"I'll Have What She's Having!":				
Depictions of Orgasm in Heterosexual Pornography Labeled for Female Consumption				
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Abstract

This research paper aims to discuss and bring awareness to orgasm representation within heterosexual pornography that is specifically labeled for female consumption. Major areas of focus are on the orgasm gap and clitoral stimulation, sexual satisfaction in heterosexual relationships, and aggressive and violent behaviors depicted in pornography and sexual interactions. These areas are crucial because current research is lacking; it is necessary for more research to be conducted that focuses on orgasm representation and satisfaction. If realistic depictions of sexual intercourse are shown in pornographic content, it may bring expectations for consumers that could lead to higher rates of sexual satisfaction for all parties. Depictions of orgasm were recorded and observed through the viewing of popular pornographic videos from a mainstream pornography website. Orgasms per gender were classified based on their category of overt versus ambiguous, then further broken down into groups based on visual and auditory displays of pleasure. This research hopes to answer as to which sex has higher orgasm representation in pornography and how these results contribute to false narratives in terms of sexual expectations and satisfaction.

Keywords: orgasm, sexual satisfaction, pornography, orgasm gap, sexual aggression

Introduction

With traces of erotic images and writing dating back as far as the early 1600s (Jenkins 2020), pornography has been around for hundreds of years. Consumed by millions of people every year, it holds a heavy stance in sexual culture. Long debates have gone on regarding positive and negative effects of pornography, with many supporting sex positivity but condemning the harmful content that runs rampant on many pornographic platforms. Millions of dollars are funneled into the sex industry every year and while exact estimates are difficult to make due to privately owned corporations, estimated yearly profits for the pornography industry total roughly six billion dollars (Benes 2018). Because the internet and pornography are constantly changing and developing, it is important to conduct thorough, constant research about orgasms and sexual satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction leads to higher rates of happiness in both same sex and mixed sex relationships, as do higher rates of orgasm.

More research is required around the topics of sex, orgasms, and pornography because it is beneficial for all participants, educators, and viewers of the pornography itself. As discussed further on, pornography has been and is still used for educational purposes, especially when comprehensive sexual education is lacking. The normalization of both pornography and sexuality allows for more open conversations around sexual development and reinforces the possibility of reducing aggression and violence during sexual interactions. The benefits of researching pornography and its characteristics are monumental and absolutely essential to the academic community.

Literature Review

Pornography Consumption & Depictions of Sexual Interactions

In 2019, one of the most popular pornography websites, Pornhub, estimated that users had visited the site 42 billion times, averaging about 115 million visits per day. Uploaded content from users added up to over one million hours, or 169 years (The 2019 Year in Review 2019). Pornhub stands as just one of thousands of pornography websites filled with categories and videos to meet nearly every demand. As Mariana Valverde (2003) explains in her article regarding pornography consumption and power structures, pornography "derives most of its meaning and significance from the social context in which it exists." Positive and negative connotations are presented in pornographic content, with women typically regarded as submissive (Valverde 2003:468) while men are viewed in a more dominant role; this is harmful in that male representation is not only higher on the spectrum of what is socially acceptable but expected more in pornography. This paves the way for orgasm and pleasure inequality. Because sexual intercourse and pleasure revolve around male gaze and satisfaction, women face different expectations for pleasure and can face dissatisfaction through their sexual experiences.

Pornography in itself is taboo, as are the acts of watching, speaking, or participating in videos labeled as adult content. Certain levels of shame are associated with pornography, which may draw individuals away from truthfully answering about their pornography use and frequency. This makes data collection regarding pornography use much more difficult, but not impossible. Regardless of how willing one may be to disclose their habits, pornography is still being regularly consumed across the world; it is important to discuss its effects and impact on an ever-sexualized society. In a data collection survey consisting of over 6,000 participants between the ages of 18 and 60, it was found that 94% of men reported lifetime pornography use compared

to 87% of women (Herbenick et al. 2019:5). This shows that despite public perception of pornography use, the rates of consumption among men and women are relatively similar.

It was also discovered that 26.1% of women had experienced name-calling during at least one sexual encounter, compared to only 13.6% of male participants (Herbenick et al. 2019:5). It should absolutely be recognized as well that many of the words and phrases used during pornography are gendered and are primarily intended for women. Herbenick et al. (2019:7) explains that even with extensive searching, researchers were unable to find popular terms used against men. This is largely in part due to the high rates of aggression exhibited towards women in sexual situations.

Aggressive & Violent Behavior During Sexual Encounters

Another prevalent theme among the literature was the regularity of aggression and violence present in both pornography with sex workers and sexual interactions between individuals. As it will be further explained later, the occurence of aggression in pornography can be harmful due to the behaviors viewers may view as acceptable. Solano et al. (2018:5) reports that over 600 responses regarding the function of porn consumption indicated their pornography use was to learn sexual techniques or new information about sex. This method of learning leads to wildly inaccurate beliefs about sex, as well as an increase of aggressive behaviors towards sexual partners. Herbenick et al. (2019:9) stresses the weight this holds and encourages educators to include "porn literacy" in sex education so as to inform young people about sexual interactions in a way that embraces consent and safety.

Herbenick et al. (2019) discovered in their research that almost 37% of female respondents and 12% of male respondents indicated that they were forced into non-consensual sexual acts on at least one occasion. 31% of men and 26.8% of women also reported at least one

instance of a partner trying anal sex without consent. The same study revealed 35% of men and 21% of women had consumed pornography containing unwanted sexual advances. Over 20% of men and 11% of women also watched pornography that simulated rape. Given the ever-increasing rates of sexual assault in the United States (Walker 2020), the prevalence of rape and non-consensual sexual behavior furthers the acceptance of victim blaming and rape culture. As it was previously mentioned, individuals consuming porn may use it for education; if a sexual act is depicted in pornography, one may believe it is acceptable in real life regardless of consent. Because sexual education in the United States varies greatly based on location, school funding, and parental approval, many students are not informed on consent practices or warning signs of harmful sexual behavior.

Comprehensive sexual education has still not been adopted fully in the United States, with 37 states requiring some form of abstinence education (American Adolescents' Sources of Sexual Health Information 2017). 25 states further require that abstinence be the primary method of instruction. While the intention of this may be to decrease the likelihood of sexual encounters among young people, research shows rising rates of teen pregnancy among states who enforce abstinence (Banerjee 2019). The idea that comprehensive sexual education encourages risk-seeking sexual behavior is false with no legitimate statistical evidence. The use of pornography as education and the occurrence of dangerous, violent behavior during depictions of sex are harmful to all individuals in sexual situations as well as students who may be making efforts to learn more about sexual intercourse.

Orgasm Gap & Sexual Satisfaction

It must be noted as well that the rate of orgasms between men and women differs greatly not only in pornography, but in regular sexual encounters. Women in heterosexual relationships

also report lower instances of orgasm due to clitoral stimulation by their partner, which contributes to overall lower sexual satisfaction (Blair, Cappell, and Pukall 2017). This finding is crucial given the results regarding orgasm from clitoral self-stimulation were not statistically different when comparing women in same sex and mixed sex relationships. The high likelihood of fake orgasms demonstrated by female partners is also significantly high. Blair et al. (2017) also found that when women fake orgasms during sexual activity, they also report feelings of shame and dissatisfaction. The behavior of faking an orgasm is also associated with urges to satisfy a sexual partner and strategies to end sexual interaction.

Sexual communication was also found to have high importance relating to sexual satisfaction and orgasm attainment in women. Individuals who regularly practiced sexual communication experienced increases not only in sexual satisfaction, but in orgasm attainment for women (Jones, Robinson, and Seedall 2018). Without communication about their intimate experiences, researchers noted that individuals with sexual problems or difficulties may receive either improper treatment or a complete lack of assistance in solving said issues (Jones et al. 2018:15). Women within heterosexual relationships with men who regularly consume porn also reported feeling inadequate or inferior compared to the actors in the films their partners consume. As stated by Stewart & Szymanski (2012:265-266), "frequency of pornography use was also negatively related to relationship quality [...] a common theme among female participants was that felt they could not compete with the sexual and physical ideals portrayed in pornographic materials." Pornography held negative association not only towards female self image in relationships, but also to lower ratings of relationship quality and sexual satisfaction.

As previously stated, orgasm frequency is linked to sexual satisfaction and is important when determining equality within sexual encounters. Blair et al. (2017) discovered that men

experience orgasm in more than 85% of their sexual activities with partners. Women experience orgasm significantly less, with numbers as low as 40%. Researchers propose this gap could be caused by multiple factors, including what and how men and women are taught about sex. While men are taught sex is a positive experience and goal oriented, "women often learn that sexual activity can be dangerous for both their bodies and their reputations and should, therefore, take place only within the context of "meaningful" relationships" (Blair et al. 2017:11). These sexual scripts can be attributed to the social stigmas surronding sex for women, as well as society's reinforcement that male orgasm signifies the end of most sexual encounters (Blair et al. 2017; Stewart & Szymanski 2012). False beliefs and expectations during sex can and do lead to lessened sexual satisfaction and lower orgasm attainment, further enforcing the need for sexual communication and education regarding sexual encounters.

Given the research mentioned above, pornography consumption and lower orgasm representation lead to lower satisfaction rates among all parties. Orgasms are not equal during sexual interactions; men orgasm at much higher rates than women and the following data is expected to reflect that. While pornography may provide assistance in reaching orgasm or discovering new activities to engage in with a partner, it must be noted that more comprehensive education surrounding sex should be taught, preferably at an age before individuals start consuming pornography. Herbenick et al. (2020:6) found that this age could be as young as 13 for young men and 17 for young women, further encouraging comprehensive sex education that does not involve abstinence only lessons. The orgasm gap will not decrease without substantial education about the female orgasm and female pleasure during sex.

Methods

When beginning the research process, I felt it was important to gather data from the source of the research question, which asked: How does the depiction of orgasms vary between men and women in pornographic content labeled for female consumption? I chose to focus on this topic due to the general lack of research surrounding the representation of orgasms in pornographic content designated for women. The information gathered from this research displays the inequality of orgasms in pornographic content and brings more attention to the need for more female-intended content. My choice of research method was a content analysis of videos from a popular pornographic website that provides users with a specific section designed for women. In an analysis done by *SimilarWeb.com*, *xHamster.com* is one of the most popular pornographic websites (Top Sites Ranking 2020) and the only high-ranking website listed that provides a selection of content specifically catering to women.

The sample for this research was chosen through a random number generator in order to eliminate any possible bias by researchers, or simple random sampling. The random sample comes from the most popular videos of all time for women filtered by the highest number of views on the aforementioned website. This filters out promoted videos or recommendations from the websites themselves, eliminating further bias.

When the generator chooses a number, that specific video is selected for research. This allows all videos the same likelihood for being chosen, eliminating both implicit and explicit bias in the research. Not all videos are able to be assessed for this particular study, which does run the risk of unequal representation based on demographic information. For the sake of research, only videos containing sexual contact between men and women are included in the sample. If a video depicting solely men or women is generated, a new number is put into its place. This design

makes sense given the intention to study orgasm representation among men and women. This research analyzes depictions of pleasure measured by different codes, based on the scales. By using scales previously developed by fellow researchers, I am able to continue on the paths towards an open dialogue concerning this research topic. By using the same coding techniques, uniformity is created among analyses and contributes to a more cohesive research strategy.

Coding

Videos were analyzed using coding techniques initially created by Séguin et al. (2018) and can be viewed in Table 1. These codes specify various types of outward pleasure cues, such as visible ejaculation or verbal expression, and were recorded and checked after two viewings of the chosen sample of videos. This coding contributes to the overall representation of orgasms in pornography through context clues and expression from performers in the adult films.

Overt orgasms
Ambiguous orgasms
Orgasm indicators*
Verbal
Moaning
Hyperventilation
Preorgasmic absence of breathing
Myotonia
Facial contortions
Closed eyes

Unit of Analysis

Squirting External ejaculation Internal ejaculation

Table 1. Orgasm indicators as given by Séguin et al. (2018)

This type of content analysis is best for answering the research question because the question specifically addresses pornography. Although movies and television shows do occasionally depict sexual scenes, pornography is the most explicit, outward example that is best for the sake of the research being completed. This method is also based on a random sampling of

the most popular videos designated for female consumption, covering a crucial aspect of the research question.

As explained in the study conducted by Séguin et al., "the analyses conducted in the present study were grounded in *representations* of male and female orgasm and not necessarily in instances of *authentic* orgasm" (2018:351). This research is not focusing on whether the orgasms represented are authentic, but rather on which descriptors of orgasm are deliberately chosen for inclusion in the videos. The data collected contributes to a conversation regarding orgasm representation and how often men and women are perceived to be orgasming in pornography. Orgasms depicted in the video were put into two categories: overt and ambiguous. Ambiguous orgasms are defined in this research as "cases with insufficient cues to confirm the experience of orgasm, instead only suggesting experiences of heightened sexual pleasure" (Séguin et al. 2018:350). Overt orgasms displayed one or more indicators shown in Table 1 and were recorded further based on specific characteristics of each orgasm.

Findings

In total, 25 videos were chosen for research with 50 orgasms depicted. Women in the videos displayed just 16 orgasms, 9 of which were coded as overt. Men accounted for the remaining 34 orgasms, with just 5 orgasms coded as ambiguous.

Clitoral Stimulation & Likelihood of Orgasm

Because every video contained one female performer, the presence of any clitoral stimulation was recorded. Out of 16 orgasms displayed by the women, only three instances of clitoral stimulation occurred, two of which were manual stimulation conducted by the female performer. The disconnect between this research and past findings lies in that clitoral stimulation is almost always needed in order for most women to reach orgasm (Blair et al. 2017). Although it

is possible that women can achieve orgasm through solely penetrative sex with no clitoral stimulation, 83% of women reported manual stimulation of the clitoris was necessary to reach orgasm (Blair et al. 2017:2). This disparity in the behavior depicted in pornography versus feedback from women outside of the films can be attributed to the true audience of pornography, regardless of the label for female consumption. Pornography largely caters to the male demographic, automatically negatively affecting the likelihood for accurate female representation.

Orgasm Gap

As explained in prior sections, the orgasm gap is a major issue in terms of sexual satisfaction and communication during heterosexual sex. The single largest differentiation in the data occured in the number of orgasms per gender. 68% of orgasms were experienced by males, while just 32% of orgasms were experienced by females. When these orgasms are further analyzed by the coding techniques in Table 1, 85% of male orgasms examined in the videos were overt, or orgasms which fit criteria identified in the table displaying the presence of orgasm indicators. This means those who experienced overt orgasms displayed sufficient indications to the point where there was little to no indication of the absence of an orgasm. Overt orgasms were evident to the researcher when analyzed by the aforementioned indicator table. Overt and ambiguous orgasms are documented in Table 2.

	Ambiguous	Overt	Total Orgasms
Male	5	29	34
Female	7	9	16

Table 2. Overt & Ambiguous Orgasms

Aggression & Dangerous Behaviors

One major characteristic of the videos filmed was the presence of aggressive behavior or language. As Fritz and Paul (2017) explain in their article regarding sexual aggression and objectification, aggression is defined in this research as "any action appearing to cause physical or psychological harm to another person [...] harmful intent of the perpetrator is not a requirement of aggression" (644). The inclusion of aggression in data collection is crucial because there are occasions when, regardless of original intention, certain aggressive behaviors do cause some form of harm to those on the receiving end. Examples of this were depicted in the videos through methods such as choking, hair pulling, and slapping. Aggression was also included in the definition to account for consensual sexual activity that involves typically violent actions.

The research reinforces the idea from Fritz and Paul (2017) that women are the primary targets of aggression in pornography. This idea further contributes to the popularity of the inclusion of violence in both pornographic material and real life sexual situations. Though the coding procedures did not indicate specific types or examples of aggression, displays of aggression were recorded for an overall total. Out of 25 full videos, 23 contained at least one occurrence of aggressive behavior towards a partner. All 23 videos displayed acts of aggression towards the female performer in the video, while just 6 of the videos contained aggression from female performers towards their male counterparts. It should be noted that out of 25 videos, condom use was only displayed one time, and said condom was later removed before ejaculation into another performer's mouth. Though this behavior may not be explicitly aggressive, it is important to recognize condom use as a safety measure. While pornography is intended for

consumption and should not represent real sexual situations, disgust towards condoms discourages use in real life. In the video mentioned, the actor expresses his feeling that sexual intercourse feels better without a condom; this reinforces the idea that condoms negate pleasure and should not be involved in sexual intercourse for maximum pleasure.

In one video, the arms of a female performer were held down by her partner to the point where handprints were left after the position was changed; she was unable to move or resist any actions from her male partner. Four videos displayed some form of bodily harm inflicted, shown through the appearance of bruising after spanking or hitting and in one case, to the point where blood was drawn. In all 11 videos where male orgasm was reached through oral intercourse, male performers held down the head of their female partners, blocking their airways, causing them to choke, spit up, and in one instance, vomit.

Aggression through verbal behavior was also exhibited through several different terms and expressions. Several examples of phrases regularly used are: "filthy whore", "slutty bitch", "I love watching you choke on me", "I am going to destroy you", and "Shut the fuck up, take it like a good girl." Furthermore, even titles of the observed videos implied aggression and/or violence, with one video titled "Sexual Objectification" and many others involving a mix of the previous words mentioned. While these sayings may be regularly used in sexual situations outside of pornography, the inclusion of them in pornography reinforces the need for aggression and violence.

These displays of aggression, regardless of intention, contribute towards an environment in which sex is meant to be aggressive and potentially harmful (Fritz and Paul 2017). This environment becomes dangerous when pornographic material is considered reference material (Solano et al. 2018:2, 5, 7) for sexual intercourse between individuals who are not performing for

an audience. If those watching believe and support the idea that aggression is mandatory, they may continue to support these myths in real life and perpetuate harmful sexual behavior.

Conclusion

In regards to limitations and setbacks of the present study, demographic information could have been further analyzed. Due to the type of research and the extent of the content, the researcher was not able to analyze several hundred videos as previous studies have done. Gender identity and sexuality of performers would benefit future research as this study focused on cisgender actors. Further research should be done to determine how these pornographic videos are perceived, and what impact they may have based on higher ratings and increased view counts. Determination of orgasm is also made solely by one researcher and although videos were viewed twice to ensure accuracy, having more than one viewer would rule out any discrepancies or disagreements about the occurrence of orgasm. Cultural differences also vary across different pornographic websites; it is strongly encouraged that future studies should be conducted surrounding multiple websites and their "For Women" categories.

Research and studies about pornography and orgasms are crucial in order to develop healthier sexual conversations and situations, and establish a conversation around sexual interactions that can lead to greater health and wellness in society. As explained previously, vast differences between the fantasy of pornography and real life sexual encounters lead to lower sexual satisfaction rates and miseducation about sex and the human body. With further research, sexuality as a concept can be normalized, rather than shamed, and brought into the public sphere as something that is natural and allowed. These discussions could also lead to an urge for pornographic content made through ethical processes due to the environment necessary for orgasm attainment. If women in mainstream pornography are not experiencing orgasms, or are

experiencing them less than their male counterparts, I believe this research would contribute to an open discussion regarding the orgasm gap, unequal sexual satisfaction during sexual intercourse, and an increase in the overall sexual wellness and health of people just trying to reach orgasm.

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