

Article

“As Long as It’s Not on the Face”: Pornography Viewers Discuss Male Ejaculation Perceptions and Preferences

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Abstract: Feminist scholars have suggested that male ejaculations in pornographic videos, particularly ejaculations on a sexual partner’s face or in their mouth, are often used to symbolically debase and humiliate women. However, no previous study has asked pornography viewers about their perceptions and preferences regarding male ejaculation. In this article, I investigate these perceptions and preferences using a large sample of more than 300 pornography viewers representing diverse demographics and cultural backgrounds. I find that most viewers either did not care about the male ejaculation or its placement or preferred for it to be in the female partner’s vagina. In contrast to common assumptions found in the literature, very few viewers expressed a preference for ejaculation on a woman’s face or in her mouth and many of them found such practices disturbing.

Keywords: pornography; gender; viewer perceptions; interviews; ejaculation

1. Introduction

Research on visual portrayals of orgasm in pornographic videos has shown that men are much more likely than women to be shown reaching an orgasm and visibly ejaculating [1–3]. This disparity reflects a real-life orgasm gap, as a large host of studies have reported that men are much more likely than women to experience an orgasm during sexual intercourse [4–7] and that both men and women care more about the male orgasm than about the female orgasm [8–10]. Some scholars believe that visible male orgasms are important to viewers because they confirm male pleasure and its authenticity [11,12].

Studies on viewers’ approaches and preferences regarding pornographic content have begun to proliferate in recent years, with many of them focusing on issues such as authenticity [13,14], pleasure [15,16], and aggression [17]. However, no previous study has focused on viewers’ perceptions and preferences regarding the male ejaculation. In the absence of such research, the most common perception among scholars is that the male ejaculation is often used as a tool to symbolically debase women [18,19]. More specifically, feminist scholars have written about the symbolic meanings of ejaculating on a female sexual partner’s face or in her mouth, which content analyses show are very common practices in mainstream pornography [20–25]. Most feminist scholars argue that such practices are misogynistic, humiliating, and degrading, as they celebrate gender inequalities through sexual domination [26–32]. In this view, producers, directors, and viewers of pornographic videos, who are mostly men, enjoy ejaculation on a female performer’s body parts, particularly her face. This demand, in turn, drives the ubiquity of these practices in the pornographic industry.

In this article, I investigate these common assumptions using a large and diverse sample of more than 300 pornography viewers, both men and women, from a wide range of geographical locations, ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, and sexual orientations. These viewers were asked about their perceptions and preferences regarding male ejaculations, their importance, and their placement. In contrast to common assumptions in the literature, as well as the findings of content analyses of popular videos, very few viewers expressed



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a preference for ejaculation on a woman's face or in her mouth, with many more viewers (both men and women) finding these practices unappealing or even disturbing. Instead, most viewers either did not care about the male ejaculation or its placement or preferred for it to be in the female partner's vagina.

1.1. Previous Research on Male Ejaculation in Pornography

Content analyses of visual pornography consistently show that depictions of male orgasms and ejaculations are much more prevalent than those of female orgasms [1–3,22,24,33,34]. This gap in pornographic representations reflects a real-life orgasm gap. Indeed, studies have repeatedly demonstrated a clear gap between men and women in reported rates of orgasm, with men much more likely than women to report an orgasm during sexual intercourse [4–7,35,36]. Studies further suggest that experiencing an orgasm during a sexual encounter is more important for men than it is for women [8,9] and that heterosexual men also feel more entitled to orgasms than their female partners [37]. Furthermore, not only is the male orgasm very important for men, it is also very important for women, as both men and women believe that it is an essential aspect of sex and are concerned when men do not reach an orgasm, viewing the sex as abnormal or incomplete [10].

Given these cultural beliefs and scripts, it is not surprising that nearly all mainstream pornographic heterosexual videos culminate, and usually also terminate, with the male ejaculation, also often referred to as “the cum-shot” [19] or “the money shot” [1,33]. Under the conventions of mainstream pornography, the male ejaculation serves as the authentic affirmation of the male climax and represents “the visible truth” of sexual pleasure [11], which also confirms the authenticity of the pornographic texts themselves [12]. This conceptualization has led to the “money shot” becoming a fetishized feature of pornographic production from their very early days [11]. Indeed, even when male performers ejaculate within the female performer's mouth or vagina, the pornographic script often demands that the female performer make the semen visible, letting it spill out of her mouth or vagina, as evidence that the male climax indeed occurred.

1.2. The Meanings of Male Ejaculation and Its Placement

Some might believe that the form or placement of male ejaculations is of little academic interest or practical consequence, dismissing it as merely a fetish or a matter of personal tastes. However, I argue that, similar to other sexual acts and scripts, the act and script of male ejaculation is in fact loaded with gendered and cultural meanings. Depending on both personal and cultural interpretations, the placement of the male ejaculation may be perceived as an act of passion, commitment, love, and acceptance, or alternatively of dominance, degradation, humiliation, and even aggression. Hence, it is important to assess the readings that both male and female viewers of pornography ascribe to this act, as well as their perceptions and preferences regarding male ejaculation in the videos they watch.

Scholars have offered various readings of the male ejaculation. The most common reading suggests that this ejaculation is often used as a tool to symbolically debase women [18]. Many feminist scholars believe that certain forms of male ejaculation, particularly ejaculation on a sexual partner's face or in their mouth, are inherently humiliating, degrading, and even dehumanizing [3,20,21,38]. According to Schauer [19], the location of the male ejaculation in both real life and pornography is a primary component of female degradation, as it links the male sexual imagination with misogyny and objectification. Schauer argues that “since male performers are depicted discharging on their victim's faces (this is by far the most common), breasts, or buttocks—i.e., on the bodily spaces that are signifiers of feminine difference—the cum-shot metaphorically debases femininity” (pp. 54–55, [19]). And while ejaculation on a woman's body in general may be seen as degrading, ejaculation on her face is particularly humiliating, because it “signifies not only extreme subordination, but also a disregard on the part of the dominant male partner for the identity and personal sentiments of his female or male partner” (p. 55, [19]).

Despite these readings (or, some might argue, in large part because of them), content analyses of mainstream pornography suggest that ejaculations on a female performer's face or in her mouth are very common practices. For example, Cowan and Campbell [39], who analyzed popular X-rated pornography videocassettes, found that 43% of White women and 28% of Black women in interracial pornography were portrayed with men ejaculating on their faces. Bridges, Wosnitzer [21], who examined aggression in popular rental pornographic videos, found that the male character's ejaculation almost always occurred outside the female character's vagina, most frequently in her mouth (58.6%). Gorman, Monk-Turner [20], who analyzed a convenience sample from multiple internet websites, reported that nearly half (45%) of the videos in the sample included a scene where one or more male performers ejaculated onto the face of a the female performer. Finally, Shor and Seida [22] found that 24.3% of the most watched videos on Pornhub included male ejaculation on a woman's face, while 35.7.% of these videos featured ejaculation in her mouth.

1.3. The Current Study

Despite the rich research described above, we still know relatively little about the preferences of both men and women regarding male ejaculation in pornographic videos. Research on pornography viewers' preferences and perceptions has grown substantially in recent years. Most of these studies have focused on female viewers, utilizing primarily focus groups and in-depth interviews with a select group of respondents (typically fewer than 30) in a single locale [13–16,40–44]. Many of these studies examined perceptions regarding authenticity in pornography, finding that viewers are quite preoccupied with detecting genuine pleasure, including genuine orgasms [13,14,40]. However, none of them asked viewers directly about their perceptions and preferences regarding male ejaculation.

This study expands on these empirical efforts in several important ways. First, it relies on more than 300 interviews, a much larger sample than these previous studies, allowing for a much wider range of demographics, geographical distributions, ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, and sexual orientations. Perhaps most importantly among these, while many recent studies on the perceptions and preferences of pornography viewers have focused nearly exclusively on women, e.g., [13–15,40–42,45], the current sample includes an equal number of men and women, as well as several non-binary individuals.

Comparing the preferences and views of women and men regarding male ejaculation in pornography is particularly important given common claims that while these preferences vary significantly, men's preferences are the ones driving industry norms. Petersen and Hyde [46], who conducted a systematic review of gender differences in sexuality, concluded that men's attitudes toward sexuality tend to be more "liberal" than those of women, suggesting that they may find alternative depictions of sexuality, including ones that are arguably degrading, more appealing. In addition, since ejaculation on body parts, which some also find degrading, is conducted by men and directed toward women, one might expect that women who watch pornography would be more likely to identify with the perceived humiliation of the female performers and thus resent such acts.

Moreover, some pornography critics have suggested that male viewers might in fact have a preference for watching acts that are often perceived as humiliating for women, such as ejaculation on a woman's face, in her mouth, and perhaps also on other intimate body parts. This is because such acts celebrate the tension and thrill derived from sexualizing gender inequalities and contribute to the entrenchment of gender hierarchies. Thus, videos that revel in the degradation and abuse of women are for many men thrilling, providing greater sexual pleasure [26–32]. These feminist scholars argue that such preferences are the source of the great popularity and presence of facial and mouth ejaculations in pornography, as most producers, directors, and viewers are men. Accordingly, we might expect male pornography viewers to express particular affinity toward ejaculation on a female performer's body parts, particularly on her face.

2. Method

2.1. Sampling Strategy and Recruitment

Since there is no comprehensive list of online pornography viewers, I had to use a non-probability sampling method. While this method limits generalizability, it is still useful in obtaining rich descriptive data, revealing certain trends, and identifying preferences and views [47]. I used a mix of voluntary and purposive sampling techniques. First, I posted recruitment ads inviting participants over the age of 18 who watched pornographic videos online at least once per month over the previous year to share their experiences and preferences. To encourage participation, I offered each participant a \$20 compensation. Ads were posted to Craigslist, Kijiji, and to several Facebook groups, primarily those of current and former students in several North American universities. About 60% of eventual participants learned about the study through Kijiji or Craigslist, while about 40% reached it through various Facebook groups.

I then applied a theoretically driven purposive sampling strategy. This strategy was designed to increase variability in theoretically important factors, primarily gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and geographical location. For example, I sought to reach a roughly balanced number of men and women. Therefore, toward the end of the recruitment process, when realizing that the sample includes more women than men, I gave preference to the recruitment of men who agreed to participate in the study and did not interview some of the women who wished to participate. Similarly, I gave preference in later stages of the recruitment process to older individuals (over the age of 25) and to non-North American participants, seeking to increase representation of these populations, which were harder to recruit. For the purpose of this preliminary screening, we first sent potential interviewees a preliminary questionnaire, asking them to note their age, gender, place of residence, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and relationship status.

The final sample includes 302 interviewees. Of these, 149 identified as women (two of them transgender), 148 identified as men (one of them transgender), and 5 identified as non-binary or gender fluid. In Table 1, I present some of the key descriptive statistics of the sample of interviewees. Interviewees came from a wide variety of countries (55 different countries (we spoke with interviewees from Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Costa Rica, The Czech Republic, Denmark, The Dominican Republic, Ecuador, France, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Kenya, Korea, Lebanon, Mauritius, Mexico, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, Nepal, The Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, The Philippines, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovenia, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Syria, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, Venezuela, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe)) and geographical regions, including substantial representation for interviewees from Europe, South Asia, East Asia, and Latin America. Still, nearly half of the interviewees were raised in North America (Canada or the US).

The interviewee list also includes a relatively high share of younger people, as nearly two thirds of these interviewees were 25 years old or younger, with the overall average age around 24. Finally, students (about 60 percent of all interviewees) and individuals from relatively affluent socioeconomic backgrounds (86.8 percent) were also over-represented in the sample. Any generalizations should therefore be made with caution. Nevertheless, the study includes a diverse group of interviewees, and most importantly, the sample captures some of the most theoretically-relevant features and characteristics that could influence viewers' preferences, including gender, ethnicity (about half of the interviewees identified as visible minorities according to North American standards), sexual orientation (nearly 30 percent sexual minorities), and relationship status (the sample is almost evenly distributed between those who are in a steady relationship and those who are not).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the sample.

	Women (<i>n</i> = 149)	Men (<i>n</i> = 148)	Non-Binary/ Gender Fluid (<i>n</i> = 5)	All (<i>n</i> = 302)
Mean number of views per month	6.6	14.3	13.8	10.5
Mean age	23.5	24.9	22.4	24.2
Mean age of first watching pornographic videos	13.4	12.3	11.6	12.8
Age categories				
18–19.9	8.7%	3.4%	0.0%	5.9%
20–24.9	61.3%	53.4%	80.0%	57.8%
25–29.9	22.0%	31.1%	20.0%	26.4%
30–34.9	4.0%	9.5%	0.0%	6.6%
35–39.9	2.7%	1.4%	0.0%	2.0%
40+	1.3%	1.4%	0.0%	1.3%
Region of residence (at least until age 18)				
North America	53.3%	45.3%	60.0%	49.5%
South and Central America	6.0%	6.8%	0.0%	6.3%
Europe	12.7%	12.8%	20.0%	12.7%
Middle East	0.7%	5.4%	0.0%	3.0%
South Asia	10.7%	16.2%	0.0%	13.2%
East Asia	12.7%	11.5%	20.0%	12.2%
Africa	4.0%	2.0%	0.0%	3.0%
Ethnicity				
Caucasian	53.3%	48.0%	40.0%	50.5%
Latin American	8.0%	7.4%	0.0%	7.6%
Middle Eastern	2.0%	6.7%	20.0%	4.6%
East Asian	16.7%	18.9%	40.0%	18.2%
Southwest Asian	13.3%	14.9%	0.0%	13.9%
Indigenous American/Canadian	0.7%	1.4%	0.0%	1.0%
Black	6.0%	2.7%	0.0%	4.3%
Sexual orientation				
Heterosexual	66.7%	80.4%	0.0%	72.3%
Homosexual	2.0%	7.4%	40.0%	5.3%
Bisexual	22.7%	10.1%	20.0%	16.5%
Queer/Pansexual/Sexually fluid	8.7%	2.0%	40.0%	5.9%
Relationship status				
Single	52.0%	52.7%	60.0%	52.5%
In a relationship	48.0%	47.3%	40.0%	47.5%
Socioeconomic background				
Low	0.7%	0.7%	0.0%	0.7%
Medium	12.0%	13.5%	0.0%	12.5%
High	87.3%	85.8%	100.0%	86.8%

Table 1. Cont.

	Women (n = 149)	Men (n = 148)	Non-Binary/ Gender Fluid (n = 5)	All (n = 302)
Education				
High school graduate	4.0%	4.7%	20.0%	4.6%
Undergraduate degree (completed or in process)	70.7%	73.0%	60.0%	71.6%
Advanced degree (completed or in process)	25.3%	22.3%	20.0%	23.8%
Occupation				
Student	63.3%	58.8%	20.0%	60.4%
Manager	2.7%	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%
Clerical support	11.3%	7.4%	0.0%	9.2%
Service and sales	7.3%	18.2%	40.0%	13.2%
Independent/business owner	4.7%	4.7%	0.0%	4.6%
Teacher	2.0%	4.1%	20.0%	2.3%
Medical professional	2.7%	1.4%	0.0%	2.0%
Unemployed/not working	6.0%	5.4%	20.0%	5.9%

2.2. Procedure, Coding, and Analysis

Following approval from a university research ethics board, all interviews were conducted in either French or English by two highly skilled and well-trained graduate research assistants (a man and a woman). Both research assistants met with the project leader multiple times before beginning and while conducting the interviews, undergoing careful training and discussing and resolving various issues that came up during interviews. In an attempt to reduce social desirability bias and increase interviewees' sense of confidentiality, both the interviewers and the interviewees were encouraged to avoid revealing their real names or any specific identifying details and all interviews were conducted via Skype audio (without video). Interviewees were furthermore assured that their real names would not be revealed and all names appearing in the findings section are indeed pseudonyms. As a result, most interviewees appeared to be open about their preferences and views, even when these did not seem to conform with social conventions. Still, since interviewees were not provided complete anonymity, it is possible that at least some of them were not fully candid when discussing their views and preferences.

Interviews lasted between 30 and 120 min. They were recorded (with the consent of the interviewees) and subsequently transcribed, coded and analyzed using an open coding strategy, which is useful in gaining a rich understanding of under-researched phenomena [48]. For the current study, I primarily analyzed interviewees' responses to two primary questions: (1) "How important for you is it to see the men reach an orgasm?", and (2) "Where would you prefer the men to ejaculate?" I derived the codes directly from the text, first identifying preliminary themes and then re-categorizing and combining them to form major themes. Interviewees were presented with some specific questions about their views and preferences regarding male ejaculations in pornography but were also given freedom to speak more broadly about other sexual experiences and preferences.

3. Findings

In Table 2, I present viewers' preferences for male ejaculation, overall and by various demographics. When asked about their preferences regarding male ejaculations, most of the interviewees either did not care/had no preference (26.6%) or they preferred to see male performers ejaculate inside the female performer's vagina (37.8% of all interviewees and 48.35% of the women in the sample). Others (15.4% of the interviewees) preferred

the ejaculation to be on the partner's body parts, mentioning primarily the breast/chest, the stomach, the back, or the buttocks. Only about 17% of all interviewees said they preferred to see ejaculation on a woman's face (9.0%) or in her mouth (8.2%). I examine these trends below, noting variations by gender, sexual orientation, age, cultural diversity, and relationship status.

Table 2. Interviewees' preferences for male ejaculation ($n = 302$).

	Vagina	Face	Mouth	Body	Don't Care	Other
Entire sample	37.8%	9.0%	8.2%	15.4%	26.6%	3.0%
Sexual orientation						
Non-heterosexual men	29.6%	18.5%	7.4%	11.1%	25.9%	7.4%
Others	39.9%	6.7%	8.6%	15.5%	26.9%	2.5%
Gender						
Men	29.6%	8.9%	11.1%	14.1%	31.1%	5.2%
Women	46.2%	9.1%	5.3%	16.7%	22.0%	0.8%
Heterosexual interviewees						
Men	33.8%	5.3%	11.8%	14.6%	30.9%	3.6%
Women	48.4%	8.8%	2.2%	18.7%	22.0%	0.0%
Age						
24 or younger	37.2%	5.5%	8.1%	14.9%	31.8%	2.5%
Older than 24	38.7%	12.1%	8.9%	15.3%	21.0%	4.0%
Region of residence						
North America	35.8%	11.2%	12.7%	14.2%	23.9%	2.2%
South and Central America	36.8%	5.3%	10.5%	15.8%	21.1%	10.5%
Europe	35.3%	2.9%	0.0%	20.6%	41.2%	0.0%
Middle East	37.5%	12.5%	8.6%	37.5%	0.0%	0.0%
South Asia	54.3%	8.6%	0.0%	17.1%	17.1%	2.9%
East Asia	30.3%	9.1%	9.1%	0.0%	45.5%	3.0%
Africa	44.4%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	22.2%	0.0%
Relationship status						
Single	35.7%	10.0%	10.0%	12.1%	29.3%	2.9%
In a relationship	40.2%	7.6%	6.8%	18.2%	24.2%	3.0%

3.1. "Just Keep It to Yourself": Male Ejaculation as Unimportant/Unappealing

About half of the interviewees in the sample did not find displays of male performers' ejaculation at all important or stimulating. Of note, this was more common among men, with 58.9% of the heterosexual men in the sample declaring that seeing a male orgasm was not important to them, compared with only 37.7% of heterosexual women who held this view. Some of these interviewees still had preferences for where the ejaculation was placed when it did occur, while others (26.9% of the heterosexual sample) simply did not care whether ejaculation occurred or where it was placed. This was especially true for men (31.1%) vs. women (22.0%), for younger interviewees (31.8%), and for interviewees from Europe (41.2%) and from East Asia (45.5%). In contrast, none of the interviewees from the Middle East reported being uninterested in where ejaculations were placed.

Many of the interviewees, particularly heterosexual men, told us that they mostly stopped watching before the male orgasm occurred and that if they did reach that point, they simply did not care about their form or placement of the male ejaculation. For example,

Liam, 25, a heterosexual unemployed Canadian told us: “I don’t know; I’m not a big watch-until-the-end kind of guy, so no preference.” Similarly, Ivan, 22, a heterosexual student from Russia said: “I don’t reach that point. So I don’t care.” Fady, 25, a heterosexual/asexual student from Lebanon, felt the same: “I don’t care really if [the] guy doesn’t ejaculate.” Mathilda, 23, an unemployed bisexual student from France also had “no preference. Vagina if anything. But I don’t care if they do [reach an orgasm] honestly.”

Other interviewees felt even more strongly about male ejaculation, finding it unappealing or even revolting. Christine, 19, a bisexual student from France, said that she did not care much for the male orgasm and preferred vaginal ejaculation, “where I don’t see it.” Julian, 20, a queer man from Canada working at a customer call center, said that male performers should ejaculate “on themselves; just keep it to yourself.” Claudia, 22, a non-binary gay student from Saudi Arabia, wanted male ejaculations to be “nowhere near me, so no preference.” Miguel, 22, a heterosexual student from Costa Rica was even more explicit:

I think I’m weird in this one. I don’t like jizz; I hate it! It’s sticky and annoying; it’s ugh! Why does it have to be so gooey? To me, since I lost virginity, I have post-sex cleanup. So the less of that, the better. So if the girlfriend swallows, it avoids mess.

3.2. “Somewhere Where It’s Seen”: Desire for Male Ejaculations to Be Visible

In contrast to the sentiment expressed in the previous section, other interviewees felt that male ejaculations were not only important, but also that they needed to be discernable. They therefore preferred the ejaculation to be made visible by being placed on a partner’s body part, including sometimes their face. This sentiment was significantly more common among heterosexual women (27.5% of respondent) than among heterosexual men (20.9%), and was particularly prevalent among interviewees from the Middle East, with nearly half of all Middle Eastern interviewees preferring to see visible ejaculations on the partner’s body or face.

Selena, 23, a bisexual educational assistant from Canada said that she generally had “no preference, but not in the vagina. On face or body.” Jamila, 20, a heterosexual student from India, similarly wanted to see male performers ejaculate “all over the face or on the body, cause that’s more visible.” Josh, 25, a heterosexual performer from Canada preferred male ejaculation to be “on chest; somewhere where it’s seen.” James, 22, a heterosexual construction worker from the United Kingdom agreed: “Nowhere in particular. On body though; I like to see it.” Celeste, 23, a bisexual student from St. Martin summarized this sentiment:

I would say that any part of the body [is fine], just as long as it’s outside. If he cums on the genital area, it’s more arousing than like inside, where you don’t see any of it, or on the face, where it’s like, ‘go wipe it off’.

3.3. “Hottest Is Inside”: Internal Ejaculations as a Sign of Passion, Intimacy, and Authenticity

As mentioned above, the most common specific preference among interviewees (37.8% of all interviewees) was for male performers to ejaculate inside the female partner’s vagina. This preference was especially prevalent among women, with nearly half of all women (46.2% and 48.4% of heterosexual women) expressing a preference for vaginal ejaculation. South Asian (54.3%) and African (44.4%) interviewees also showed particular affinity for this option, but it was quite popular across all demographics (at least 30% for all demographic groups).

For some, primarily among male interviewees, the portrayal of vaginal ejaculations was favored because these indicated that the woman was willing to accept the male semen, implying that she was more engaged and involved in the sexual act and there was some reciprocity and mutual respect. They therefore preferred ejaculations to be in “either the mouth or the vagina” (Antonio, 32, a heterosexual interior designer from Brazil and Brandon, 24, a heterosexual student from Canada). Paul, 24, a heterosexual army officer

from the United States, similarly though that “hottest is inside if she’s telling him to [do it]. That’s the biggest plus.” Like Paul, others also stressed that they wanted the ejaculation to be “wherever she wants it” (Rajesh, 21, a heterosexual student from Bangladesh and Liana, 20, a sexually fluid student from Canada). For Jace, 25, a pansexual customer service representative from China, who also preferred vaginal ejaculations, this was a very important point:

I prefer inside, but only if [the] woman wants it. I don’t like it when [the] woman says ‘don’t cum in me’, but [the] guy still does it. That’s not respectful. It’s men showing their macho. So it depends on [the] wish of the female [performer].

Others viewed internal ejaculations as a sign of passion, intimacy, and authenticity. Elijah, 22, a gay student from Canada, wanted to see ejaculations “inside the other person. It seems more like, genuine, and it mirrors my experiences.” Daria, 23, a “sexually questioning” student from Romania, also said that she preferred ejaculation to be “inside” because “it feels more personal. I feel less like, oh, I’m just watching two people doing this for money.” Jessica, 22, a heterosexual part-time administrative worker from Canada, agreed, while also mentioning another common theme—the thrill of a potential impregnation:

I think [ejaculating in the] vagina is the one I like most. . . Vagina is interesting because I always think if they’ll get pregnant, and it [makes it] more sensual when they do. So that’s more arousing with that. But otherwise, [I would prefer that they ejaculate on the] body, not on the face.

Of note, several interviewees who said that they preferred ejaculations to be in the sexual partner’s mouth mentioned vaginal ejaculations as a close second. The reasoning given was that in both cases the female performer was accepting the male performer’s semen into her. For example, Megan, 20, a bisexual student from Canada, said that she liked to see ejaculations in the mouth but “I also don’t like it in porn when the girl opens her mouth and the cum drips out. If it’s a swallow, I’d like it most, because it shows she’s fully accepting him.” Felix, 27, an unemployed heterosexual American of Chinese descent, similarly said that he liked ejaculations “in the mouth. When they swallow it and it goes down without an issue, it’s a sign that they enjoy and accept it.”

3.4. “As Long as It’s Not on the Face”: The Undesirability of Facial Ejaculations

As noted above, less than 10% of both the male and female interviewees in the sample indicated that they preferred to see the male performer ejaculate on the female performer’s face. Moreover, when excluding non-heterosexual (that is gay, bisexual, and queer) men from the sample (these were more likely to express an affinity to facial ejaculations, with 18.5%, as some other options like vaginal ejaculations were mostly not relevant), only 6.7% of the remaining interviewees favored facial ejaculations. Another interesting finding was that facial ejaculations were in fact slightly more popular among female heterosexual interviewees (8.8%) than among male heterosexual interviewees (5.3%). However, this difference was not statistically significant and the large majority of both men and women were uninterested in this practice. Other groups that were relatively less likely to express interest in facial ejaculations included younger interviewees (only 5.5%, compared with 12.1% among older interviewees), interviewees who were in a relationship (7.6%), and interviewees from South and Central America (5.3%), from Europe (2.9%), and particularly from Africa, where none of the interviewees expressed a preference for this practice.

Beyond the fact that facial ejaculations were not coming up as a popular option for most interviewees, they were also the one practice that often elicited a strong negative reaction. A large portion of the interviewees singled out “facial ejaculations” as an unwanted practice, emphasizing that they disliked it and did not wish to encounter it. Of note, most interviewees mentioned this aversion out of their own volition, prior to any solicitation or explicit mention of the practice in the interview questions. Interviewees repeatedly used expressions such as “not on the face,” “don’t like face,” “below the face,” “as long as it’s not on the face,” and “anywhere other than the face or mouth” when discussing

ejaculations by male performers. Some of them also referred to ejaculation on a partner's face as "gross," "weird," "demeaning," "degrading," "abusive," "unsanitary," and "uncomfortable," adding that they "never understood it." Viktoria, 36, a heterosexual student from Germany, summarized the sentiments of many viewers (both male and female):

I mean, I don't like it when it's on the face or in the mouth. I often watch porn [to see] things I wouldn't do. But sometimes you put yourself in [the] place of [the] person. And I wouldn't enjoy it all over my face.

Of note, among those interviewees who did express an affinity for facial ejaculations, most did not view this as an aggressive or degrading practice. More often, they said that they preferred it due to the visibility of the ejaculation ("I'd like to see it"), with many of them noting that ejaculation on the body, which is also noticeable, would be their secondary preference. For example, Elodie, a bisexual student from Canada, said that she liked ejaculations to be "on the face. Also on the body. I just like it being shown versus inside."

For some interviewees, facial ejaculations also signaled acceptance, showing that the female performer was not repulsed by her male partner's semen. For example, Cameron, 22, a heterosexual Masters' student from the United States, said that he likes facials, particularly when "the girl is kind of asking for it versus other videos where she isn't. Maybe because that shows she's in to it and accepts him." Henrietta, 24, a Black lesbian student from Canada, who also expressed an affinity for facial ejaculation in pornography, similarly thought that these could be interpreted in different ways: "It depends on the person receiving and how they interpret [the facial ejaculation]. Are they able to breath and talk? It depends on what you hear from the person."

4. Discussion and Conclusions

In this paper I examined the preferences of both men and women regarding male ejaculation in pornographic videos. I found that a relatively large portion of interviewees did not deem the male orgasm as important, and thus many of them had no clear preference about where ejaculations would be placed or in fact whether or not ejaculations would even be shown. Among those interviewees who did express a preference, ejaculations inside the female partner's vagina were clearly the most popular option, with nearly half of the women and about one third of the men showing a preference for this option and many others mentioning it as their secondary option. In contrast, ejaculations on the partner's face or in their mouth were much less popular, particularly among heterosexual interviewees.

Notwithstanding these general tendencies, sub-group analyses showed some interesting variability among interviewees, particularly by gender and by culture (as measured by region of residence). One notable difference between men and women was that in comparison to heterosexual male interviewees, heterosexual female interviewees were significantly more likely to see depictions of male orgasms in pornography as important. This finding challenges the perception that the fetishization of "the money shot" and the desire to watch it in pornography is almost entirely led by male viewers. In contrast, it is in line with recent studies showing that most women find it important that their male partner ejaculates during intercourse [49] and that the male orgasm is very important for women, as they often see it as an essential aspect of normal heterosexual sex and a confirmation of their own sexual appeal and attractiveness [10].

Findings regarding cultural variability in ejaculation preferences are also interesting to explore. Perhaps most notably, while ejaculations inside a female performer's vagina were generally quite popular among all groups of interviewees, this preference was especially salient among South Asian and African interviewees. One possible explanation for this preference may be the importance that these cultures ascribe to the male semen and the common belief that spilling semen in vain weakens men [50,51]. These beliefs, in turn, may drive a desire to avoid wasteful spilling of semen, noting that vaginal ejaculations at least hold some potential to produce meaningful results in the form of impregnation.

In contrast, visible ejaculations (ejaculations on the female performer's face or body) were especially popular among Middle Eastern interviewees. This finding is particularly interesting given the fact that nearly 80% of all Middle Eastern interviewees in the sample identified as heterosexual men and that heterosexual men in general were actually significantly less likely than heterosexual women to express a preference for such visible ejaculations. Of note, this difference was not due to an aversion to vaginal ejaculations, as Middle Eastern interviewees' preference for vaginal ejaculations was on par with that of interviewees from Europe and the Americas. Instead, it is mostly due to the fact that all Middle Eastern interviewees expressed a clear preference regarding ejaculations, with none of them saying that they did not care about the location of such ejaculations (compare this with more than 40% of European and East Asian interviewees who said that they did not really care). Clearly, Middle Eastern cultures ascribe great importance to the male orgasm and viewers wanted visible proof that it occurred.

Turning to the more general implications of this study's findings, it is interesting to note that these results are somewhat counterintuitive given the extant literature on pornography and the male ejaculation. First, they are not compatible with content analyses of popular mainstream pornographic videos. These analyses reported a relatively high prevalence for facial ejaculations, ranging from 24.3% of all videos [22] to 45% [20], while ejaculations in a partner's mouth were reported to be even more prevalent, ranging from 35.7% [22] to 58.6% [21]. Viewers, however, seem much less partial to these acts. Fewer than 15% of heterosexual viewers said that they preferred either of these options. Even more, facial ejaculations were the one practice that many of the interviewees singled out, often unsolicited, as it elicited a strong negative reaction and a clear desire to avoid seeing it. Of note, this aversion was by no means reserved to female viewers. In fact, heterosexual female viewers were somewhat more likely than heterosexual male viewers to express a preference for facial ejaculations, although interviewees who expressed this preference were a small minority among both men and women.

Second, the low popularity of facial ejaculations and the frequent overt rejection of this practice do not support arguments by radical feminist scholars, suggesting that viewers, particularly male viewers, largely enjoy and seek the degradation of women in pornography [26–28,31,32]. These scholars concluded that since aggressive and degrading practices are common in mainstream pornography, they must be popular among male viewers. Instead, there seems to be a disconnect between the low popularity of content that is often perceived as degrading and humiliating women (primarily ejaculation on a performer's face or in her mouth) and the relatively high frequency of these acts in pornographic videos and films. This disparity seems to suggest that producers, directors, and more generally industry conventions about the preferred pornographic script may be out of touch with what most viewers actually wish to watch. Furthermore, even those interviewees who did express an affinity for facial ejaculations mostly did not perceive this as a degrading or humiliating act. Instead, many of them explained this preference with the desire for the ejaculation to be visible.

Somewhat similarly, ejaculations in a female performer's mouth were also not very popular among viewers, with female viewers finding these particularly unattractive. Here, even more than with facial ejaculations, one could see viewers' perception that this is not a degrading practice. Instead, most interviewees, whether they wanted to see it or not, perceived it as an act of acceptance by the female performer, as long as she was consenting and not visibly repulsed by it. Some, particularly ones who found male semen unattractive, even saw mouth ejaculations as a relatively elegant way (when the female performer swallows the semen) to avoid watching the semen altogether. Of note, there was substantial cultural diversity among viewers regarding both facial and mouth ejaculations. These two related practices were most popular among North American viewers, with nearly a quarter of all viewers expressing a preference for one of them. However, among interviewees from Europe and from Africa, nearly no one expressed a preference for either of these practices. These differences may be a result of varying sexual cultural norms

and/or of greater exposure to pornographic industries that might be less likely to feature these practices. Regardless, they demonstrate that there is nothing “natural” about such sexual fantasies and preferences.

Finally, the most popular ejaculation option among interviewees was inside the female partner’s vagina. Viewers spoke about different reasons for this preference. Male viewers often emphasizing the feeling that this meant the female performer accepted the male semen (rather than being repulsed by it), especially when she was encouraging the male performer to ejaculate inside her, and interpreted this as her being more engaged in the sexual act. Female viewers (as well as some men) who expressed particular affinity for vaginal ejaculations often felt that this act signified intimacy, passion, sensuality, and authenticity. It showed that both sexual partners were fully engaged in the act and that they both cared about each other’s feelings and enjoyed the sex rather than just performing for payment.

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