

Media Representations of Sexuality in an Era of Pornification

SCM Special Issue – Call for Papers

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Media representations of sexuality are challenging and ambivalent: They are able to elicit curiosity, fascination, pleasure and arousal as well as disgust, outrage, shame and fear, sometimes in the very same media user. Also, on an intrapersonal, interpersonal and societal level, the outcomes of media portrayals of sexuality are assessed contradictorily: Media representations of diverse sexual identities, lifestyles, and practices can be linked with inspiration, education, improved couple communication, destigmatization and empowerment but also with performance pressure, unrealistic expectations, insecurity, couple conflicts, violence, sexism, racism, and disempowerment (e.g., Hakkim et al., 2022; Hoagland & Grubbs, 2021; Litsou et al., 2021a).

Media and communication scholars have been observing a trend towards increased sexualization and pornification of media content since the advent of the internet. Three elements are characteristic of the current *era of pornification* (e.g., Smith, 2010; Mulholland, 2013; Paasonen, 2016; Csányi et al., 2022): Through digitalization and the internet, pornographic media content has become more accessible, diverse, and widespread than ever. Furthermore, the codes of pornography have been widely adopted in popular culture and media content, examples are “porno chic” in the fashion and beauty industry, “gangsta and porn rap” in music, explicit sex talk on reality TV, and sexualized selfies shared on social media platforms. Last but not least, news media have picked up on the trend. Journalistic debates around issues such as “today’s youth being a porn generation”, “the epidemic of porn addiction” or “the rise of ethical porn” are ongoing in different news media (Montgomery Graham et al, 2015). As a result, debates about porn regulation have also become more intense.

Together with scholars from related disciplines such as psychology, sociology, education, medicine, queer and gender studies – media and communication researchers have been addressing the uses and effects of sexual and pornographic media content among youth and adults for decades. Most often, the focus is on *negative and harmful effects*. Negative effects have proven to be most severe and prevalent among heterosexual men who seem to be prone to excessive use, adoption of biased views of sexuality, sexual dysfunction and dissatisfaction (e.g., Bennett-Brown & Wright, 2022). Sexual and pornographic media use among sexual minorities and women, conversely, is more often associated with positive outcomes such as pleasure, self-validation and empowerment (e.g., Bóthe et al., 2019; Litsou et al., 2021b; McCormack & Wignall, 2017).

In contrast to the proliferation of media use and media effects studies in the context of pornification, considerably less attention has been paid to *media content research* (e.g., Duncan, 2016; Miller & McBain, 2022). Not seldomly, sexually explicit or pornographic media content is treated as a homogenous media genre without clarifying its characteristics and without differentiating between different types and subgenres as well as national peculiarities of sexuality-related media content. In an era of pornification, there is growing demand for sound analyses of sexual and pornographic media content to avoid speculations and overgeneralizations about the respective media material.

The upcoming special issue of SCM aims at exploring *sexual and pornographic media content*. We welcome qualitative, quantitative and computational content analytic studies as well as theoretical and methodological contributions addressing a wide spectrum of sexuality representations in both fictional and non-fictional media. Individual submissions can cover, but are not limited to, the following approaches (that may be combined with each other and integrated in cross-cultural and/or longitudinal designs):

- Content analyses of representations of sexuality in fictional and non-fictional mass media and advertisement (e.g., magazines, TV series, school books, song lyrics, video games)
- Content analyses that address representations of sexuality in fictional and non-fictional social media (e.g., Instagram posts, TikToks, OnlyFans accounts, selfies)
- Analyses of news media debates about sexual media content and the pornification of society (e.g., journalistic debates about the “porn generation”, “porn epidemic”, “rise of ethical porn”)
- Empirical studies that link media representations of sexuality with their production (e.g., production motifs, monetarization, business models, production ethics)
- Theoretical and methodological contributions advancing the systematic scientific analysis of portrayals of sexuality in different media in an era of pornification (e.g., advancements in sexual script theory, objectification theory or positive sexuality theory, improvements in sampling plans for online pornography, applications of computational analyses to sexually explicit online material)

Submission Instructions

SCM is an Open Access Journal of the German Communication Association (DGPK) and Affiliate Journal of the International Communication Association (ICA). Accepted papers will be published as Open Access without additional costs.

We invite submissions that fit any of the SCM formats: *Extended paper* (50-60 pages), *Full Paper* (15-20 pages), and *Research-in-brief* (5-10 pages). Manuscripts should be prepared in accordance with the SCM guidelines:

- <https://www.nomos.de/en/journals/scm/#directions-for-authors> (English)
- <https://www.nomos.de/zeitschriften/scm/#autorenhinweise> (German)

Manuscripts are to be submitted to nicola.doering@tu-ilmeneu.de.

Deadline for submissions will be **April 1st, 2024**. The special issue will be published in December 2024 (SCM issue 4/2024).