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Censorship in Online Comics

This research investigates whether or not amateur artists who publish comics online are taking advantage of the internet's relative freedom from censorship to include content in their work which might be unacceptable in other media. We conducted a content analysis of a small sample of randomly selected webcomics (N = 31), looking for frequency and severity of foul language, violence, sex, and drug use. Relatively speaking, language remained virtually uncensored (only 16.7% had censored or no foul language). Violence was highly prevalent and relatively uncensored, with 72.4% of comics having violence depicting blood or breaking of limbs (61.9% of these depicted graphic injuries or murder). Sexual themes were present in many comics (76.6%), but instances of nudity (13.3%) or on-screen sex (10.0%) were relatively uncommon. Illicit drug use was highly unrepresented, with 66.7% of comics having no instances of drug use, 30% depicting usage of alcohol or cigarettes, and 3.3% (one comic) depicting illicit drug use. Preliminary analyses also suggest that comics drawn by male artists tend to use harsher language, be more violent, and have more sexual content than comics drawn by female artists. The potential motivations for self-censorship as well as the sex differences in webcomic content are discussed