



Choking a Partner During Sex Is As Dangerous As a Police Chokehold

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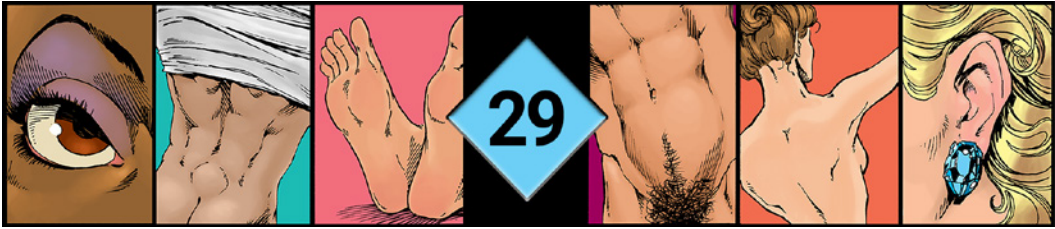
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The single most dangerous and degrading act that porn has helped popularize is the idea that women like to be choked during sex.

How popular? According to a female reader who attends a major university: “Several male partners have choked me during sex, without asking!” In case you think she is exaggerating, consider these findings from a recent study of almost 5,000 undergraduates at a large university in the midwest:

A majority of undergraduates in our sample have choked or been choked during sex... More than half of women reported having asked partners to choke them, and most men reported having been asked to choke a partner. These patterns suggest that choking is becoming (or is already) a common aspect of college students’ partnered sexual repertoires.²

What is particularly alarming is that most of these women and men don’t understand how dangerous it is to be choked during sex. Hopefully, this chapter will help give you a better sense of the physical and legal risks that are involved when a person is choked during sex.

Is Choking During Sex The Same as a Police Chokehold?

There are two types of police chokeholds that have been banned in many of the nation’s largest police forces: one type is called the carotid hold, which limits the flow of blood to the brain. The carotid hold is what happens when a partner is choked during sex. According to a report about this by some of the nation’s leading neurologists:

“Approximately 70% of the blood to the brain flows through the carotid arteries. Interruption of blood supply to the human brain for as little as 4 seconds can lead to a loss of consciousness. The human brain generally demands at least 15% to 20% of the total blood in circulation, with some brain structures vulnerable to permanent ischemic damage when this amount falls to even half that.”¹



“There is a rapid loss of human nervous tissue with each second that the flow of oxygen to the brain is reduced or stopped.”¹

That's four seconds—not several minutes! As for how little pressure it takes on a person's neck to stop the flow of blood into their brain:¹

A force of only 6 kg is needed to compress the carotid arteries, which is about the average weight of a household cat.¹

But isn't it different if it's your hands on a partner's neck and you can stop choking her or him as soon as something bad happens?

The negative health consequences of carotid manipulation are not a matter of 'dose': neither the duration nor the strength of the force applied fully mitigate potential health risks. Even gentle manipulation of the carotid arteries to control a rapid heart rate vis-à-vis a 'carotid massage' has fallen out of favor because of risk of iatrogenic harm to the patient, even at the hands of master clinicians with decades of experience.¹

I emailed the neurologists who had written this report about the dangers of chokeholds. I asked them if their concerns would also apply to choking a partner during sex. The response I received was an unequivocal *YES!*

The Origins of Choking During Sex: Breath Play or Erotic Asphyxiation

I first became aware of this more than ten years ago, when a reader informed me that he puts his hands around his partner's neck and squeezes tightly when they are having sex—at her request. She told him it makes sex feel more intense. He was concerned because she was asking him to ratchet up the choking by using a belt around her neck.

This was before choking became mainstream, and it was limited to a practice in BDSM called *breath play* or *erotic asphyxiation*. Other terms for it were *scarfing* and *terminal sex*. There were two distinct groups of people who enjoyed doing it: males who would partially suffocate themselves while masturbating and couples where one partner liked to be choked.

Boys and young men who are into erotic asphyxiation are known as *baggers* or *gaspers*. They put plastic bags over their heads or tight ropes around their necks while they masturbate. The few studies I could find said that *baggers* are often white, straight, and middle-class. They fit in well socially and

they keep their sexual secrets well hidden. Up to a quarter of them wear women's underwear while they are masturbating on death's doorstep.

Several boy baggers die each year in this country. Their deaths are often reported as suicides. But people who are trying to kill themselves don't hang from door knobs while naked, and they don't design safety releases into their death devices. Boy baggers fully intend to free themselves after squeezing out their blurry-eyed orgasms.

Horrified parents will often spruce up the death scene before the ambulance arrives. Instead of being reported as masturbation gone awry, the coroner thinks it's a suicide. None of the kids' friends can understand why someone who seemed so well-adjusted would want to off himself.

The other group who was into breath play were normal-appearing couples. They had no fear of the boy-bagger's fate. They assumed the person who is doing the choking is like a designated driver who can put the brakes on before it's too late. So, I asked BDSM expert Jay Wisemen if this was true. "Not so!" he said:

"As a person with years of medical education and experience, I know of no way whatsoever that either suffocation or strangulation can be done in a way that does not put the recipient at risk of cardiac arrest. If the recipient does arrest, the probability of resuscitating them, even with optimal CPR, is distinctly small."

In other words, you could be hooked up to state-of-the-art heart monitors and have a board-certified cardiologist for a sex partner, and breath play would still be like playing Russian roulette. Charles Moser, a physician who is highly respected in the world of kink, also expressed his concern about the long-term consequences of breath play in causing brain damage. He spoke about these concerns years before the public outcry against chokeholds.

While I knew at the time that breath play was prominently featured in the *rough sex* category of porn, I had no idea that choking would move to the prime time of mainstream porn or that rough sex would be considered a hallmark of healthy sex.

As for other forms of *rough sex* besides choking, the Herbenick et al. study

also found that an alarming number of women had been slapped by a partner during sex, had a partner aggressively facefuck them, or had come in their face. The choking and rough sex seems to be happening in hookups as well as in relationships.

The individuals who were studied by Herbenick, et al. weren't sex workers whose clientele consisted of paroled prisoners. They were 5,000 undergraduate students at a major university.

“Sex Games Gone Wrong”

In the UK, there has been an increasing number of men who have been charged with the murder of female partners who have used the defense of “sex games gone wrong.” Granted, most of these men are cold blood killers, but by no means are all of them. Even I have been contacted by a defense attorney who had trouble believing that anyone would choke a partner during sex without wanting to kill her. And that would be the person who is supposed to be on your side.

So, the next time a partner asks you to choke her or him during sex, you might practice being convincing while saying, “But Your Honor, she asked me to choke her!” You might also practice convincing your defense attorney that she really did want you to choke her. Or, take a plea deal and spend the next ten years in prison catching up on your reading.

When You See Choking in Porn

There is simply no other way to describe the proliferation of choking a partner during sex besides being porn's most toxic moment, and porn has provided plenty of competition for that title.

There is nothing wrong with enjoying porn; however, the next time you see choking, hopefully it will start to make you a little sick to your stomach, instead of it being anything you'd want to do or have done to you in real life.

Where Do We Go From Here?

It's time we stop doing to women what we don't allow the police to do and what neurologists with decades of experience won't do, because it is so dangerous. And maybe it's time for women to stop asking their partners to do this to them. (The same applies to choking a male sex partner, although

it would probably be easier for a woman to convince a jury he could have resisted if he wanted to, even if that's not true.)

REFERENCES:

¹ “Carotid Physiology and Neck Restraints in Law Enforcement, Why Neurologists Need to Make Their Voices Heard” Berkman, et al. *The Journal of the American Medical Association's NEUROLOGY*, December 28, 2020.

² “Diverse Sexual Behaviors in Undergraduate Students: Findings From a Campus Probability Survey,” Herbenick, et al, *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, June, 2021.

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