**Do men watch in porn what they practice in real sex life?**

Association of adult men’s visual sexual stimuli use and their sexual activities in relationship is content specific

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1. Introduction

Between 50 and 99% of adult heterosexual men in a relationship use visual sexual stimuli (VSS)¹. Lately, there has been an increase in research evaluating the effects and consequences of VSS use, mostly focusing on negative effects on relationship²⁻⁴. To understand the influence, we first need to know which specific factors explain the correlation between VSS use and couple sexual activities. Currently, sexual counselors have no reliable backgrounds to support couples, which seek help for sexual problems that they attribute to VSS use. The present study examines the association between men’s VSS use and their corresponding sexual activities with their heterosexual partner to better understand if and how virtual and real-life sexual preferences are correlated.

2. Methods

**Design**

- A cross-sectional study 2014 – 2015

**Procedure**

- Internet-based anonymous survey
- heterosexual men living in Switzerland
- Recruitment: mailing list of University, announcement over e-mail, social online network platforms, online site of the Psychological Institute of University Zurich, online platform for sexual questions, Search Sites, announcement in a weekly national newspaper.
- approved by university ethical review boards
- participating conditions: being aged between 18 and 60 years and being for at least one year in a heterosexual relationship
- purpose of the study: to examine different influences on relationship men also reported to engage most often in vaginal sex, oral sex and BDSM sex. As for the satisfaction with frequency of specific partnership sexual activities, oral sex was most often wished to take place more often, followed by vaginal sex, anal sex and BDSM sex.

**Participants**

For the present study only men (N = 647) were evaluated. From those men, 73 were excluded because of missing data in one of our main study variables, providing a final sample of 574 men. The average age of the sample was 39 years. About half (52%) of the participants were married. The average of relationship duration was 11.2 years.

**Questionnaire and Measures**

- age, gender, marital status, relationship duration, living form, employment status and educational attainment
- VSS use: the average frequency based on the last year of actively using VSS (contents: vaginal sex, oral sex, anal sex, and BDSM sex) on a 6-point likert scale (1 = never to 6 = always)
- Specific sexual activity in relationship and satisfaction with it: the frequency of their heterosexual activities in average in the last year on a 5-point likert scale (1 = not at all to 5 = more than twice a week). To evaluate satisfaction with the frequency of vaginal, oral, anal and BDSM heterosexual activities, participants had to estimate the frequency of each activity with ‘adequate’, ‘better less’ or ‘better more’.

3. Results

**Frequencies of VSS use and sexual activities**

As Table 1 shows, the VSS content most often used is vaginal sex, followed by oral, anal and BDSM sex. In their heterosexual relationship men also reported to engage most often in vaginal sex, followed by oral sex, anal sex and BDSM sex. As for the satisfaction with frequency of specific partnership sexual activities, oral sex was most often wished to take place more often, followed by vaginal sex, anal sex and BDSM sex.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VSS Content</th>
<th>Vaginal sex</th>
<th>Oral sex</th>
<th>Anal sex</th>
<th>BDSM sex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of used VSS content (Mean ± SD) from “1=never” to “6=always”</td>
<td>4.7±1.2</td>
<td>4.4±1.2</td>
<td>3.4±1.5</td>
<td>2.2±1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of partnership sexual activities (Mean ± SD) from “1=never” to “5= twice/week”</td>
<td>3.4±1.1</td>
<td>2.7±1.2</td>
<td>1.4±0.8</td>
<td>1.3±0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of participants being satisfied with frequency of partnership sexual activity</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
<td>75.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlations between VSS use and sexual activities**

As Table 2 shows significant correlations between VSS use and sexual activity according to the specific preference anal sex and BDSM sex. Notably, no correlation occurred between the frequency of used VSS content and frequency of sexual activity according to the specific preference vaginal sex and oral sex. Nor was there any correlation found in cross table analysis between VSS content and non-corresponding sexual activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VSS Content</th>
<th>Vaginal sex</th>
<th>Oral sex</th>
<th>Anal sex</th>
<th>BDSM sex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Activities with the Partner</td>
<td>Vaginal sex</td>
<td>Oral sex</td>
<td>Anal sex</td>
<td>BDSM sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaginal sex</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral sex</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anal sex</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-0.20</td>
<td>0.33*</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDSM sex</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.39*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Note: Significant correlation indicated in bold (p < 0.001)

**BDSM = Bondage, domination/submission plays, mutual sadomasochism**

4. Conclusion

- Our results show that the association between VSS use and sexual activity varies depending on the content. They can just partially support the assumption that men have overall sexual preferences, which seem to be similar in virtual and in real-life sexuality. One reason for such difference in sexual preference might be that vaginal and oral sex represent more socially accepted sexual activities, while anal and BDSM sex are less common², consequently more tabooed and more difficult to be realized in a partnership.

- Results consistently reveal that those men who report to be unsatisfied with the frequency of a specific sexual activity with their partner use more VSS of the corresponding content - which can be found for all the four measured sexual preferences (vaginal-, oral-, anal-sex, BDSM). In contrast to the novel findings that the association between virtual and real-life sexual preferences is content specific, under the condition of insufficient frequency of desired sexual activities, we find an overall association, which is not depending on the content. Since our study design does not allow evaluation of causal effects, we are not able to explain if men use more of a specific VSS content because they are unhappy with the frequency of their partnership sexual activities or the other way around. This is why further research should investigate possible causal effects.

References