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Felching Among Men Who Engage in Barebacking (Unprotected Anal Sex)

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Abstract

Felching (sucking or eating semen out of someone's anus) is a sexual behavior about which virtually nothing has been written in the scholarly literature, despite the fact that it appears to be a not-uncommon practice among certain subpopulations of men who have sex with men (MSM). This study examined three broad research questions: (1) How common is felching? (2) How does a desire for felching relate to other HIV risk practices and risk behavior preferences? (3) What factors are associated with the desire to engage in felching? The data were from a content analysis study of one of the largest Internet websites specifically targeting MSM looking for partners for unprotected sex. A total of 1,316 profiles on the site were analyzed and selected randomly based on users' ZIP codes. Felching was mentioned as a sought-after practice in approximately one-sixth of the men's profiles. Men who wanted to find felching partners were significantly more likely than those not searching for felching partners to seek other types of risky sex, including unprotected oral and unprotected anal sex, and various enhanced risk preferences (e.g., having sex while high, multiple-partner sex, unwillingness to withdraw the penis prior to internal ejaculation). Multivariate analysis revealed several factors that were related to an interest in identifying partners online for felching, including race/ethnicity, indifference to sex partners' HIV serostatus, several sensation-seeking measures (e.g., wanting "wild" or "uninhibited" sex, self-identification as a "bug chaser"), and eroticizing ejaculatory fluids.

Keywords

Felching; Internet; Gay men; MSM; HIV risk behaviors

Introduction

Felching is a sexual practice, fairly common among men who have sex with other men (MSM) but not limited to this population, about which little has been written and, scientifically, about which little is known. Behaviorally speaking, felching entails sucking or eating semen out of someone's anus. Among heterosexual or bisexually involved couples,

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felching occasionally occurs as well, and entails sucking or eating semen out of someone's anus or vagina. In terms of actual practice among MSM, however, what usually happens is that one man performs unprotected anal sex on another man, ejaculates inside of that man's anus, sucks out the semen from that man's anus, and then swallows the semen. Sometimes, this process is taken one step farther by then feeding the semen back to the original recipient by drooling it onto or into his mouth or exchanging it back and forth with him orally with a series of deep kisses (i.e., French kisses). The last part of this process—the oral exchange of the semen between the partners—is sometimes referred to as “snowballing” and is, for many men who engage in felching, an integral part of the felching act. It is the part that conveys the greatest interpersonal intimacy through the semen exchange, and it is also a behavior that enhances the chances for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) to be transmitted from one man to the other. Among MSM, another variation on felching—one that carries with it considerably greater risk—entails several men performing unprotected anal sex on the same man, all of them ejaculating into that man's anus, and then one man (who may or may not have been a participant in the anal sex/ejaculation activities) coming along to eat the semen from the group of men out of the recipient's anus, often concluding the activities by sharing the semen with the original recipient via kissing.

In terms of health risk, felching may involve several types of risk. First, if the anal insertive partner is HIV-positive, the snowballing component of the felching act increases the chances that the receptive partner will become infected because he is being double exposed to the HIV-infected semen (first through receiving it anally, second by accepting it orally). Although the chance of becoming HIV-infected by receiving semen orally is generally considered to be low, it is not a “no risk” or a “safe sex” behavior (Campo et al., 2006; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006; Hawkins, 2001). Second, if the person performing the unprotected anal sex has other sexually transmitted infections, such as gonorrhea, chlamydia, or syphilis, these, too, can be transmitted to the person receiving the semen both through the unprotected anal sex act and through the felching act (Emerson et al., 2007; Morris et al., 2006; Templeton et al., 2008). Likewise, hepatitis may also be transmitted via felching if the person(s) originally providing the semen is/are hepatitis-infected (Turner et al., 2006).

Yet, despite these health risks attendant with felching, little, if anything, has been documented in the scientific literature regarding this behavior. Little is known about how common this practice is among men who have sex with other men or about how common it is for them to report a desire to engage in felching. Little is known about the types of men who like to engage in felching or if there are differences between those who do and those who do not practice this behavior. Little is known about how involvement in this particular sexual practice is related to involvement in other risky sexual behaviors. The main purpose of the present study was to examine these particular issues in a sample of men who use the Internet specifically to find sex partners with whom they can engage in unprotected sex. Five research questions were examined: (1) How prevalent is felching among the sexual practices being sought by men who use the Internet to identify potential partners for unprotected sex? (2) What characteristics are associated with expressing a desire for felching in one's online profile? (3) How, if at all, is a desire for felching related to other sexual risk practices in this population? (4) How, if at all, is a desire for felching related to sexual risk preferences

among men who use the Internet to find other men for unprotected sex? (5) What factors differentiate men who look for felching partners online and those who do not, when the effects of other factors are taken into account?

Method

Participants

Men ranged in age from 18 to 63 years ($M = 35.8$, $SD = 8.8$). The sample approximated the American population fairly well in terms of its racial composition (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001), with 76.9% of the men being Caucasian, 8.1% African American, 7.8% Latino, 2.7% Asian, 0.2% Native American, and 4.3% biracial/multiracial. The large majority (88.7%) considered themselves to be gay, with most of the remainder (10.0%) self-identifying as bisexual. A small number of men said that they were heterosexual (0.5%) or “curious” (0.8%). One-third of the men (33.9%) self-identified as being “top” or “versatile top”; one-quarter (22.4%) self-identified as being “versatile”; and the remainder (43.7%) self-identified as being a “bottom”; or a “versatile bottom.” Most (59.6%) said that they were HIV-negative, although sizable proportions of the men whose ads were coded said that they knew that they were HIV-positive (17.3%) or that they did not know what their HIV serostatus was (23.1%). The sample, like the American population in general, tended to be skewed toward people residing in more densely populated areas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). One-fifth (20.0%) of the men lived in an area with fewer than 250 persons per square mile. At the other end of the spectrum, 37.8% of the men resided in an area with more than 5,000 persons per square mile, and half of these men (19.8% of the total sample) lived in an area with more than 10,000 persons per square mile.

Procedure

The data were collected between September 2006 and January 2007 using one of the largest MSM-oriented bareback-focused websites currently available on the Internet. The website was chosen because it is free to the public, findable by virtually any Internet search utilizing common key words like “bareback,” and because it boasts a large and steadily growing membership. This website allows members to post profiles (including photographs) describing themselves, and there are no length restrictions placed on profiles posted. In addition, there are specific places in their profiles where members are instructed to indicate the type(s) of relationships they are seeking (long-term relationships, one-on-one sexual encounters, three-way sexual encounters, and so forth), specific sexual acts that they would like to practice, and an open-ended field that can provide supplemental information about one’s most-sought-after traits or behaviors. Essentially, the large, stable, and growing membership of this website, coupled with members’ ability to describe themselves as fully as they chose, made this particular website an ideal candidate for the present research.

This research relied upon content analysis as the principal analytical tool (Franziosi, 2008; Krippendorff & Bock, 2009). All ads were double-coded (once at the beginning of the study and then again at the end of the study) to ensure data quality, and code-recoding reliability coefficients were computed to assess the quality of the data. Kappa coefficients were 0.90 or greater for all items coded, indicating a very high rate of reliability. The content analysis was

based on a random sample of users' profiles, randomly selected by ZIP code, which is a searchable feature on the site. This included analyzing both the "check box "information contained in their profiles and their "free form" self-description narratives, in which they provided detailed information about themselves and/or what they were seeking sexually. Men residing outside of the United States were excluded from this research, so as to keep it a U.S.-focused study. Also excluded from analysis ($n = 6$) were profiles that had not been filled out completely (i.e., with the user not providing at least one piece of the required information on each profile page on the website). In order to be included in the analyses, a user's profile had to be active at both the beginning and the conclusion of the data collection period, to guard against "experimenters "or one-time-only visitors to the site being included in the study. (Each profile coded initially was visited at the end of the data collection period to ensure this.) This led to the exclusion of 67 cases (4.8%). In all, 1,316 valid profiles comprise the study sample.

Measures

For each profile, the following information was collected: age (examined both as a continuous measure and as a dichotomous measure comparing men under the age of 30 to those aged 30+); race/ethnicity (Caucasian, African American, Latino, Asian, Native American or biracial/multiracial); self-identification as being a sexual "top," a versatile top, versatile, a versatile "bottom" or a bottom (analyzed both as "top" vs. other and separately as "bottom" vs. other); self-reported HIV serostatus (negative, positive, or unknown); desired HIV serostatus in sex partners (must be negative, may be negative, must be positive, may be positive, do not care); self-identified sexual orientation (gay, bisexual, "curious, "heterosexual, analyzed as gay vs. other); willingness to give and receive ejaculatory fluid in the mouth and anus; type(s) of "relationships "sought (one-on-one sexual encounter, long-term relationship, three-person sexual encounter, multiple partner sexual encounter, nonsexual activities partner); the user's ZIP code (which was also used to compute population density as a macro-level analytical variable, in accordance with statistics provided by the U.S. Census Bureau, 2010); and whether or not the user's profile was one of the most commonly searched profiles on the site on any day during the data collection period.

In addition, data collection also entailed coding for a wide variety of specific sexual behaviors, including, among others, receiving/giving oral sex, receiving/giving anal sex, felching, and rimming (oral stimulation of the anus). Finally, a variety of risk-enhancing practices and attitudes were also coded, including a stated preference for engaging in rough sex, having sexual relations while high (known in the target community as PNP, or "partying and playing"), overtly stating that they will not use condoms and/or that they will not permit their partners to use condoms, an HIV-negative person actively trying to become HIV-infected (known in the target community as "bug chasing"), an HIV-positive person actively trying to infect partners with HIV (known as "gift giving"; for further information about this phenomenon, see Grov & Parsons, 2006; Moskowitz & Roloff, 2007a), unwillingness to withdraw the penis prior to ejaculation and/or unwillingness to allow a sex partner to withdraw his penis prior to ejaculation, an overt preference for anonymous sex, a stated preference for having long-lasting sexual encounters, an expression of seeking sexual

encounters that are “wild “or “uninhibited, “and eroticizing ejaculation fluid (known in the target community as being a “cum whore “or a “cum freak “or a “cum lover “or a “cum dump”).

All of the research done in conjunction with this article was undertaken as part of a larger study known colloquially as The Bareback Project. The research protocols for this study were reviewed and subsequently approved by the Institutional Review Board at Morgan State University.

Results

Prevalence of Characteristics Associated with Wanting to Find Felching Partners

Approximately 1 man in 6 (16.5%) expressed a desire to find partners with whom he could engage in felching. Men who were looking for felching partners were younger, on average, than those who did not post profiles expressing such an interest (34.5 years of age vs. 36.1, $t = 2.41$, $p = .016$), with particular differences noted between men under and those over the age of 30. African American men were considerably less likely than members of other racial/ethnic groups to express a desire for felching (4.7% vs. 17.6%; OR = 0.23, CI₉₅ = 0.08–0.60, $p < .001$) and, conversely, Caucasian men were substantially more likely than members of other racial/ethnic groups to have profiles indicating an interest in felching (18.0% vs. 11.5%; OR = 1.69, CI₉₅ = 1.13–2.54, $p = .007$). There was no difference in profiles mentioning or not mentioning felching based on the population density of the area where the men resided or on their sexual orientation.

Felching was more commonly sought by men who self-identified as sexual bottoms or versatile bottoms than it was among those who self-identified as being versatile, versatile tops, or tops (20.2% vs. 13.6%; OR=1.60, CI₉₅=1.18–2.17, $p=.002$). Men who said that they were HIV-negative were significantly less likely than those who were HIV-positive or unsure about their HIV serostatus to post profiles saying that they wanted to find partners for felching (14.3% vs. 19.7%; OR=0.68, CI₉₅=0.50–0.92, $p=.009$). Finally, men who had paid for a site membership, which gave them access to additional features and allowed them more comprehensive usage of the site than those without such a membership, were more likely than those who had not paid for a site membership to say that they were looking for partners for felching (20.5% vs. 15.3%; OR=1.43, CI₉₅=1.02–2.01, $p=.031$).

How Is a Desire for Felching Related to Other HIV Risk Practices?

For the two sexual practices examined that entailed receiving no semen—that is, having someone perform unprotected oral sex on the person, and being the insertive partner in unprotected anal sex—no significant differences were found between men who did and men who did not want to find felching partners (88.5% vs. 87.9% for receiving oral sex; 79.7% vs. 79.7% for insertive anal sex). When the sexual practice in question involved receiving semen, however, men whose profiles indicated an interest in felching were far more likely to want to engage in the risk practice than were those whose profiles indicated no such interest. Where receiving semen during oral sex was concerned, men seeking felching were more than three times as likely as those who were not seeking felching to want to engage in this

behavior (19.4% vs. 6.4%; OR = 3.53, CI₉₅ = 2.12–5.95, $p < .001$). This differential was nearly as large when receiving semen from unprotected anal sex was concerned as well (20.6% vs. 7.2%; OR = 3.34, CI₉₅ = 2.18–5.15, $p < .001$). Men whose profiles expressed a desire for finding felching partners were about twice as likely as those whose profiles did not to say that they wanted to identify men with whom they could engage in all four of these sexual practices (i.e., receptive and insertive unprotected oral sex, receptive and insertive unprotected anal sex) (21.5% vs. 11.6%; OR = 2.08, CI₉₅ = 1.52–2.85, $p < .001$). Moreover, men seeking felching online were more likely than those who were not to say that they wanted to find men with whom they could practice oral-anal sex (colloquially known as “rimming”) (26.0% vs. 15.3%; OR = 1.95, CI₉₅ = 1.28–2.96, $p < .001$).

How Is a Desire for Felching Related to HIV-Related Risk Preferences?

On almost all dimensions of risk preference examined, men whose profiles indicated a desire for felching were also seeking to engage in other sexual behaviors that are considered to be high risk. For example, they were more likely to want to have sexual relations while high (19.6% vs. 12.6%; OR = 1.70, CI₉₅ = 1.24–2.33, $p < .001$). As another example, they were more than three times as likely to state overtly in their profiles that they would not withdraw their penis prior to internal ejaculation or to allow their partners to do so (48.0% vs. 15.9%; OR = 4.89, CI₉₅ = 2.06–11.59, $p < .001$). As a third example, men seeking felching were about five times as likely as those not seeking felching to want multiple-partner sex (20.5% vs. 4.3%; OR = 5.70, CI₉₅ = 3.18–10.38, $p < .001$). They were more likely to want rough sex (24.8% vs. 15.4%; OR = 1.89, CI₉₅ = 1.19–2.76, $p = .003$), to state overtly that they disliked condoms (even though this was implicit by their very use of the website in question) (41.3% vs. 15.6%; OR = 3.81, CI₉₅ = 1.99–7.26, $p < .001$), to want to find partners with whom they could engage in anonymous sex (32.6% vs. 16.0%; OR = 2.54, CI₉₅ = 1.25–5.10, $p = .004$), to want to find men for “wild” or “uninhibited” sexual encounters (36.2% vs. 15.0%; OR = 3.22, CI₉₅ = 2.00–5.16, $p < .001$), to eroticize ejaculatory fluids (35.7% vs. 12.8%; OR = 3.78, CI₉₅ = 2.68–5.34, $p < .001$), and to want to find partners with whom they could engage in sex involving bondage (21.6% vs. 14.2%; OR = 1.66, CI₉₅ = 1.22–2.27, $p < .001$).

Consistent with the preceding, men searching online for felching were more than three times as likely as those who were not to be bug chasers—that is, men whose profiles specifically indicated a desire to become HIV-positive (51.7% vs. 15.7%; OR = 5.75, CI₉₅ = 2.58–12.84, $p < .001$). Also consistent with this, men who were looking for felching partners were more likely than those who were not to say that they did not care about the HIV serostatus of potential sex partners (19.9% vs. 11.3%; OR = 1.94, CI₉₅ = 1.39–2.72, $p < .001$). The former were also about half as likely as the latter to insist on identifying sex partners who were HIV-negative (10.5% vs. 19.8%; OR = 0.47, CI₉₅ = 0.33–0.67, $p < .001$).

The only risk preferences measure examined that did not demonstrate a significant difference between the men who did and the men who did not advertise for felching online was a stated preference for having long-lasting sexual encounters (19.5% vs. 16.3%).

What Factors Are Associated with Seeking versus Not Seeking Felching Online When the Effects of Other Measures Are Considered?

Table 1 presents the findings obtained in this part of the analysis. The last column of this table provides standardized coefficients, so that readers can compare the relative effects sizes of the items in the final equation. As shown, eight items were found to contribute uniquely and significantly to the determination of whether or not men sought felching partners in their online profiles. The strongest contributor to the model was wanting multiple-partner sex, which was much more common among men looking for felching partners than it was among those who were not ($\beta = 0.32, p < .001$). The next strongest variable in the equation was eroticizing ejaculatory fluids. Here, men whose If-identified as “cum freaks” or “cum dumps” or who said that they could not get enough cum (or anything to that effect) were more likely to seek felching partners online as those who did not so identify ($\beta = 0.20, p < .001$). Third, African Americans were found to be substantially less likely than their non-Black counterparts to advertise online for felching partners ($\beta = 0.18, p = .012$).

All remaining items in the multivariate model contributed approximately equally to one another. They showed that men seeking partners for felching were more likely than those who were not to say that they did not care about the HIV serostatus of their potential sex partners ($\beta = 0.11, p = .018$). Likewise, site users who wanted to find felching partners were more likely to say that they hoped to find sex partners with whom they could have sex while high ($\beta = 0.11, p = .016$). Moreover, men who were actively trying to become HIV-infected (i.e., bug chasers) were more likely to advertise for felching than their counterparts who did not seek HIV infection ($\beta = 0.10, p = .002$). Wanting sex that was “wild” or “uninhibited” was more common among men seeking felching partners as it was among men who did not advertise for such partners ($\beta = 0.09, p = .007$). Finally, stipulating in one’s profile an unwillingness to withdraw the penis prior to internal ejaculation was more prevalent among the men searching for felching partners as it was among men who were not ($\beta = 0.08, p = .022$).

The Hosmer–Lemeshow chi-square was non-significant, $\chi^2(7) = 6.60$, and, therefore, indicated that this multivariate model constituted an excellent fit with the data. The pseudo- R^2 associated with this model suggested that the equation presented in Table 1 explained approximately 18.0% of the total variance.

Discussion

This study has shown that felching is not an uncommon risk practice sought by men who use the Internet to find partners for bareback sex, appearing as a sought-after behavior in approximately 1 online profile in 6. Future community-based research and HIV intervention efforts would be well-advised to ask their project participants specific questions about their involvement in felching, so that more accurate prevalence estimates of this behavior can be obtained. Given the potential HIV and STI-related risks inherent in the practice of felching, it is critical that intervention projects identify men who enjoy this practice and work with these individuals to try to find acceptable ways to reduce their sexual risk. Without question, this will be difficult to accomplish, because there are few, if any, functional equivalent behaviors that can be offered as substitutes for men who like the physical sensation of

ejaculating into someone's anus and then the additional oral and gustatory sensations of retrieving that semen directly from the anus afterwards.

The present research found that age was associated with a desire for felching, such that younger men—particularly those in their later teens and twenties—were more likely than their older counterparts to want to find partners with whom they could engage in this behavior. This finding is consistent with published studies suggesting that younger MSM are more apt to engage in HIV-related risk behaviors than their older counterparts (Chen, Weide, & McFarland, 2003; Halkitis et al., 2005; Xia et al., 2006). Others have written about the need for age-specific HIV interventions (Blankenship, 1998; Hillman, 2007; Norman, Malow, Loue, Abreu, & Candelaria, 2008) and have found this approach to be effective at reducing HIV risk among younger men (Amirkhanian, Kelly, Kabakchieva, McAuliffe, & Vassileva, 2003; Kegeles, Hays, & Coates, 1996). Strengthening partner communication among young MSM, helping them to develop a sense of pride in their sexual identity, and providing them with a social network of men who share an interest in risk reduction have all been shown to be effective at helping members of this community to reduce their risk for HIV (Kegeles, Hays, Pollack, & Coates, 1999; Mpowerment Project, 2008). These approaches might be applied to the practice of felching, in an effort to reduce young men's overall levels of HIV and STI risk.

The multivariate analysis revealed that African American men were far less likely than their non-Black counterparts to seek felching partners online. One possible explanation of this may pertain to the fact that the African American men in this sample were significantly more likely than other men to self-identify as sexual tops (data not presented) and, as noted, it was the sexual bottoms, not the tops, who were most likely to want to find partners for felching. Another possible explanation is that this race-based difference is attributable, at least in part, to cultural differences in how men of different races define masculinity for themselves. Accepting another man's semen (or actively seeking this semen, as would be the case in sex involving felching) may be construed as being less masculine than giving one's semen to another man. The extent to which people's personal definitions of masculinity affect their sexual risk-taking is a subject well worth examining in future research, particularly because several studies have shown a link between self-definitions of masculinity and HIV risk taking (Berg, 2009; Halkitis & Parsons, 2003; Halkitis, Parsons, & Wilton, 2003; Knipper et al., 2007; Operario, Smith, & Kegeles, 2008). Issues surrounding masculinity appear to be particularly salient to African American men, their expressions of their sexuality, and their involvement in various sexual practices (Crook, Thomas, & Cobia, 2009; Malebranche, Fields, Bryant, & Harper, 2009; Mays, Cochran, & Zamudio, 2004). Interventionists working with MSM may wish to consider developing intervention curricula that take into account issues pertaining to masculinity, particularly as it applies to risk-taking practices.

Another important finding is that men who did not care about the HIV serostatus of people who responded to their profiles were 50% more likely to express a desire for felching than were those who did have an HIV serostatus preference. Men who are looking for partners for felching may be at particular risk of contracting HIV if they are unaware of their partners' HIV serostatus because of the high risk of contracting HIV that is attendant with this

particular behavior. This highlights the need for community-based projects and HIV interventionists to emphasize the importance of knowing one's own HIV serostatus and asking about the HIV serostatus of one's sex partners before engaging in unprotected sex with them. Working with men to enhance partner communication skills is likely to be one effective way of attaining this goal. Studies have shown that there is an inverse relationship between partner communication skills and HIV risk taking (Crepaz & Marks, 2003; Klein, Elifson, & Sterk, 2004).

Another point worth emphasizing is that several of the items retained in the final multivariate equation have something in common—namely, a propensity toward sensation seeking and/or pursuing riskiness in one's sexual practices. This was true with regard to findings for seeking multiple-partner sex, actively seeking “wild” or “uninhibited” sex, being an active bug chaser, wanting to have sex while high, and men's unwillingness to have sex involving penile withdrawal prior to internal ejaculation. Taken together, these findings suggest that searching online for partners with whom one can engage in felching may be indicative of a broader pattern of impulsivity, sensation-seeking, and/or sexual compulsivity in some men's lives. Research has shown that impulsivity is related to sexual risk taking in MSM (Hayaki, Anderson, & Stein, 2006; Semple, Zians, Grant, & Patterson, 2006a), leading to the recommendation that HIV interventions targeting MSM should address men's impulsivity needs. Similarly, sensation-seeking has been found to be associated with sexual risk-taking (Berg, 2008; Hendershot, Stoner, George, & Norris, 2007), once again emphasizing the need to address this trait in HIV risk reduction interventions. A strong link between sexual compulsivity and HIV risk practices has been demonstrated as well (Grov et al., 2008; Moskowitz & Roloff, 2007b; Semple, Zians, Grant, & Patterson, 2006b), again leading to recommendations to target sexually compulsive men in HIV intervention efforts (Satinsky et al., 2008). Interestingly, a few of these studies have focused on the conjoint effects of sexual compulsivity and the Internet in elevating men's HIV risk, pointing to the need to address both of these factors. Individually tailored intervention efforts are needed to work with MSM who seek risky sex partners online. In some instances, it is likely that formal treatment for impulsivity disorder and/or sexual compulsivity may be needed in order to help these men to reduce their overall HIV risk. Recent research on these approaches has yielded promising results (Bostwick & Bucci, 2008; Southern, 2008).

Finally, the present study also found that approximately 1 man in 6 eroticized ejaculatory fluids. Desired (i.e., advertised for) sexual risk behaviors among these men were more than 50% greater than among their peers who did not eroticize semen, and this includes a nearly threefold greater likelihood of advertising for felching partners. Unfortunately, developing an effective intervention to combat this particular behavior is likely to be extremely challenging, since there are few, if any, functionally equivalent activities that interventionists can offer up as substitutes for the specific behaviors that are placing the “cum freaks” at risk. One potential solution to this problem would be to encourage men who eroticize semen to allow their partners to ejaculate on them rather than inside of them, or to ejaculate onto their partners externally rather than internally. Although this would be unpalatable to many of the men who self-identify as “cum lovers” who specifically enjoy the taste of semen, some might find it to be an acceptable compromise at least some of the time. It is a textbook example of the value of advocating a harm reduction approach, particularly

when extinction of a particular behavior (in this instance, the risky behavior of felching) is not a feasible or realistic goal.

Before concluding, a few potential limitations of the research will be noted. First, this content analysis research was conducted using one specific website and, therefore, there is no way to know whether users of this particular site are similar to or different from those who frequent other sites. Other sites were excluded from consideration because of the fees that they charge in order for would-be users to partake of their services and/or because of the significant limitations they placed on members' ad/profile content. Nonetheless, the website chosen as the focus of this research represented an excellent sampling of men who were using the Internet specifically to locate other men with whom they can have unprotected sex.

Another potential limitation of this research was that virtually all of the ads/profiles appearing on the website studied were written in English. This may prevent non-English speakers from utilizing the website and this may limit the generalizability of the findings somewhat.

As a content analysis project, this research was unable to assess the extent to which the behaviors advertised for in the ads represent the behaviors practiced when people meet in person. It is not possible without interview data from the men themselves who place the profiles to know whether their profiles were a true reflection of their sexual behaviors and risk preferences or, alternatively, whether their profiles were more of an expression of sexual fantasy (that is, actual preferences vs. symbolic preferences). The extent to which the risky behaviors advertised for and/or listed as preferences in the ads reflect actual behaviors practiced when people meet in person is, by necessity, the subject of a different study, following on the heels of the current project. Findings from that study (recently completed by the present author) suggest that the profiles posted online are an accurate indication of what the men using MSM barebacking sites are looking for sexually. Published studies (Bolding, Davis, Sherr, Hart, & Elford, 2004; Bull, McFarlane, Lloyd, & Rietmeijer, 2004) showing that men who use the Internet to locate sexual partners are very likely to meet up with such individuals for sex also suggest that there may not be a great disconnect between ad/profile content and behavioral practices. Nevertheless, this needs to be established with additional research.

Additionally, this study was limited to men who seek unprotected sex via the Internet. The findings cannot be generalized to MSM overall, because many of them do not overtly search for partners for unprotected sex and not all of them use the Internet to locate potential sex partners.

In conclusion, the present study found that felching is a not uncommon practice sought by many men who use the Internet to find partners for unprotected sex. It was listed as a sought-after practice by approximately one-sixth of the men studied. An interest in engaging in this practice was found to be associated closely with an interest in engaging in a variety of other HIV risk practices and risk preferences. This highlights the need to understand the factors that are related to a tendency to want to engage in the practice of felching. Toward that end, the present study identified numerous factors that were linked with men's stated

desire to find partners for felching, including race/ethnicity, indifference to the HIV serostatus of one's potential sex partners, a propensity to seek and/or engage in risk-enhanced sexual practices, and eroticizing ejaculatory fluids. These findings require further examination and replication in future studies, because they are among very few reported in the scientific literature. But evidence from the present study suggests that (1) MSM who wish to engage in felching comprise a significant minority of the Internet-using barebacking population, (2) felching is part of an overall behavioral pattern involving great levels of sexual risk, and (3) there are specific steps that might be taken to try to reduce felching among men who use the Internet to find other men for unprotected sex.

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Table 1

Multivariate findings for the factors associated with whether or not men seek felching partners in their online profiles

	Odds ratio	95% Confidence interval	β
Race = African American	0.30	0.12–0.77	0.18 *
Does not care about partner's HIV serostatus	1.51	1.07–2.14	0.11 *
Wants multiple sex partner sex	3.81	2.15–6.74	0.32 ***
Prefers to find men who will have sex while high	1.49	1.08–2.05	0.11 *
Self-identification as a bug chaser	3.63	1.59–8.26	0.10 **
Unwillingness to withdraw prior to internal ejaculation	2.85	1.16–6.99	0.08 *
Seeking “wild” or “uninhibited” sex	1.95	1.20–3.17	0.09 **
Eroticizes ejaculatory fluids	2.68	1.88–3.82	0.20 ***

*
 $p < .05$;

**
 $p < .01$;

 $p < .001$