an anonymous proxy server so that the results would not be influenced by any personal browsing history. The video starts with the Pornhub Community ident. Then we see a woman in a short dress who shows her body off to the song “Till The Roof” by Pump Gorilla & SEVEK. This song is posted on YouTube by the channel “Infinity by VideoHUB” that claims to upload the “Best Of Deep House & Tech House”.⁴⁰ The melody, chords and bass are all played by synthesizers, the drums sound like they are played on a drum pad. A repetitive eight-bar melody in 4/4 loops over an Em – Em – C – D chord progression. The song works up to a bass drop by accelerating straightforward eight-notes played on the drum pad/machine. After the bass drops, a dance beat kicks in while the harmony remains on E-minor.

The woman in the video does not really “dance” to the music, she is showing different angles of her body, but not in a particular groove or rhythm, and certainly not to the rhythm of

³⁶ Sometimes video titles will give “instructions”, e.g. to masturbate in a certain way or for a certain amount of time.

³⁷ Rodman, *Tuning In*, 40-41.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁹ “After party with hot young college girlfriend,” Pornhub, accessed August 10, 2019, https://www.pornhub.com/view_video.php?viewkey=ph5be585cbe3aac.

⁴⁰ “Pump Gorilla & SEVEK – Till The Roof (INFINITY BASS) #enjoybeauty,” YouTube, accessed August 12, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1iO7a5kN4y4>.

the song. There are no synchronized points or other indicators that the woman is hearing this music. There is also no trace of diegetic sound, you can only hear the non-diegetic beats of “Till The Roof” . This means that it is possible that while filming, the performers heard different or no music at all. The woman touches herself in an increasingly sexual manner, as she goes from stroking her arms and legs to stimulating her nipples and inserting fingers in her vagina.

At 02:09, the man holding the camera, or who appears to hold the camera, steps into the frame to touch the woman. Exactly at this moment the volume of the music is slightly lowered, and the volume of the diegetic sound is turned up. You can now softly hear the woman moaning through the music. As the camera gets closer, the moaning of both performers can be heard more clearly. They do not speak to each other. At this point the woman is partially nude, with an uncovered breast and her dress frequently pulled up to reveal no underwear, so that the man can touch her vagina with his hands. At 03:25, the music abruptly stops, coinciding with the woman reaching for the man’s penis for the first time. The couple then continues to perform multiple sexual acts throughout the ten-minute video, with no music.

Nothing about these images implies that the woman is the man’s girlfriend, that she goes to college, or that she has been to a party and they are now at a different party. The only information about these two people and their situation is provided by the video title, the description box beneath the video (see Figure 2), and the music. The combination of paratext and house music tells us that the context of this hook-up takes place at an after party. The uploaded version of this song on YouTube has four million views and features a videoclip with model Sierra Skye, who stereotypically looks at the camera seducingly while wearing little clothing. The channel’s name “Infinity by VideoHUB” is a clear reference to Pornhub, and all other videos on this channel feature models that are quite plainly subjected to the male gaze.⁴¹ This likely contributes to associations of partying, women, and sex, that this particular Pornhub video evokes, consciously or not, through a combination of paratext and music. To summarize, “using contemporary dance music styles in porn not only provides an aural backdrop, it helps to further code the text, layering it with meaning and (sub-)cultural

⁴¹ “Male gaze” refers to the term Laura Mulvey coined in 1975. It is widely used to analyze how women in films have been represented in a voyeuristic manner.

resonance”, as Andy Medhurst and Sharif Mowlabocus have said surprisingly fitting to this analysis, even though their statement concerns male gay pornography.⁴²

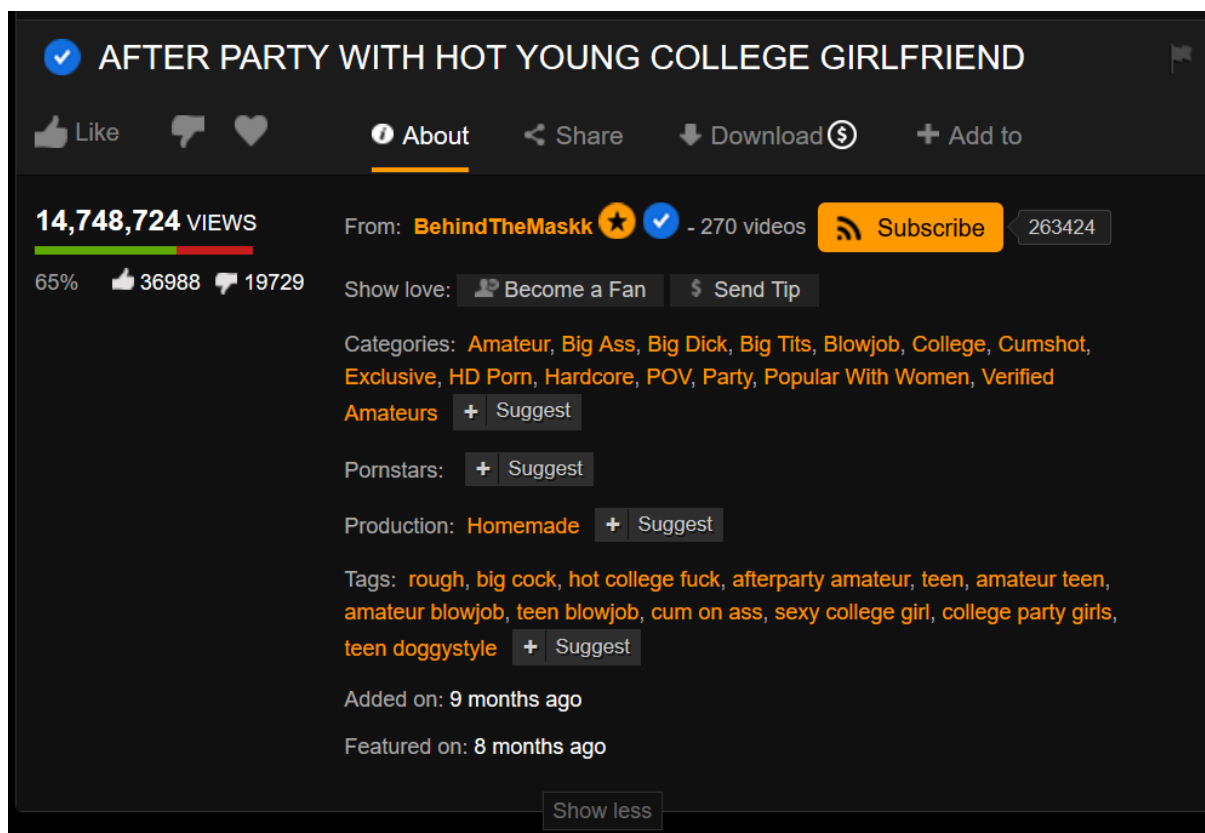


Figure 2

Lastly I want to focus a little bit on why this non-diegetic mini soundtrack even *is* in the video, apart from it being a convention. Earlier we established how music became a less used tool in online pornography, and yet, there is this music. Perhaps it can be seen as another frame that will lead us into a new layer of the narrative/video. Biancorosso wrote that the presence of music in beginning credits functions as a threshold by “cleansing our current auditory field and creating a new sound environment”.⁴³ The same effect is achieved by letting diegetic sounds come in after the non-diegetic music has been the only audio. Williams has stated that the musical sexual interlude in Hollywood films offered a kind of “affective control”.⁴⁴ The same can be said for the use of “Till The Roof”, or more importantly, its relative absence. By juxtaposing non-diegetic music with the “naked”, diegetic sounds of people having sex, the latter will be experienced with more intensity than if there had not been

⁴² Andy Medhurst and Sharif Mowlabocus, “Six propositions on the sonics of pornography,” *Porn Studies* 4, no. 2 (2017): 212.

⁴³ Biancorosso, “Beginning Credits and Beyond,” 2.

⁴⁴ Williams, *Screening Sex*, 83.

music beforehand. As Paasonen and Paul Morris remarked, “sound plays a crucial role in the mediation of intensity”.⁴⁵

The transition of a new sound environment and a new narrative layer go hand in hand. I consider it likely that stopping the music signals that the sex will begin, even though many sexual acts have already been performed at this point, like a strip-tease, kissing, female masturbation, fingering, and rubbing against each other. That the designated place for this transition is when the attention of the performers is shifted towards pleasuring the man, says something about the prevailing ideas on sex, what it constitutes, where it begins, and whose pleasure is paramount.

Conclusion

Pornography’s relation with music and sound has changed a lot throughout the past fifty years. The arrival of video cameras, editing software and internet connections made possible a large increase in amateur pornography. This went hand in hand with a growing appreciation of (supposed) realness in pornography. The continued development of technology and online community platforms have amplified this feeling of immediacy even more, leading to a decrease in using music in pornography. To be able to hear the sounds of two (or more) people engaging in sex, without music functioning as a “buffer”, adds a sense of proximity and explicitness to pornography, that just the images of naked bodies cannot create.⁴⁶

Still, music structures online pornography videos by acting as frames or thresholds. The Pornhub Community ident, can be understood as a station identification: it is a musical identifier of Pornhub as the website that provides you the video. Additionally, ideas from Heldt and Biancorosso on music in company logos and opening titles in films can serve to understand the ident. It is a peritextual cue that signals the beginning of the video. It acts as a demarcation of the diegetic world of the video, and the musical motif stresses this transition. The extra-fictional music is an additional way of framing the video, in addition to the visual frame of the window in which the video plays.

In my other case study, the non-diegetic audio of the song “Till’ The Roof” provides a second threshold. The change from non-diegetic to diegetic audio causes a transition into a

⁴⁵ Paul Morris and Susanna Paasonen, “Coming to Mind: Pornography and the Mediation of Intensity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Sound and Image in Digital Media*, ed. by Amy Herzog, John Richardson, and Carol Vernallis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 558.

⁴⁶ Williams, *Screening Sex*, 83.

new layer of the video and it leads us from the “prologue” of a video to the “action”. In creating this distinction between the sexual acts that focus on female pleasure and those that focus on male pleasure, the placement of the music signifies how pornography prioritizes male pleasure. Hopefully, further research will be done on the relation between music, sound and gender in pornography.

Finally, music and paratexts play a key role in constituting meaning in online pornography. Websites like Pornhub are saturated with paratexts. These captions and tags provide a large bulk of information about the video (where it is set, what the relationship is between the people, etc.) that is not addressed in the video itself, except through the music. Here Rodman’s associative approach to television music is applicable, because the small budgets and relatively short span of television programs are taken a step further by online video culture.

In the introduction I posed the research question, “what is the role of music in online pornography?”. By touching upon several aspects of the music in online pornography, I hope to have answered this. As in traditional audiovisual media, music in online pornography structures and gives meaning, but the traditional means and measures are now subjected to the ever changing qualities of the internet and online platforms. In *Carnal Resonance*, Paasonen states that existing research fails to capture much of the nature of contemporary pornography, because it does not take enough into consideration the impact of the internet on the production and distribution of pornography.⁴⁷ I would add to this that the existing research also does not take music enough into account. I have written this thesis in the hope of changing that.

⁴⁷ Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance*, 66.

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