

Safer Sex Practices (Portrayals of Sexuality in Pornography)

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KEYWORDS

sexuality, sexual scripts, media representations of sexuality, visual communication, video pornography

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Pornography is a *fictional media genre* that depicts *sexual fantasies* and explicitly presents naked bodies and sexual activities for the purpose of sexual arousal (Williams, 1989; McKee et al., 2020). Regarding media ethics and media effects, pornography has traditionally been viewed as highly problematic. Pornographic material has been accused of portraying sexuality in unhealthy, morally questionable and often sexist ways, thereby harming performers, audiences, and society at large. In the age of the Internet, pornography has become more diverse, accessible, and widespread than ever (Döring, 2009; Miller et al., 2020). Consequently, the depiction of sexuality in pornography is the focus of a growing number of content analyses of both mass media (e.g., erotic and pornographic novels and movies) and social media (e.g., erotic and pornographic stories, photos and videos shared via online platforms). Typically, *pornography's portrayals of sexuality* are examined by measuring the prevalence and frequency of sexual practices or relational dynamics and related gender roles via quantitative content analysis (for research reviews see Carrotte et al., 2020; Miller & McBain, 2022). This entry focuses on the representation of *safer sex practices* as one of eight important dimensions of the portrayals of sexuality in pornography.

FIELD OF APPLICATION/THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

In the field of pornographic media content research, different theories are used, mainly 1) general media effects theories, 2) sexual media effects theories, 3) gender role, feminist and queer theories, 4) sexual fantasy and desire theories, and different 5) mold theories versus mirror theories. The DOCA entry "[Conceptual Overview \(Portrayals of Sexuality in Pornography\)](#)" introduces all these theories and explains their application to pornography. The respective theories are applicable to the analysis of the depiction of safer sex practices as one dimension of the portrayals of sexuality in pornography.

REFERENCES/COMBINATION WITH OTHER**METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

Manual quantitative content analyses of pornographic material can be combined with qualitative (e.g., Keft-Kennedy, 2008) as well as computational (e.g., Seehuus et al., 2019) content analyses. Furthermore, content analyses can be complemented with qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys to investigate perceptions and evaluations of the portrayals of sexuality in pornography among pornography's creators and performers (e.g., West, 2019) and audiences (e.g., Cowan & Dunn, 1994; Hardy et al., 2022; Paasonen, 2021; Shor, 2022). Additionally, experimental studies are helpful to measure directly how different dimensions of pornographic portrayals of sexuality are perceived and evaluated by recipients, and if and how these portrayals can affect audiences' sexuality-related thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (e.g., Kohut & Fisher, 2013; Miller et al., 2019).



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EXAMPLE STUDIES FOR MANUAL QUANTITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSES

A common research hypothesis states that pornography displays sexuality – and even high-risk sex acts, such as penetrative sex – predominately without condoms. To test such hypotheses and code pornographic material accordingly, it is necessary to clarify the concept of “safer sex” and use valid and reliable measures for different types of safer sex practices.

It is important to note that safer sex practices could be assessed at the sexual encounter level (e.g., Is a condom used during the sexual encounter?) or at the level of specific sexual acts (e.g., Is a condom used during anal sex?). It is also possi-

ble that a scene depicts a condom being used, but only for the purpose of it being removed (e.g., to highlight the unrestricted nature of the sex being shown or as part of an impregnation roleplay). Given that such scenarios would depict condom use while simultaneously presenting sex with a condom as being less pleasurable, researchers may need to consider these contextual factors when developing their coding schemes. In gay male pornography “barebacking” (deliberately forgoing condom use during anal sex) is its own sub-genre (Tollini, 2019), thus there is a possibility for indirect coding based on meta-information about whether material sits within this sub-genre.

Table 1. Example studies.

Coding Material	Measure	Operationalization (excerpt)	Reliability	Source
<p>Safer Sex Practices: Condom use during penetrative sex with a penis provides a high degree of protection against pregnancies and several types of STIs (Sexually Transmitted Infections) including HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). While condom use is recommended for private sexual encounters (and demanded by some legislatures for porn performers), condoms can increase pain, risk of injury and risk of STI/HIV transmission among performers (particularly those engaging in receptive penetrative practices) because professional performances are typically much longer and more demanding than the average private sexual encounters. For this reason, some porn performers have challenged the idea that legal obligations for condom use on set effectively protect them (Shachner, 2015). Alternative protection measures are often preferred by professional performers (e.g., long acting contraception methods, regular STI/HIV testing, HIV-Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis). The availability of HIV-Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis has resulted in a trend toward condomless anal sex (“barebacking”) in gay male pornography (Tollini, 2019). Apart from issues of performer health protection, safer sex practices in pornography are also regarded as relevant in terms of modelling behaviors for audiences.</p>				
N=50 scenes from 50 best-selling heterosexual adult films (1 scene per film) and N=50 scenes from 50 bestselling male homosexual films (1 scene per film)	<p><i>Condom use</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Condom use during penile-oral contact (type of condom use) Condom use during penile-vaginal contact (type of condom use) 	<p>Penile-oral contact is shown and a condom is used at least some of the time during this act. Binary coding (1: yes; 2: no).</p> <p>Penile-vaginal contact is shown and a condom is used at least some of the time during this act. Binary coding (1: yes; 2: no).</p>	Cohen's Kappa across all four variables: .78	Grudzen et al. (2009)

Coding Material	Measure	Operationalization (excerpt)	Reliability	Source
N=50 scenes from 50 best-selling heterosexual adult films (1 scene per film) and N=50 scenes from 50 bestselling male homosexual films (1 scene per film)	<i>Condom use</i>		Cohen's Kappa across all four variables: .78	Grudzen et al. (2009)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Condom use during penile-anal contact (type of condom use) 	Penile-anal contact is shown and a condom is used at least some of the time during this act. Binary coding (1: yes; 2: no).		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Condom use during anal-to-oral penile insertion 	Anal-to-oral penile insertion (penile-oral insertion immediately following penile-anal insertion) is shown and a condom is used at least some of the time during this act. Binary coding (1: yes; 2: no).		

Apart from condom use, further safer sex practices can be measured (e.g., visible use of lube to prevent pain or injuries during penetrative sex; observable communication between characters about sexual health status, STI testing, or use of contraception).

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