

ORIGINAL RESEARCH—EPIDEMIOLOGY

Variation in Orgasm Occurrence by Sexual Orientation in a Sample of U.S. Singles

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. Despite recent advances in understanding orgasm variation, little is known about ways in which sexual orientation is associated with men's and women's orgasm occurrence.

Aim. To assess orgasm occurrence during sexual activity across sexual orientation categories.

Methods. Data were collected by Internet questionnaire from 6,151 men and women (ages 21–65+ years) as part of a nationally representative sample of single individuals in the United States. Analyses were restricted to a subsample of 2,850 singles (1,497 men, 1,353 women) who had experienced sexual activity in the past 12 months.

Main Outcome Measures. Participants reported their sex/gender, self-identified sexual orientation (heterosexual, gay/lesbian, bisexual), and what percentage of the time they experience orgasm when having sex with a familiar partner.

Results. Mean occurrence rate for experiencing orgasm during sexual activity with a familiar partner was 62.9% among single women and 85.1% among single men, which was significantly different ($F_{1,2848} = 370.6$, $P < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.12$). For men, mean occurrence rate of orgasm did not vary by sexual orientation: heterosexual men 85.5%, gay men 84.7%, bisexual men 77.6% ($F_{2,1494} = 2.67$, $P = 0.07$, $\eta^2 = 0.004$). For women, however, mean occurrence rate of orgasm varied significantly by sexual orientation: heterosexual women 61.6%, lesbian women 74.7%, bisexual women 58.0% ($F_{2,1350} = 10.95$, $P < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$). Lesbian women had a significantly higher probability of orgasm than did either heterosexual or bisexual women ($P < 0.05$).

Conclusions. Findings from this large dataset of U.S. singles suggest that women, regardless of sexual orientation, have less predictable, more varied orgasm experiences than do men and that for women, but not men, the likelihood of orgasm varies with sexual orientation. These findings demonstrate the need for further investigations into the comparative sexual experiences and sexual health outcomes of sexual minorities. **Garcia JR, Lloyd EA, Wallen K, and Fisher HE. Variation in orgasm occurrence by sexual orientation in a sample of U.S. singles. J Sex Med 2014;11:2645–2652.**

Key Words. Orgasm; Orgasm Variation; Sexual Orientation; Gay; Lesbian; Bisexual

Introduction

Orgasm is characterized by subjective feelings of intense sensation and pleasure, including a sudden discharge of accumulated erotic tension at sexual climax and a temporarily altered state of consciousness [1–4]. Orgasm is generally comprised of a series of psychophysiological responses,

including genital reactivity, involuntary rhythmic contractions of pelvic musculature, changes in heart rate and blood pressure, and neurohormonal activation/deactivation [2–5]. While neural and psychophysiological aspects of orgasm have been recently described [6–11], surprisingly little is known about orgasm in nonclinical and nonconvenience populations. This includes the

fundamental questions of how demographic factors may contribute to variation in individuals' orgasm experiences. In order to advance both research and clinical practice, this article further investigates associations between self-identified sexual orientation and orgasm variation.

For decades researchers have been aware of variation in orgasm occurrence and experience [1,12–15]. Understanding sex/gender differences in the form and function of orgasm variation has been of interest to both health practitioners and scholars from a wide range of disciplines. Existing literature demonstrates substantial variation in orgasm experiences among women and to a lesser, but not inconsequential, extent among men [2–4,15,16]. Theory and research have focused on the higher rates of primary or secondary anorgasmia among women (compared with men) [4,11,15,17–22].

At least one recent probability sample in the United States provides nationally representative rates of orgasm frequency for both men and women. In a subset of 3,990 participants ages 18 to 59 years from the National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior, 91.3% of men and 64.4% of women reported orgasm during their most recent sexual event [23]. Among these findings, both men's and women's orgasm occurrence was positively correlated with engaging in a greater variety of sexual behaviors. Further, among men, age was correlated with decreased erectile function and decreased orgasm, while among women age was correlated with decreased vaginal lubrication but increased orgasm [23].

While relationships between orgasm and some sociodemographics, such as age, have been investigated to some extent [12,13,23–25], other factors remain more elusive. In particular, there is a dearth of data on rates of orgasm across sexual orientations. Despite initial insights into orgasm occurrence among gay men and lesbian women in the 1940s and 1950s [1,12,13], little empirical research is available on orgasm among sexual minorities. Some historical accounts have suggested that lesbian women may orgasm more than heterosexual women [1,13]. Kinsey and colleagues [13] suggested that lesbian couples likely had higher orgasm rates than heterosexual couples. Similarly, Masters and Johnson [1] suggested that lesbian women offer a good example to heterosexuals who may more regularly focus on sexual performance (i.e., emphasis on “show,” exhibition, and/or longevity and duration) over mutual sexual pleasure.

One study sought to address this gendered information gap. In a sample of primarily young Caucasian women, participants were asked about their frequency of orgasm (regardless of type of sexual stimulation). Results showed that while 2.2% of lesbian women and 13.3% of heterosexual women reported *never* experiencing orgasm, 28.7% of lesbian women and 25.5% of heterosexual women reported *always* experiencing orgasm [26]. While these data provide an important starting point, generalizability is somewhat limited and rates were not reported for self-identified bisexuals. Thus it remains that little is known about orgasm occurrences among women and men of varied sexual orientations across the adult lifespan. Understanding the factors that influence variation in orgasm occurrence among sexual minority populations may assist in tailoring behavioral therapies for those of different sexual orientations. Moreover, to the extent that lack of orgasm is seen as a common and unwanted problem, learning more about orgasm in same-sex relationships may inform treatment for men and women in both same-sex and mixed-sex relationships. Consequently, these findings may contribute to promotion of a more informed and positive sexual health care.

Aim

To assess orgasm occurrence during sexual activity with a familiar partner across sexual orientation categories (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual).

Methods

Study Design and Procedures

Data for the current study were drawn from a 2011 questionnaire of single men and women in the United States of America.¹ The study questionnaire focused primarily on attitudes and behaviors regarding dating, sexual activity, and single life styles, and included questions about demographic characteristics. Data were collected by MarketTools® (San Francisco, CA, USA; see www.markettools.com) using Internet research panels for population-based cross-sectional survey. Nationally representative research panels are compiled based on demographic distributions reflected in the most recent Current Population Survey, released by the United States Bureau of the Census. However, the current study also included aug-

¹Singles in America (SIA) is sponsored by the online dating company Match.com®; however, participants were not drawn from the Match.com® population or subsidiary sites.

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