

Sexplaythings

Rules and instructions for seven sex-games

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You hold in your hands a design magazine devoted to sex. Sex and design? Should sex be designed? *Can* sex be designed? I don't mean the accessories of the sexual act – sexy garments, overspecialized furniture, battery-operated toys – but the very act itself.

As a game designer, sex offers itself up as a vast, juicy, untasted subject for design experimentation. Games are rational systems of rules and regulations, boundaries and goals, winners and losers. Yet at the same time, games also embody *play*: the supple permutations of improvisation, the syncopated dance of uncertainty. Play questions, bends, and breaks the very rules that give rise to it.

And so it is with sex. Rule-bound in complex webs of social etiquette and hormonal biochemistry, sex emerges from ritual and convention, even as it unmakes those structures in its own forms of play. A cozy coupling between these two essential human endeavors, sex and games, would seem to be in the cards.

But I haven't yet seen a serious design investigation of games and sex. So to test these virgin bedsprings, I present for your pleasure a pocketful of sex game concepts. Some are formal game systems, with clearly defined rules and winning conditions. Others are more like structured play. But all of them are functional prototypes ready for you to playtest on your own. If you don't end up following all the rules, that's perfectly understandable – in the moist heat of a well-played game, rules often get quite slippery. Just remember to wear proper protective gear and to practice safe play.

Couples Eavesdroppings

A game for two intimate listeners. Play this game in any setting where you and your fellow player are more or less shielded from prying eyes, but where you will be able to overhear nearby conversations. Suitable locations include a clothing store dressing room booth, a roomy bathroom stall, or an apartment with thin walls and noisy neighbors. First-time players can try eavesdropping on a television, for a low-risk practice game or two.

Your behavior with your play-partner is determined by what you overhear. During a silence or lull, make dirty conversation, loud enough for someone nearby to notice. Every time the eavesdropped topic changes, remove a single garment and toss it where it might be seen. For each overheard insult or disagreement, you both must deliver one gentle kiss or touch – and for each compliment or tender word, one pinch, slap or bite.

By mutual consent, both players can adjust the rules according to the content of the conversation, the circumstances of your setting, and the predilections of both players. How long can you play without being detected? You score one point per minute of anonymity. Half-points if you are discovered before you finish the act. And double score for getting another pair of players to eavesdrop on *you*.

Arbitrary Fetish Solitaire

This game of random pleasure is for a single player only. Select a general-interest magazine and open it to any page. Fixate on the first image you see, and let the rest of the world fall away to the margins of your awareness. For the duration of the game, this image represents the very essence of your desire, the throbbing heart of your libido, your masturbatory mandala.

You know what to do. To win, let the image guide you to the sweet satisfaction of self-induced sexual climax. You can do it. Yes you can. Don't cheat and use your imagination. Okay, you can cheat a little bit, but the point is to enjoy rewiring your desire. Trust me. It works. After mental sex with a strapping SUV, a coyly submissive bottle of cough syrup, or a roomful of naughty Ethan Allen recliners, fucking your own species in the real world will seem like a lackluster alternative.

The Chastity Marathon

Less a sex game than a game premised on the very absence of sex, this grueling contest of stamina and willpower is recommended only for those with a passion for long-distance endurance. The rules of the game are simple: abstain from sex. (Rule clarification: the challenge comes from knowing what you're missing, so the sexually inexperienced are not eligible to play.)

While solo play can be useful for training, the more competitively nonsexual would do well to organize contests of two or more players. Once the race begins, the goal is to be the last one remaining in the game. Some winning strategies: fix up other players with the most charming, attractive, successful singles you can find. Buy them fancy new wardrobes, homes and cars. Arrange for them to be kidnapped by prepaid prostitutes. Plus, all of that work will keep your mind off the fact that you're not getting any yourself.

As a game design problem, the Chastity Marathon presents a curious paradox. What does it mean to win? Those that remain in the race indefinitely never quite seem to reap the pleasure of victory, while those that finally do lose usually enjoy the circumstances of their defeat. Choose whatever strategy suits you. Just remember: you may have been already playing this game for years and not even know it.

Pretend Sex

This metaphysical play activity is inspired by children's' classics like "House," "Doctor," and "Cops and Robbers." You can play this game anywhere and with anyone. Come to think of it, there's nothing wrong with playing Pretend Sex in a house, with a doctor, and in the presence of real-life cops and robbers.

The goal of this game is to play at having sex – but not *really* have sex. To play, simulate as best you can the sounds, sights, and interactions of sex, by yourself or with others, in any way you see fit. Go wild. Get busy. Do your thing. Lions, tigers, and bears, oh my. You get the idea. Just remember: you're not having sex. You're playing pretend. And if you do get turned on and end up really having sex, *you lose*. Big time.

You see, the theory of General Relativity, the field of Semiotics, and Rod Sterling all agree: apocalyptic things are bound to happen when signifier and signified get mixed up. Nobody expects to raise a family playing House. Or cure cancer by playing Doctor. So please, whatever you do, don't get off playing Pretend Sex.

Probabilistic Sex Role-Playing

One existing sex phenomena comes quite close to games: the well-documented activity of sex role-playing. The Dungeons & Dragons geeks of erotica, role-players spice their sex with a dash of narrative flair. The problem is that the *stories* these sex-gamers cook up are so impotently generic. Master and slave; boss and secretary; cowboy and Indian. Yawn, yawn, yawn. If you're going to experiment with sexual narrative, then the narrative should be, well, *experimental*.

So. Inserting the sex-gamer role-playing impulse into the tried-and-true gloryhole of game randomization, we get Probabilistic Sex Role-Playing. To begin, two players agree on a meeting time and place. Then each player secretly concocts a detailed character sketch, complete with false name and back-story, full-blown costume with hair and makeup, plus any additional prostheses and props necessary to complete the illusion.

The two players meet at the appointed rendezvous and viola! They must role-play through their sexual encounter, no matter how surreal the juxtaposition. Some of my favorites over the years: blind pirate captain & furry baby squirrel slut; vampire zombie goth leather schoolmarm & recovering alcoholic pizza deliveryboy; fresh-faced Capitol Hill intern & crooked undercover cop (who is posing as a fresh-faced Capitol Hill intern).

Experienced players can add more bodies to the cast, increasing the narrative possibilities geometrically with each new player. Do the math. A Probabilistic Sex Role-Playing game with seven or more players generates more story possibilities than a roomful of monkeys banging their keyboards (and each other) for eternity.

The Sweat Bead Game

An anatomical game of strategy for two. To setup the Sweat Bead Game, you and your opponent carefully place long lines of electrician's tape over your entire bodies, creating a grid of perfectly positioned two-inch by two-inch squares. Then you both spend 24 hours at a tanning salon. Afterwards, remove the tape to reveal a clean grid of squares from your brow to your toes, and every fleshy protuberance in-between.

Here's how you play. Disrobe down to your gameboard epidermis and choose a starting square on your opponent's skin, touching it with some part of your body. Alternating turns, each player is permitted to expand his or her position by touching one more adjacent square, retaining contact with all of the initial positions as well.

Take your time and choose your moves carefully. Every precisely placed finger, wrist, and forearm, every point of hip, belly and inner thigh contact must follow the rules exactly. The Sweat Bead Game is a Chess match of flesh that winds around itself. The board for one player is one and the same time the same time the pieces for the other, creating mathematical permutations of dizzying paradoxical complexity.

Initially, these strategic depths may slow down the action. But have faith in your natural ability to play. Before too long, you and your opponent will internalize the rules and the game will proceed on a more intuitive level. Can you maintain your current position and add just one more square? Can you lure your opponent into making an illegal move? Matches of The Sweat Bead Game can go on for days. If you can continue to play until the grid lines fade completely from your close-pressed skin, the game ends in a draw. However, you may find that you and your opponent have exchanged sides like a copulating Jacob's Ladder. In that case, you'll have to play a second time to get back inside your own body again.

Exquisite Corpses

This game for many, many players is part chain letter, part memory exercise, and part serial orgy. Any game of Exquisite Corpses begins innocently enough. Two initial players, let's call them A. and B., have sex. Player B. notes one element from the encounter: a particular technique or position, a memorable garment or perfume, an unusual setting or time of day, an unexpected phrase whispered involuntarily at the moment of ecstasy. Anything that tickles the fancy.

Player B. then continues the game by having sex with a third party, player C. Player B. must include, during sex with C., the fancy-tickling element from the first coupling. Player C., in turn, is required to remember what it was, and take note of something else to pass on for next time.

Player C. moves on to sex with D., incorporating both of the previous rules, which D. carries forward to E., along with one more. And so on. Like a libidinal Victorian parlor game, the details add up, making each new instance of sex a progressively convoluted ritual of elaborately stylized sex. By the time we get to players G. and H., we find them in the back seat of an abandoned schoolbus, using only their elbows to undress each other, tongues dripping with low-carb cookie dough, 3-inch false eyelashes akimbo, rubbing genitals to armpits and moaning the words "Madison, Wisconsin" every 24 seconds. Such dedicated players! And the rest of the alphabet still beckons...

More than just a way to indirectly screw with your lover's lover's lover's lover, Exquisite Corpses is a collaborative sex design exercise. The game continues until a player makes a mistake and leaves something out, or until by chance the circle returns to A., the original participant, the game's *player zero*. If players Z. and A. can complete the chain, and yet still manage to actually end up having something resembling sex, then the game ends in a win for all players. Otherwise, think of the trouble you went through and you didn't even get laid.