



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

# Personality and Individual Differences

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/paid](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/paid)

## Female copulatory orgasm and male partner's attractiveness to his partner and other women



Yael Sela\*, Viviana A. Weekes-Shackelford, Todd K. Shackelford, Michael N. Pham

Department of Psychology, Oakland University, Rochester, MI, United States

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 14 November 2014  
 Received in revised form 2 February 2015  
 Accepted 4 February 2015  
 Available online 25 February 2015

#### Keywords:

Evolutionary psychology  
 Female copulatory orgasm  
 Male attractiveness  
 Good-genes hypothesis  
 Sexy-Sons Hypothesis

### ABSTRACT

Women's copulatory orgasm may function to retain sperm from men with "good genes", one indicator of which is attractiveness, and one benefit of which is pathogen resistance. Women who perceive their partner to be more (vs. less) attractive are more likely to report orgasm at last copulation. Another benefit of male attractiveness to women is that he may sire offspring that will gain the heritable share of this advantage (i.e., "sexy sons"). Research has not addressed the "Sexy Sons" Hypothesis (e.g., as indicated by women's perception of *other women's* assessments of their partner's attractiveness) in regards to female copulatory orgasm. We secured self-reports from 439 women in a committed, heterosexual relationship and investigated the relationships between women's orgasm at last copulation and (1) women's assessments of their partner's attractiveness and (2) women's perceptions of *other women's* assessments of their partner's attractiveness. The results indicate that women mated to more (vs. less) attractive men are more likely to report orgasm at last copulation, and this relationship is mediated by women's perceptions of other women's assessments of their partner's attractiveness. We discuss the mediated relationship, note limitations of the research, and suggest future research directions.

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### 1. Introduction

According to the Sperm Retention Hypothesis for women's copulatory orgasm, female copulatory orgasm functions as a sire-selection mechanism by preferentially retaining sperm provided by men with "good genes" and, in turn, increasing the probability of producing offspring that carry their sire's high quality genes (Baker & Bellis, 1993, reviewed in 1995; Thornhill, Gangestad, & Comer, 1995). Previously, the Good Genes Hypothesis of sexual selection has been framed in the context of pathogen theory (e.g., Thornhill et al., 1995), whereby sexual selection favors preferences for mates who exhibit honest indicators of pathogen resistance (Hamilton & Zuk, 1982). Potential benefits of preferentially retaining the sperm of males with good genes include development of healthy offspring (e.g., via pathogen resistance) and mateship to a healthier male (and, therefore, increased likelihood of the male's investment in the female and their offspring).

One indicator of good genes is physical attractiveness (Gangestad & Buss, 1993; Grammer, Fink, Møller, & Thornhill, 2003; Thornhill et al., 1995). Women mated to more (vs. less)

attractive men are more likely to report copulatory orgasm with their partner. Previous studies measured male attractiveness by constructing composite scores from independent raters (Puts, Welling, Burriss, & Dawood, 2012; Thornhill et al., 1995). Other researchers have measured male attractiveness by asking women to rate their partner on facets of attractiveness (Gallup, Ampel, Wedberg, & Pogosjan, 2014; Shackelford et al., 2000; Thornhill et al., 1995). Following previous research, we hypothesize that women who perceive their partner to be more (vs. less) attractive will be more likely to report orgasm with their partner at last copulation (Hypothesis 1).

Men who are found to be more attractive by women and, therefore, have greater sexual access to women (Bogaert & Fisher, 1995; Rhodes, Simmons, & Peters, 2005; Weeden & Sabini, 2007; cf. Hill et al., 2013), will transmit the heritable share of their attractiveness and, consequently, attractiveness-related success to their offspring. Therefore, another potential benefit of genetic quality is a man's heritable component of his attractiveness to women. A woman obtaining genes that built such a desirable man would pass on this advantage to her offspring (i.e., she will increase her likelihood of having "sexy sons"; Fisher, 1958). The Sexy Sons Hypothesis has been offered in the context of short-term mating and extra-pair mating (e.g., Cashdan, 1996; Kruger, Fisher, & Jobling, 2003). Here we test a variation of the Sexy Sons

\* Corresponding author at: 130 Pryale Hall, Oakland University, Department of Psychology, Rochester, MI 48309-4401, United States. Fax: +1 248 370 4612.

E-mail address: [ysela@oakland.edu](mailto:ysela@oakland.edu) (Y. Sela).

Hypothesis in a long-term mating context. One valid assessment of women's perception of their partner's attractiveness to *other women* (i.e., information relevant to the Sexy Sons Hypothesis) can be secured by directly asking women how attractive *other women* find their partner. We hypothesize that women mated to men that they perceive *other women* assess as more (vs. less) attractive will be more likely to report orgasm at last copulation (Hypothesis 2).

Because women mated to more (vs. less) attractive men are more likely to report copulatory orgasm, and because women mated to men that they perceive *other women* assess as more (vs. less) attractive may be more likely to report copulatory orgasm, their perception of *other women's* attraction to their partner may affect the relationship between their copulatory orgasm and their assessments of their partner's attractiveness. We tested the hypothesis that women's perception of *other women's* assessments of their partner's attractiveness mediates the relationship between women's assessments of their partner's attractiveness and orgasm at last copulation (Hypothesis 3). Because women's relationship satisfaction is correlated with their likelihood of experiencing copulatory orgasm (Ellsworth & Bailey, 2013; Shackelford et al., 2000; Singh, Meyer, Zambarano, & Hurlbert, 1998; Trudel, Boulos, & Matte, 1993), we control statistically for this and other potential confounding variables, including age of participant and partner and relationship duration.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Participants

We recruited 439 women, each in a committed, sexual, heterosexual relationship from universities and surrounding communities. The mean participant age was 21.1 years ( $SD = 5.5$ ), the mean of their partner's age was 23.2 years ( $SD = 6.7$ ), and the mean relationship length was 26.6 months ( $SD = 38.8$ ).

### 2.2. Materials

Participants completed a survey that included several sections. All sections of the survey followed Shackelford et al. (2000). First, participants reported demographic information, including the participant's age, her partner's age, and the duration of the current relationship. Second, four questions assessed women's perceptions of their partner's attractiveness: How (1) physically attractive and (2) sexually attractive do you think your partner is? How (3) physically attractive and (4) sexually attractive do *other women* think your partner is? Participants recorded responses on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*Not at all*) to 9 (*Extremely*).

Participants answered questions about their most recent sexual intercourse with their partner, including whether the participant experienced copulatory orgasm (*Yes, I definitely DID have an orgasm / No, I definitely did NOT have an orgasm / I'm not sure or I can't remember if I had an orgasm*). Finally, participants answered two questions about their relationship satisfaction on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*Not at all*) to 9 (*Extremely*): How (1) emotionally satisfied and (2) overall satisfied are you with your partner?

### 2.3. Procedure

Potential participants were asked if they were at least 18 years of age and in a committed, sexual, heterosexual relationship. Those who qualified were asked to sign a consent form and to complete a questionnaire. The consent form was placed in a separate envelope to retain anonymity.

## 3. Results

Following Shackelford et al. (2000), we excluded 32 women who were unsure or could not remember whether they had an orgasm the last time they had sexual intercourse with their partner, leaving data from 407 women for analyses (see Table 1). Following Shackelford et al., we constructed a *partner's attractiveness* variable from the mean of participant's ratings of (1) physical attractiveness of partner and (2) sexual attractiveness of partner ( $\alpha = .82$ ). We constructed a *relationship satisfaction* variable from the mean of participant's reports of their (1) overall relationship satisfaction and (2) emotional satisfaction ( $\alpha = .83$ ). *Women's age and partner's age* is the mean of participant's age and her partner's age ( $\alpha = .91$ ). Finally, we constructed a *perception of other women's assessments of partner's attractiveness* variable from the mean of participant's ratings of their partner's (1) physical attractiveness and (2) sexual attractiveness to other women ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

Tests of Hypothesis 1 followed Shackelford et al. (2000) and indicated that women who rated their partners as more attractive are more likely to report an orgasm at last copulation (*female copulatory orgasm*) than woman who rated their partners as less attractive (Table 2). Hypothesis 1 was supported. Tables 2 and 3 present the results of logistic regressions of the target variables (partner's attractiveness, relationship satisfaction and duration, and the couple's average age) on female copulatory orgasm. The models presented in Tables 2 and 3 were each significant when compared to a constant-only model ( $X^2(1, n = 407) = 5.93, p = .015$ ;  $X^2(4, n = 407) = 18.94, p = .001$ ; respectively). Table 3 shows that the relationship between partner's attractiveness and female copulatory orgasm remains after controlling for other variables, with participant's relationship satisfaction also predicting copulatory orgasm.

Tests of Hypothesis 2 indicated that women who perceive that other women find their partner to be more (vs. less) attractive are more likely to report orgasm at last copulation (Table 4). Tables 4 and 5 present the results of logistic regressions of the target variables on the presence (vs. absence) of female copulatory orgasm. The models presented in Tables 4 and 5 were each significant when compared to a constant-only model ( $X^2(1, n = 407) = 8.30, p = .004$ ;  $X^2(4, n = 407) = 21.57, p < .001$ ; respectively). Table 5 shows that this relationship remains even after controlling for other variables. Relationship satisfaction also predicts female copulatory orgasm. Hypothesis 2 was supported.

We tested Hypothesis 3 following the procedures outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) (also see MacKinnon & Dwyer, 1993). First, tests of Hypothesis 1 indicated that women's ratings of their partner's attractiveness predicted their orgasm at last copulation (Fig. 1, path c). Second, linear regression indicated that *partner's attractiveness* and *perception of other women's assessments of partner's attractiveness* are positively related [ $\beta = .46, F(1,405) = 108.49, p < .001$ ]. That is, women's ratings of their partner's attractiveness are related to their perception of *other women's* assessments of their partner's attractiveness (Fig. 1, path a). Third, we entered *partner's attractiveness* and *perception of other women's assessments of partner's attractiveness* into a logistic regression analysis predicting *female copulatory orgasm*. The model was significant [ $\chi^2(2, n = 407) = 9.89, p = .007$ ]. *Perception of other women's assessments of partner's attractiveness* uniquely predicted *female copulatory orgasm* (Fig. 1, path b;  $B = .160, Wald = 4.082, p = .043$ ). *Partner's attractiveness* no longer predicted *female copulatory orgasm* after controlling for *perception of other women's assessments of partner's attractiveness* (Fig. 1, path c';  $B = .11, Wald = 1.60, p = .206$ ). A Sobel test (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2001) confirmed that *perception of other women's assessments of partner's attractiveness* fully mediated the relationship between *partner's attractiveness* and *female copulatory orgasm* (Sobel test statistic = 1.99, *s.e.* = .04,  $p = .047$ ).

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