



POKER

Interview with Indy Mellink, developer of a gender-neutral deck of cards

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No king, queen, and jack, but gold, silver, and bronze. Indy Mellink of Oegstgeest, Holland has developed a gender-neutral deck of cards.

The king is higher than the queen, and the queen in turn is higher than the jack. In every card game, the king is higher than the queen.

Indy Mellink thought this was strange. When she wanted to explain a new card game to her cousins, 23-year-old Mellink paused to consider those age-old values and got annoyed. Her father remarked that if it irritated her so much, then she should start doing something about it.

With the coronavirus raging in the Netherlands and everyone forced to stay home under lockdown rules, Indy had plenty of time on her hands. Already well-versed in graphic design, she began devoting her time to change the design of the card game.



Royal couples, princes and princesses, and farmers and farmers' wives

Initially, Mellink wanted to replace the king with a royal couple of king and queen. Then instead of the queen, she wanted a prince and princess, and instead of the jack, she wanted a farmer and farmer's wife together on the card. That way, both genders would be represented equally, but you still had different values.

She moved on from that idea, as new problems soon presented themselves. "I found it difficult to represent two people properly on one card. And what would we call that card?"

“It's always a white king, queen, and jack. Whether that's intended or not; they're certainly not people of color.”

Not only did the naming and equal representation on the cards cause a problem, another issue made Mellink change her course as well: "I thought about it and most of the picture cards you see, are white people. It's always a white king, queen, and jack. Whether that's intended or not; they're certainly not people of color. I didn't think that was representative either. That's another a form of inequality."

Mellink stepped away from the idea of depicting individuals on the three playing cards altogether. She looked for a solution; something that represented a triad of easily recognizable values. Even people, or perhaps especially people, who had never played cards before and had never seen the gender-neutral card game, needed to understand immediately which order of precedence applied.

"I was looking for something new; something easy that everyone already knows. Finally I had a Eureka-moment: gold, silver, and bronze! Everyone already knows those three from sports like the Olympics medals."

Fierce reactions to the gender-neutral card game

In October 2020, she launched her site gsb-playingcards.com where, for €9.95, anyone can buy a gender-neutral deck of cards without kings, queens, and jacks, but instead with gold, silver,

and bronze.

The initiative received modest attention at first but the reactions really started pouring in after an interview in of Holland's biggest newspapers and daily new shows this week.

It not only led to increased sales, but the project also unleashed a big debate, with hundreds of people discussing the need (or lack thereof) for a change to the classic deck of cards. The reactions are very polarized; from very positive to extremely negative.

“*The fact that people have such strong feelings about it, shows that I am addressing something important.*”

The first reaction is always the same, says Mellink: “The first thing people say is, ‘Oh, I’ve never thought about this.’” The reaction that follows then varies: “Or they go in the direction of ‘I do believe in this, I do agree with you. Just give me six decks right away.’ But other people say ‘It’s such a small thing anyway, why is it important at all? Why are you changing something that needs no changing?’”

People who fall into the second category often accuse Mellink of making much ado about nothing by changing things. At the same time, some vehement reactions indicate that there is an issue and it’s not a small one. “Ironic yes,” laughs Mellink when she describes how people get infuriated while accusing her of getting riled up about something that is not a problem.

All those reactions, including negative ones, don’t make Mellink question whether she was right to get into this. “It certainly does motivate me. It just shows that I’ve come up with an idea that’s getting a lot of attention. The fact that people have such strong feelings about it shows that I’m addressing something important.”

At times it’s difficult to deal with the negative reactions, but fortunately, there have also been some very positive ones. “With the heavily negative reactions, I really feel pity for people. Some people have so much hate in their lives that they get so worked up about me trying to change something, which I find almost pathetic. I don’t let it get to me; if people feel the need to express themselves like that, they can do so .”

Making a career out of the the gender-neutral cards

Mellink completed her Master's degree in Forensic Psychology last year, now she teaches at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam. But in addition to her work as Course Coordinator for Legal Psychology and pursuing a Ph.D., she is now fully dedicated to the gender-neutral deck of card with the gold, silver, and bronze cards.

Her phone is constantly ringing with interview requests and her Inbox is flooded with people looking for collaborations. "I'm pursuing my Ph.D. but if I can get this [card game] to spread all over the world, that would be awesome. If I can start devoting myself to this full time, I think that would be really cool!"

“ *“With cards, that medieval – that old class system – isn't really reflected in the games we play like poker and blackjack.”*

Whether her local Holland Casino will give the game a try and whether [Unibet Poker](#) (which already introduced [Queen's Rules](#) events) will play with the GSB deck one day remains to be seen. But Mellink is open to any initiative that will bring her gender-neutral card game more widely to the attention of the public.

With [The Queen's Gambit](#) still fresh in our minds, the question is whether there are any other games on Mellink's list to tackle. "There is no such list, and if there were, chess would not be immediately on it," laughs Mellink.

"Chess is meant to replicate the medieval way of waging war." Mellink says. "With cards, that medieval – that old class system – isn't really reflected in the games we play like poker and blackjack. So that's why with cards it's important that we change the ranking but with chess, it's not. And by the way; the queen is not necessarily that much less valuable than the king in chess. She's actually much more powerful."

The gender-neutral card game is available for purchase through [gsb-playingcards.com](#). Mellink is also active on Facebook and Instagram with her online store. Lead photo via Indy Mellink. This interview was originally published in Dutch on [CasinoNieuws.nl](#).

About [Frank Op de Woerd](#)

Frank Op de Woerd is an iGaming journalist and reporter with well over a decade of experience in the world of poker and casinos. He covers major poker tournaments all over the world, is a regular poker commentator, and he's a



frequent talking head when poker and gambling hit the mainstream news. Op de Woerd is a member of the Dutch Poker Hall of Fame for his contribution to the game's popularity in his home country.

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