

Characteristics of Sex Scenes

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ABSTRACT

Media representations of sexuality can be found across many different types and genres of media. Much sexuality-related media content research focuses on portrayals of sexuality in video pornography (e.g., Döring & Miller, 2022a; Miller & McBain, 2022) and other audiovisual fictional media such as movies (e.g., Jozkowski et al., 2016), TV and streaming shows (e.g., Oschatz et al., 2024a, 2024b), and adult video games (Lankoski et al., 2023), as well as visual media such as comics (e.g., Mukai et al., 2022), and audio media such as songs (e.g., Döring & Mohseni, 2025). *Narrative prose fiction* – that is, written fictional works that tell a story through a sequence of events, characters, and causality, including both literary and popular fiction – also frequently depicts sexuality. In the age of the Internet, such fiction is reaching increasingly large and young audiences: pornographic stories and erotic fan fiction are shared on dedicated online platforms (e.g., Wattpad and Literotica; Döring, 2021; Keft-Kennedy, 2008; Seehuus et al., 2019), while erotic novels such as *Fifty Shades of Grey* (James, 2011) and its successors are promoted by publishers, authors, and readers in online book communities on YouTube and TikTok (e.g., under hashtags like #BookTube and #BookTok; Dera, 2024; Döring, 2025). The sexual content in such

narrative prose fiction can be more explicit and graphic than what national laws permit in audiovisual media: for instance, in the novel *Den of Vipers* (Knight, 2025), a #BookTok bestseller from the popular *Dark Romance* subgenre, a sex scene takes place after a murder in the victim's blood, with the murder knife used during penetration (Döring et al., 2026). Another key difference between audiovisual and textual representations of sexuality in narrative fiction is the fact that textual descriptions can provide more in-depth insight into characters' sexual emotions, thoughts, and bodily sensations – for example, through inner monologue or narrative commentary (Ziv, 2015). Consequently, the depiction of sexuality in narrative prose fiction such as stories and books from the *Erotic Romance* and *Dark Romance* subgenres has become the focus of a growing number of media content analyses, linked both to (a) concern about unhealthy, harmful, toxic, and deviant fictional models of sexual interaction and (b) acknowledgment of the pleasure- and identity-affirming reflections of diverse, queer, feminist, escapist, and even boldly transgressive sexual fantasies in fictional media spaces (Döring, 2025; Döring & Schmitt, 2024). This entry focuses on the quantitative measurement of eleven key characteristics of sex scenes between a woman and a man in narrative prose fiction from a gender role and sexual script theory perspective.

FIELD OF APPLICATION/THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

In the field of sexual and pornographic media content research, and particularly within communication research and the social sciences, *media effects theories* predominate, assuming that media representations of sexuality provide audiences with information and models about real-life sexuality and may influence their sexual attitudes, intentions, and behaviors (Döring & Miller, 2022a; Wright, 2011). Hence, content analysis studies informed by the media effects paradigm are typically guided by normative conceptions of healthy and responsible sexuality and, hence, aimed at (a) identifying problematic



elements in sex scenes (e.g., lack of safer sex and contraception representation) that could teach audiences the wrong lesson and/or (b) finding and promoting beneficial elements in sex scenes (e.g., representation of verbal consent communication) that could educate audiences in a helpful way. Queer theories, for example, when focusing on queer media, often stress the identity-affirming positive effects of media representations of sexual experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, or asexual individuals for young queer audiences in Western countries and beyond who otherwise often lack positive role models (e.g., Hermes, 1992; Pucherova, 2019; Wickens, 2011).

Sexual Script Theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1986) is one of the most widely applied theories used to link media representations of sexuality with real-life sexual behavior. It posits that sexual interactions follow more or less fixed scripts based on (1) individual preferences, (2) interpersonal negotiations, and (3) cultural norms that are often reinforced and circulated through media content. For heterosexual interactions, *the traditional male-centric sexual script* sees the man, rather than the woman, initiating, guiding, and dominating the sexual interaction, at times in aggressive or degrading ways, with penile-vaginal intercourse and male orgasm as central elements and a typical disregard for verbal consent communication, safer sex and contraception, clitoral stimulation, female orgasm, expressions of affection and post-sex caregiving (e.g., Aubrey et al., 2025; Kim et al., 2007; Oschatz et al., 2024b). According to the media effects approach and the sexual script theory, the wide circulation of media representations of this male-centric sexual script (e.g., through mainstream video pornography) can contribute to its normalization and, consequently, shape the sexual expectations and behaviors among media audiences, particularly among young, sexually inexperienced, and impressionable audiences.

With video pornography historically male-oriented and literary erotica historically more female-oriented – as reflected in the predominance of women among writers and readers – sex scenes in narrative prose fiction are assumed to depict sexuality more often from a female gaze perspective (Li et al., 2024) and to focus more on the emotional and bodily pleasures of the female

characters. Hence, one would expect a less traditional and male-centric but instead a more *female-centric sexual script* in narrative prose fiction that, for example, sees the woman more often in active roles, includes a broader repertoire of sex acts beyond penile-vaginal intercourse, focuses more on clitoral stimulation and female orgasm, and acknowledges

emotional connection and care between sexual partners. According to the media effects approach and the sexual script theory, a wider circulation of media representations of female-centric sexual scripts (e.g., through erotic literature) could contribute to their normalization and, ultimately, more gender-equitable sexual relations in real life (Kim et al., 2007).

While the concepts of a male-centric and a female-centric script are fundamental to the content analysis of characteristics of sex scenes between a woman and a man, their application and meaning demand theoretical nuance. This is why, before we present the codebook and its operationalization of key variables relevant to male- and female-centric scripts, we provide some theoretical background that should guide analyses in this field. From a theoretical perspective, it is important to acknowledge that there is no singular or uncontested understanding of what constitutes a female-centric sexual script. One reason for debate is the fact that women authors and women readers alike differ greatly in their sexual preferences and experiences (e.g., ease of reaching orgasm, personal significance of orgasm). This leads to different expectations of how the male-centric script could be transformed into a more female-centric one: while some feminist researchers advocate for closing the so-called *gender orgasm gap* in heterosex by systematically depicting more female orgasms in narrative fiction (e.g., Oschatz et al., 2024b), others advocate for overcoming the fixation on orgasms as the ultimate goal – the so-called *orgasm imperative* – in favor of portrayals of more holistic forms of sensual pleasure beyond orgasm (Opperman et al., 2014). Consequently, while male and female orgasms in sex scenes can be counted and compared, the question of whether more female orgasms constitute a truly women-friendly sexual script remains contested both theoretically and empirically: for some women readers, more representation of female orgasms



may be appealing and empowering, whereas for others they may have the opposite effect – discouraging or inducing performance pressure.

A second and deeper reason for debate is the tension between two competing theoretical paradigms in the study of sexuality in narrative fiction. Media research in the social sciences often approaches sexual representations through the lens of the aforementioned media effects paradigm based on social learning and sexual script theory, implying that fictional portrayals of sex scenes shape recipients' sexual attitudes, norms, and behaviors – and thus that fiction carries a responsibility to model healthy, responsible, consensual, and equitable sexual interactions. *Literary and cultural theories*, by contrast, have long recognized fiction as a protected imaginative space for alternative experience, fantasy, and transgression – a realm characterized by its suspension of everyday social rules and norms (Deane, 2026; Döring, 2025; McKee, 2012; Radway, 1984/2009). From this perspective, which can be labeled the *media entertainment paradigm*, the appeal of erotic fiction – and dark romance in particular – lies not in modeling ideal conduct, but in facilitating the cathartic exploration of taboo desires, power dynamics, and complex emotions, such as the thrill of fear-laced arousal, within a protected imaginative space. The media effects paradigm and the media entertainment paradigm pull in opposite directions: one asks whether fiction teaches the right sex education lessons, the other whether fiction is the right place to demand such lessons at all.

This tension is also reflected in feminist debates about erotic fiction and female-centric sexual scripts: while some authors and researchers defend erotic literature as a legitimate space for erotic entertainment, transgressive female desires and fantasies, including, for example, erotic rape fantasies (Bivona & Critelli, 2009), others condemn the representation of transgressive fantasies as a dangerous normalization – or even glorification – of male violence towards women (Herb, 2021) and see most pornography marketed as “by and for women” as basically post-feminist and not political enough (Sonnet, 1999). While entertaining and transgressive elements of sex scenes such as rough practices or sexual violence can be counted and compared, the question of whether their presence constitutes

a male- or female-centric sexual script remains contested both theoretically and empirically: for some women readers, recognizing their forbidden and transgressive fantasies in fiction may be arousing and empowering, whereas for others the representation of aggressive acts may have the opposite effect – eliciting anger, fear, sadness, or disgust by reminding them of real-life experiences of sexual boundary violations and violence (Döring, 2025).

REFERENCES / COMBINATION WITH OTHER METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Manual quantitative content analyses of sexually explicit textual media can be combined with qualitative (e.g., Keft-Kennedy, 2008) or computational (e.g., Seehuus et al., 2019) content analyses. An example of a combination study explores the representation of orgasms in contemporary romance novels through quantitative and qualitative content analyses and shows that women's orgasms are more prevalent than men's and often elicited through manual stimulation of the vulva and clitoris (Cabrera & Ménard, 2013). Furthermore, content analyses can be complemented with qualitative interviews and focus group discussions (e.g., Radway, 1984/2009), as well as with quantitative surveys (e.g., Deller & Smith, 2013; Kraxenberger et al., 2021), to investigate readers' perceptions and evaluations of portrayals of sexuality in narrative prose fiction. Additionally, experimental studies are helpful for directly measuring if and how different depictions of sexuality in narrative fiction affect audiences' sexuality-related thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (e.g., Goldey & van Anders, 2012; Harris et al., 2017). Some survey and experimental studies, for example, have shown that reading erotic texts can make women feel sexually empowered and aroused and increase their likelihood of engaging in sex afterwards (e.g., Kraxenberger et al., 2021; Schmidt et al., 1973).

EXAMPLE STUDIES FOR MANUAL CONTENT ANALYSES

Several content analysis studies are available that investigate depictions of sexuality in narrative prose fiction such as a computational content analysis of the main themes of more than 250,000 sex stories from a leading anonymized sex story online platform (Seehuus et al., 2019),



a manual quantitative media content analysis of different characteristics of sex scenes in 24 popular novels written by male versus female authors (Whissell, 1998), and a combined manual qualitative and quantitative content analysis of 91 depictions of orgasms in 16 contemporary award-winning romance novels published between 1989 and 2009 and written by women authors (Cabrera & Ménard, 2013).

The current example study (Döring & Tramm, in preparation), which analyzed sex scenes from 84 popular romance novels from both the Erotic Romance and the Dark Romance subgenres, is anchored in sexual script theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1986) including debates around male- and female-centric heterosexual scripts (Kim et al., 2007). Consequently, the coded characteristics of a sex scene (a) broadly follow its temporal course (i.e., starting with sexual initiation and ending with post-sex caregiving) and (b) consider the protagonists' gender. In line with the sexual script perspective, the whole sex scene (Dillman Carpentier et al., 2017; Kunkel et al., 2007) – understood as an enactment of a sexual script – is the *unit of analysis*, not the individual sex acts that constitute it. Coding relevant variables at the scene level (e.g., whether a scene entails any form of verbal consent communication and safer sex practices), rather than at the level of individual sex acts (e.g., whether every sex act during the scene is accompanied by verbal consent communication and safer sex practices), is consistent with the media effects paradigm outlined above, which suggests that the mere presence of depictions of verbal consent communication and safer sex practices can promote positive sexual norms and contribute to the normalization of these practices among audiences. The scene-level coding approach also has practical advantages for coding efficiency. Specific research questions may, however, require coding at the level of individual sex acts rather than the scene level.

The 11-dimensional codebook for the manual quantitative content analysis of sex scenes entails 39 variables (3 polytomous-nominal, 8 metric, 28 binary-nominal). It was developed deductively from gender role and sexual script theory and earlier analyses of sexual media, refined inductively with example material, and evaluated for its three key quality criteria: objectivity, validity, and reliability (Döring, 2023). To ensure

objectivity, all concepts are explained in detail with coding instructions and examples, and the full codebook is publicly available (https://osf.io/s7t3e/overview?view_only=c3acc1d8d2034e-84a412b10be6ec38b4). To ensure validity, all categories in the codebook are grounded in the theoretical and empirical literature with respective references. To ensure reliability, all categories were tested for inter-coder reliability between two independent trained coders using a subsample of 50 sex scenes. A codebook overview with concept definitions, operationalizations, reliability coefficients, and sources can be found in **Table 1**. A theoretical rationale is also provided for each selected dimension, briefly explaining relevant research interests and their links to sexual script and gender role theory. While sexual script theory is usually associated with the media effects paradigm and the idea that sex scenes in narrative prose fiction can and should model ideal sexual behavior, the research interest is also partly informed by a literary fiction and media entertainment perspective, which does not always consider fiction a model for real-life behavior but rather an imaginative space to explore and enjoy unrealistic, dangerous, or transgressive fantasies.

This codebook operates with a binary concept of gender: it analyzes characteristics of sex scenes between a woman and a man and contrasts a male-centric with a female-centric sexual script. This approach follows the established literature on gendered sexual scripts and matches the protagonist constellation most prevalent in the genre under study. Contrasting these two scripts is an analytic strategy for examining how gendered patterns are represented, not an endorsement of them. The binary framework necessarily simplifies and does not capture non-binary genders or gender fluidity; extending the analysis in that direction is a task for future research.

Table 1. Characteristics of sex scenes between a woman and a man in narrative prose fiction from a gender role and sexual script theory perspective

Characteristics of Sex Scenes Between a Woman and a Man in Narrative Prose Fiction (definition of key concepts and research interests)	Operationalizations (selected variables to measure the key concepts)	Reliability Coefficients (Döring & Tramm, in prep.)	Conceptual Sources (adapted)
(1) Initiator Addresses which protagonist first expresses interest in sexual activity and initiates the sexual interaction among the involved protagonists. Initiation may be communicated through explicit verbal statements or through nonverbal behaviors that directly lead into the first depicted sexual act. <i>Research interest:</i> While the initiator can be characterized by various attributes (e.g., age, personality), one primary research interest is the gender of the initiator in a sex scene, as the traditional male-centric sexual script assigns the man the role of initiator in heterosexual interactions, while a female-centric script would emphasize women's sexual agency and, hence, represent female initiation more often.	Initiator – Gender: woman initiates (code 1), man initiates (code 2), both initiate (code 3). Example (code 1): <i>“She pulled him close and ran her hand over the front of his pants.”</i>	.84	Oschatz et al. (2024b)
(2) Dominant Role Addresses which protagonist assumes the dominant role or controls the progression of the sexual interaction. The dominant role is identified by which protagonist primarily exerts control over the course, pace, or physical dynamics of the interaction, e.g., through directive touching, physical positioning, and verbal guidance. <i>Research interest:</i> While the protagonist assuming the dominant role can be characterized by various attributes (e.g., social status, sexual experience), one primary research interest is the gender of the dominant partner in a sex scene, as the traditional male-centric sexual script assigns the man the active and dominant role in heterosexual interactions, while a female-centric script would emphasize women's sexual agency and, hence, include female dominance more often.	Dominant Role – Gender: woman assumes dominant role (code 1), man assumes dominant role (code 2), both assume dominant role (shared/alternating control) (code 3). Example (code 2): <i>“There was never any question who was leading; he remained in control from beginning to end, and she surrendered to the certainty of his direction.”</i>	.90	Barron & Kimmel (2000)

**(3) Successful Verbal Consent Communication**

Addresses the verbal negotiation of consent to sexual acts by the involved protagonists. In addition to nonverbal consent (e.g., through facial expressions, gestures, or sounds), verbal consent communication can be clearer and more specific regarding the choice, pace, intensity, duration, position, and other characteristics of joint sex acts. Successful verbal consent communication can lead to either the explicit seeking and affirmation of consent or the establishment of a boundary acknowledged and respected by the partner.

Research interest: The traditional male-centric sexual script assigns men the role of initiator and dominant partner in heterosexual interactions (see initiator and dominant role variables above), leaving little room for explicit verbal consent communication. A recurring concern is that narrative fiction reflects this traditional script and, as a result, neglects verbal consent communication – particularly the explicit seeking of consent from women and the communication of their boundaries. A female-centric script, by contrast, would treat verbal consent communication as a key component of sexual interactions, ensuring that women's consent and boundaries are verbally sought and respected. This applies equally to men's consent, particularly in depictions where women assume more active and dominant roles. Therefore, it is relevant to measure whether and how often sex scenes depict successful verbal consent communication, broken down by gender of protagonists.

Successful Verbal Consent Communication – Female Protagonist:

- **Female Protagonist – Affirmative Consent:**
A female protagonist is verbally asked for consent by the male protagonist and affirms willingness or desire to engage in a sex act. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

Example (code 1): “*Do you want me to fuck you?*” – “*Yes.*” [and the interaction continues accordingly]

.84

- **Female Protagonist – Boundary Respected:**
A female protagonist verbally communicates a limit or refusal regarding a sex act, and this boundary is respected by the male protagonist. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

Example (code 1): “*Please, don’t touch me.*” [and the interaction stops or changes accordingly]

.98

Döring & Miller (2022b); Jozkowski et al. (2016); Jozkowski et al. (2019)

**Successful Verbal Consent Communication – Male Protagonist**

- **Male Protagonist – Affirmative Consent:**
A male protagonist is verbally asked for consent by the female protagonist and affirms willingness or desire to engage in a sex act. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

.93

Example (code 1): “*Do you want this?*” – “*Yes.*” [and the interaction continues accordingly]

- **Male Protagonist – Boundary Respected:**
A male protagonist verbally communicates a limit or refusal regarding a sex act, and this boundary is respected by the female protagonist. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

.90

Example (code 1): “*I don’t want this.*” [and the interaction stops or changes accordingly]

**(4) Sexual Violence Incidents**

Addresses non-consent and dubious consent in sexual interactions. Non-consent occurs when a sex act is initiated or continued by one protagonist against the clearly expressed verbal or nonverbal non-consent of the other. Dubious consent occurs when a sex act is initiated or continued by one protagonist despite mixed verbal or nonverbal signals from the other, combining indicators of unwillingness (e.g., verbal refusal, nonverbal resistance) and willingness (e.g., expressions of pleasure, physical cooperation). Each instance of sexual violence within a scene is counted separately, such that a scene may receive a count of zero (no sexual violence depicted), one, or more, depending on how many acts of sexual violence occur. A new instance is counted when sexual violence resumes after a clear interruption by another activity or when the mode of violence changes (e.g., dubious consent → non-consent).

Research interest: The male-centric sexual script – characterized by male initiation, male dominance, and a widespread absence of verbal consent communication (as explained above) – is often criticized as partly violent, as it may include sex acts that are non-consensual or involve dubious consent from the female protagonist. It is therefore of interest how prevalent depictions of sexual violence against female protagonists are across sex scenes in narrative prose fiction. While a sexual script and media effects perspective analyzes violence as problematic model behavior, from the stance of literary fiction and the media entertainment paradigm, the inclusion of non-consent or dubious consent in fictional sex scenes can also be understood as potentially engaging and arousing expressions of transgressive fantasies. Against the background of changing gender roles and a push for more agentic and dominant roles for female protagonists in female-centric scripts, it is also of relevance to measure the prevalence of sexual violence against male protagonists.

Sexual Violence Incidents against Female Protagonist

- **Female Protagonist – Non-consent:** A sex act is initiated or continued by the male protagonist despite the verbal or nonverbal non-consent of the involved female protagonist. Frequency per scene: 0, 1, 2,

Example (1 count): “*Stop!*” – *She pushes him away.*” [and the interaction continues nonetheless.]

- **Female Protagonist – Dubious Consent:** A sex act is initiated or continued by the male protagonist despite mixed verbal or nonverbal signals from the involved female protagonist, combining indicators of unwillingness (e.g., verbal refusal, physical resistance) and willingness (e.g., expressions of pleasure, physical cooperation). Frequency per scene: 0, 1, 2,

Example (1 count): “*She shakes her head ‘no’ while moaning as he continues kissing her neck.*” [and the interaction continues nonetheless]

.84

.82

Bufkin & Eschholz (2000); Döring & Miller (2022i); Jozkowski et al. (2016)

**Sexual Violence Incidents
against Male Protagonist**

- **Male Protagonist – Non-consent:** A sex act is initiated or continued by the female protagonist despite the verbal or nonverbal non-consent of the involved male protagonist. Frequency per scene: 0, 1, 2,

1.00

Example (1 count): *“Don’t touch me.” - He moves her hand away from his body.* [and the interaction continues nonetheless]

- **Male Protagonist – Dubious Consent:** A sex act is initiated or continued by the female protagonist despite mixed verbal or nonverbal signals from the involved male protagonist, combining indicators of unwillingness (e.g., verbal refusal, physical resistance) and willingness (e.g., expressions of pleasure, physical cooperation). Frequency per scene: 0, 1, 2,

.79

Example (1 count): *“He tells her that they should not do this and tries to pull away, but when she continues kissing him, he stops resisting.”* [and the interaction continues nonetheless]

**(5) Rough Practices**

Addresses the depiction of physically forceful acts within sexual interactions. A rough practice is any act carried out by one protagonist toward the other that involves physical force and can therefore lead to pain, fear, degradation, or injury. This includes, but is not limited to, pushing, pulling, slapping, spanking, punching, choking/strangulation, biting, pinching, physical restraint/bondage, and the use of weapons. As successful consent communication and sexual violence (i.e., non-consensual acts) are measured separately, the concept of rough practices implies neither consent nor non-consent; it focuses solely on the occurrence of selected forceful acts.

Research interest: The male-centric sexual script is often associated not only with non-consent but also with rough and seemingly aggressive or degrading practices enacted by the male protagonist toward the female protagonist. Rough practices are of interest independent of consent, as their depiction may normalize physically forceful and dangerous behaviors or may romanticize forceful practices as expressions of passion. While a sexual script and media effects perspective analyzes rough practices as problematic model behaviors, from the stance of literary fiction and the media entertainment paradigm, the inclusion of rough practices in fictional sex scenes can also be understood as potentially engaging and arousing expressions of transgressive fantasies. Against the background of changing gender roles and more agentic and dominant roles for female protagonists in female-centric scripts, it is also of relevance to measure the prevalence of rough practices initiated by female protagonists and targeting male protagonists.

Rough Practices**– Targeting the Female Protagonist**

- **Female Protagonist – Being Hit:** A hitting act (e.g., slapping, spanking, punching) is carried out by the male protagonist toward the female protagonist. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

Example (code 1): “*He slapped her buttocks with his hand.*”

- **Female Protagonist – Being Choked/Strangled:** A choking or strangulation act is carried out by the male protagonist toward the female protagonist. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

Example (code 1): “*He placed his hands around her throat and applied pressure so she could not breathe.*”

- **Female Protagonist – Being Physically Restrained:** A physical restraint act (e.g., pinning down, bondage) is carried out by the male protagonist toward the female protagonist. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

Example (code 1): “*He pinned her wrists above her head, preventing her from moving.*”

1.00

.94

.82

Bridges et al. (2010); Döring & Miller (2022c, 2022i)



- **Female Protagonist – Being Targeted With a Weapon:** A weapon or object intended to cause pain or injury is used by the male protagonist toward the female protagonist. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

1.00

Example (code 1): *“He forced his gun into her mouth and instructed her to suck it.”*

- **Female Protagonist – Being Targeted With Other Rough Practice(s):** Any other rough practice (beyond hitting, choking/strangulation, restraint, and weapon use) is carried out by the male protagonist toward the female protagonist. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

.82

Example (code 1): *“He bit her shoulder hard.”*

Rough Practices – Targeting the Male Protagonist

- **Male Protagonist – Being Hit:** A hitting act (e.g., slapping, spanking, punching) is carried out by the female protagonist toward the male protagonist. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

1.00

Example (code 1): *“She slapped him in the face.”*



- **Male Protagonist – Being Choked/ Strangled:** A choking or strangulation act is carried out by the female protagonist toward the male protagonist. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

1.00

Example (code 1): *“She wraps her scarf around his neck and pulls, tightening it around his throat.”*

- **Male Protagonist – Being Physically Restrained:** A physical restraint act (e.g., pinning down, bondage) is carried out by the female protagonist toward the male protagonist. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

.98

Example (code 1): *“She cuffed his hands to the headboard of the bed.”*

- **Male Protagonist – Being Targeted With a Weapon:** A weapon or object intended to cause pain or injury is used by the female protagonist toward the male protagonist. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

1.00

Example (code 1): *“She cut him with a knife.”*

**Oral Sex**

- **Oral Sex - Female Protagonist Receiving:** The female protagonist receives oral sexual stimulation of her genitals from the male protagonist. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0). 1.00

Example (code 1): *“His tongue parted her, tasting her arousal.”*

- **Oral Sex - Male Protagonist Receiving:** The male protagonist receives oral sexual stimulation of his genitals from the female protagonist. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0). 1.00

Example (code 1): *“She took his penis deep in her mouth.”*

Vaginal Sex

- **Vaginal Sex - With Penis:** The male and female protagonist engage in penile-vaginal intercourse. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0). .88

Example (code 1): *“He pushed into her in one smooth stroke, and she gasped as her body opened around him.”*

- **Vaginal Sex - With Toy/Object:** The male and female protagonist engage in vaginal intercourse with a toy/object. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0). 1.00

Example (code 1): *“He penetrated her with a dildo.”*

**Anal Sex**

- **Anal Sex – Female Protagonist Receptive:**
The female protagonist is the receptive (penetrated) partner and the male protagonist is the insertive partner in anal intercourse. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

1.00

Example (code 1): *“He eased into her from behind, the tight clench of her ass drawing him deeper.”*

- **Anal Sex – Male Protagonist Receptive:**
The male protagonist is the receptive (penetrated) partner and the female protagonist is the insertive partner in anal intercourse. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

1.00

Example (code 1): *“She worked the strap-on into his ass, his groan deepening as she pushed it in to the hilt.”*

**(7) Clitoral Stimulation**

Addresses the depiction of direct clitoral stimulation of the female protagonist during sexual interactions. Clitoral stimulation is coded when the male or female protagonist stimulates the external clitoral area, whether manually, orally, or through the use of a toy or object. It is coded regardless of whether stimulation leads to orgasm.

Research interest: The clitoris is the primary organ of female sexual pleasure. Research consistently demonstrates that the majority of women require direct clitoral stimulation both to experience sexual pleasure and to reach orgasm. Despite this, the male-centric sexual script tends to center penile-vaginal intercourse as the primary and often sole sexual act, marginalizing direct clitoral stimulation as incidental or supplementary – if it is depicted at all. Female-centric scripts, by contrast, are expected to place greater emphasis on clitoral stimulation as a central rather than peripheral element of sexual activity, reflecting a more female-pleasure-oriented model of sexuality. Against this background, the prevalence of clitoral stimulation by either the female or male protagonist in sex scenes is relevant.

Clitoral Stimulation by

Female Protagonist: The female protagonist directly stimulates her external clitoral area, whether manually or through the use of a toy or object. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

Example (code 1): *“She presses the vibrator against her clitoris.”*

Clitoral Stimulation by

Male Protagonist: The male protagonist stimulates the external clitoral area of the female protagonist, whether manually, orally, or through the use of a toy or object. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

Example (code 1): *“He circled her clitoris with his finger.”*

.98

.81

Wetzel et al. (2025)

**(8) Orgasms**

Addresses the depiction of orgasms experienced by the protagonists during the sex scene. Orgasm is characterized by intensely pleasurable sensations, typically centered in the genital region, and accompanied by involuntary physiological responses, typically resulting in the release of sexual tension and a subsequent state of well-being. Over the course of a sex scene, both the female and the male protagonist can experience multiple orgasms, each of which is coded and counted separately.

Research interest: In the male-centric sexual script, the male orgasm is often constructed as the normative goal and endpoint of sexual activity, whereas the female orgasm is portrayed as more variable, optional, or secondary. Female-centric scripts, by contrast, are expected to place greater emphasis on female pleasure and orgasm. Against this background, it is of research interest how orgasms are depicted in narrative prose fiction and whether their frequency differs between female and male protagonists.

Female Orgasms: The female protagonist experiences an orgasm. Female orgasm frequency per scene: 0, 1, 2, ...

Example (1 count): *"She closed her eyes as she climaxed."*

Male Orgasms: The male protagonist experiences an orgasm. Male orgasm frequency per scene: 0, 1, 2, ...

Example (1 count): *"He reached orgasm buried inside her."*

.85

.92

Cabrera & Ménard (2013); Oschatz et al. (2024b)

**(9) Safer Sex Practices and Contraception Communication**

Addresses the depiction of gendered safer sex practices and contraception communication within sexual interactions. Safer sex practices aim to reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), with condom use being the most widespread method; other barrier methods such as dental dams or gloves offer additional protection. Condom use serves a dual function, providing both STI protection and contraception, and is applied during the sex scene itself. Other contraceptive methods – distinguished here between female contraception (e.g., contraceptive pill, intrauterine device) and male contraception (e.g., vasectomy) – prevent unwanted pregnancy but cannot be applied during a sex scene and can therefore only be mentioned or discussed within a sex scene.

Research interest: The male-centric sexual script tends to depict sex acts as predominantly unprotected, neglecting safer sex and contraception and thereby implying an elevated risk of STI transmission – disproportionately borne by women – as well as a pregnancy risk for women of reproductive age. Female-centric scripts, by contrast, are expected to place greater emphasis on safer sex and contraception communication. Against this background, it is of research interest how frequently common safer sex practices and contraception communication are depicted in narrative prose fiction and how responsibility for protection is distributed across protagonist gender.

Safer Sex Practices

- **Condom Use:** Condom use and/or communication about condom use during the sex scene. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

Example (code 1): *“He took a condom out of his pocket and rolled it on.”*

- **Other Safer Sex Practice(s):** Use of other safer sex practice(s) (e.g., dental dam, gloves) during the sex scene. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

Example (code 1): *“Before continuing, she unfolded a dental dam and placed it between them.”*

Contraception Communication

- **Communication about Female Contraception:** Communication about a female contraceptive method (e.g., contraceptive pill, intrauterine device) during the sex scene. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0).

Example (code 1): *“Are you using birth control?” – “I’m on the Pill.”*

.87

1.00

1.00

Döring & Miller (2022g); Noar et al. (2006); Ott et al. (2025)



	• Communication about Male Contraception: Communication about a male contraception method other than a condom (e.g., vasectomy) during the sex scene. Present (code 1) / Not present (code 0). Example (code 1): <i>"I had a vasectomy last year, you're completely safe with me."</i>	1.00	
(10) Verbal Expressions of Affection Addresses the depiction of deliberate, other-directed verbal expressions of affection performed by one protagonist toward the other during sexual activity. Expressions of affection are coded when one protagonist verbally expresses emotional closeness or tenderness toward the other, such as saying "I love you," using terms of endearment, or voicing admiration or care. They are coded regardless of whether they are reciprocated. Each instance of an expression of affection within a scene is counted separately, such that a scene may receive a count of zero (no expressions of affection), one, or more, depending on how many expressions of affection occur. <i>Research interest:</i> There is concern that the male-centric sexual script neglects emotional expressiveness during sexual activity by focusing narrowly on physical performance and gratification, thereby omitting affection and tenderness as relevant components of sexual interactions. Female-centric scripts, by contrast, are expected to place greater emphasis on emotional closeness and relational connection during sexual activity. Against this background, it is of research interest how frequently verbal expressions of affection are depicted in narrative prose fiction and how the expressive role is distributed across protagonist gender.	Verbal Expression of Affection by Female Protagonist: The female protagonist verbally expresses affection toward the male protagonist during the sex scene. Frequency per scene: 0, 1, 2, Example (1 count): <i>"I really love you."</i> Verbal Expression of Affection by Male Protagonist: The male protagonist verbally expresses affection toward the female protagonist during the sex scene. Frequency per scene: 0, 1, 2, Example (1 count): <i>"You mean everything to me."</i>	.84 .84	Floyd et al. (2021)

**(11) Post-Sex Caregiving**

Addresses the depiction of deliberate, other-directed behaviors performed by one protagonist toward the other directly following sexual activity, aimed at providing physical comfort, emotional reassurance, or relational connection. Post-sex caregiving may be expressed through actions such as cuddling, stroking, talking, offering food and drink, or tending to the other protagonist's physical needs through cleaning or grooming – behaviors that facilitate the other protagonist's transition out of an intense sexual experience and contribute to their sense of being valued and cared for. Although post-sex caregiving occurs after the sex act itself, it is treated as an integral component of the sex scene as a whole, in the same way that pre-sexual initiation behaviors occurring before the sex act are considered part of the scene. The scene thus encompasses the full interactional sequence: from initiation through sexual activity to post-sex caregiving.

Research interest: There is concern that the male-centric sexual script neglects post-sex caregiving by focusing narrowly on the sex act itself, thereby omitting emotional and physical aftercare as a relevant component of sexual interactions. Female-centric scripts, by contrast, are expected to place greater emphasis on relational connection and mutual attentiveness following sexual activity. Against this background, it is of research interest how frequently post-sex caregiving is depicted in narrative prose fiction and how the caregiving role is distributed across protagonist gender.

Post-Sex Caregiving: Aftercare as part of the sex scene is absent (code 0), female protagonist provides aftercare (code 1), male protagonist provides aftercare (code 2), mutual aftercare (code 3).

Example (code 2): *"Afterward, he pulled her into his arms and held her close as they lay together in bed."*

.93

Hughes & Kruger (2011); Muise et al. (2014)



The selected sex scene variables can be complemented with (1) further variables that address additional elements of sexual interactions (e.g., their location and duration; protagonists' sexual fantasies during the interaction); (2) variables that provide more detail on the already included categories, such as their qualitative characteristics (e.g., wording and instances of verbal consent communication during the course of a sex scene); (3) characteristics of the protagonists involved, such as their demographics (e.g., age, ethnicity, class, education, dis/ability; Döring & Miller, 2022e) and bodily appearance (e.g., body type, breast size, penis size, pubic hair; Döring & Miller, 2022d); (4) characteristics of the relational context, such as relationship type (e.g., protagonists in the sex scene are strangers, acquaintances, lovers, spouses; Döring & Miller, 2022f); and (5) potential power dynamics (e.g., age gap, experience gap, hierarchical social roles). Less important for communication and sexuality researchers who are interested in the media representation of sexuality – and therefore absent from the codebook above – yet usually central to literary research, is the significance of individual sex scenes in relation to the context of the whole story, narrative progression, and character development. More broadly, it should be acknowledged that quantitative content analysis is itself more native to the media effects paradigm: the decision to count discrete, comparable features across scenes already presupposes that their distribution matters. What the present codebook offers is therefore not a method that is neutral between the two paradigms, but an effects-oriented instrument whose outputs can be interpreted and contested from an entertainment-paradigm perspective. While quantitative and qualitative content analyses aim to dissect sex scenes in narrative prose fiction with a focus on selected variables or dimensions, other analytical approaches (e.g., critical discourse analysis) are more appropriate for connecting sexual media content to larger cultural debates.

From both a methodological and theoretical perspective, it is worth reflecting on what content analyses of audiovisual versus textual material can reveal about media representations of human sexual experiences: complex consent issues, for example, can be more explicitly portrayed in textual depictions, when readers learn

how a protagonist feels during a scene or when the narrative commentary clearly labels certain actions as consensual rough sex enjoyed by the female protagonist rather than as rape. Similarly, while the measurement of female orgasm poses methodological challenges in analyses of films and pornographic videos – as coders frequently cannot know whether a female character's moaning and screaming in front of the camera express physical pleasure or orgasm itself (Lebedíková, 2022) – narrative fiction tends to be much clearer in stating when and how a character climaxes and how the orgasm feels to them (Cabrera & Ménard, 2013).

By providing more insight into the protagonists' thoughts and feelings, textual representations of sexuality also often provide a clearer understanding of the meaning of certain elements of a sex scene. For example, in the erotic movie *Babygirl* (2024, written and directed by Halina Reijn; starring Nicole Kidman and Harris Dickinson; IMDb, 2024), the female main character Romy, a married mother of two and wealthy founder and CEO of a robotic automation company, has a BDSM affair with her young male intern, which is ultimately ended to avoid a scandal and protect her marriage. The final film scene shows Romy having sex with her husband Jacob and reaching climax while fantasizing about her former affair partner Samuel. In her fantasy, Samuel is in a red hotel room playing with a dog in a way that resembles their earlier pet play interactions in the same room. In online discussions on Reddit, viewers speculate about the meaning of this final sex scene: Is she missing her former lover? Is her marriage a hollow compromise? Will marital sex remain unfulfilling for her so that she needs to escape into her fantasy world? The written screenplay, however, clarifies the intended meaning of this scene by stating: "*Jacob uses his fingers to pleasure her. Romy feels safe and seen and is no longer ashamed of the thoughts and images in her head. [...] She starts to orgasm. For real. It's intense and raw. Even though she needed to create a red room in her head, she is closer to Jacob than ever before. Romy breathes out. She looks into the camera. Liberated*" (Reijn, 2024).

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