

# Health

## The Hottest Sex Scenes on Screen— and What You Can Learn From Them

By Danielle Friedman

Sex doesn't usually happen IRL the way it does in television and movies. After all, few people have [sex](#) that's perfectly choreographed, professionally lit (if only), and set to a triumphant score. Actual sex is more often clumsy, messy—and of course, magical in its own way. Yet more and more, pop culture is beginning to depict sex in ways that are not only steamy but also refreshingly real—and hey, sometimes even educational.

So what's worth watching? *Health* went to the pros—sex therapists, researchers, and educators across the country, who shared their favorite sex scenes and what they can teach us. Without further ado: Lights, camera . . . and lots and lots of action.

### *Outlander*

Caitriona Balfe and Sam Heughan

The Starz television drama chronicles the story of a World War II nurse (Balfe) who travels back in time and falls in love with a hunky Scottish warrior (Heughan). It's been hailed the "[feminist Game of Thrones](#)" in part for its sex appeal.

"I love all of the sex scenes from *Outlander*!" Vanessa Marin, PhD, a Los Angeles-based sex therapist and the creator of [Finishing School](#), an online [orgasm](#) course for women, tells *Health*. Not only do they prioritize female pleasure, she says, but they "portray oral sex on a woman with all the glory it deserves." Marin's favorite scene is the one in which Heughan's character loses his virginity. "It's awkward, fumbly, and over very quickly," she says. "It's also incredibly tender and sweet."

## ***Girls***

Allison Williams and Ebon Moss-Bachrach

This HBO series was known for its boundary-pushing sex scenes. But the episode in which Marnie (Williams) receives—there’s really no other way of saying it—*analingus* is a standout for Kat Van Kirk, PhD, a California- and Hawaii-based [sex therapist](#). “This is my favorite of several solid sex scenes from the show,” Van Kirk tells *Health*. Why? “I like that they are inventive in their location (the kitchen), and their openness to try something new . . . [Marnie’s] verbalizations of what she likes are self-empowering as well. We can all learn to be better self advocates.”

## ***True Blood***

Anna Paquin and Alex Skarsgard

Many fans of HBO's vampire series stuck with the show for seven bloody seasons *because* of the sex factor. (Pop culture’s best vampire sex scenes can be a story for another day.) For Van Kirk, one moment rises to the top of her hot list. “After a long flirtation, the scene where Sookie (Paquin) and Eric (Skarsgard) finally get together is monumental,” she tells *Health*. Even though, technically, the scene was a dream sequence, the hookup shows us that sometimes “protracted desire can really be worthwhile and help us confirm what we really want.”

## ***The Illusionist***

Jessica Biel and Edward Norton

Is it any surprise a romantic period drama starring a brooding magician would include a steamy sex scene? San Francisco-based [sex therapists](#) Danielle Harel, PhD and Celeste Hirschman say their favorite scene comes from this 2006 film: when Norton and Biel’s forbidden lovers reunite after being separated for 15 years.

Initially, the pair see each other and begin to kiss—but then Norton stops Biel. He touches her face while staring into her eyes. “We love this scene because it is so different from the typical sex scene where people pull each other's clothes off and are having

intercourse within 30 seconds,” Harel and Hirschman tell *Health*. “It teaches us to bring intention, passion, and connection to our sexual experiences.”

## ***Master of None***

Aziz Ansari and Noel Wells

The Netflix rom-com has been praised for holding a mirror up to how we live and love now—and for Erika Moen, creator of the popular sex ed comic “[Oh Joy Sex Toy](#),” the show’s pilot features a scene that reflects the best version of this notion. Ansari and Wells’ characters are having sex when the condom breaks and they’re forced to buy emergency contraception.

“Watching these two strangers navigate that dramatic shift in settings—from a horny, boozy liaison in a dark bedroom to the fluorescent lights of a sterile-looking pharmacy—was so relatable and human,” Moen tells *Health*. It’s also a good reminder that, even during seemingly random hookups, “you’re both real people, and even though you’re in an awkward situation, you’ve gotta take care of each other and be responsible.”

## ***Blue Valentine***

Michelle Williams and Ryan Gosling

This 2010 romantic drama jumps back and forth in time in telling the story of Dean (Gosling) and Cindy (Williams). Its buzzed-about oral sex scene almost landed it an NC-17 rating—until Gosling [protested](#), arguing that if the film had shown a woman performing oral sex on a man (instead of the other way around), it wouldn’t have been deemed scandalous. Van Kirk counts this scene among her favorites. It “helps give us permission to seek out slightly taboo behaviors like [oral sex],” she says, which can “confirm to our partners not only how much we accept their bodies fully but how much we love them.”