

Characteristics of Vibrator Use by Gay and Bisexually Identified Men in the United States

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DOI: 10.1111/j.1743-6109.2010.01873.x

ABSTRACT

Introduction. Recent reports indicate that vibrator use during solo and partnered sexual activities is common among heterosexual men and women in the United States. However, little research has comprehensively assessed vibrator use among gay and bisexually identified men.

Aims. This study sought to document the extent to which gay and bisexually identified men report using vibrators, the sexual and relational situations within which they use them, and how men use vibrators on their own and their partners' bodies.

Methods. Data were collected from 25,294 gay and bisexually identified men from 50 U.S. states and from the District of Columbia via an internet-based survey.

Main Outcome Measure. Measures included sociodemographics, health-related indicators, sexual behaviors, and those related to recent and past use of vibrators during solo and partnered sexual interactions with other men.

Results. Approximately half (49.8%) of gay and bisexually identified men reported having used vibrators. Most men who had used a vibrator in the past reported use during masturbation (86.2%). When used during partnered interactions, vibrators were incorporated into foreplay (65.9%) and intercourse (59.4%). Men reported frequent insertion of vibrators into the anus or rectum when using them during masturbation (87.3%), which was also common during partnered interactions (~60%), but varied slightly for casual and relationship sex partners. For both masturbation and partnered interactions, men overwhelmingly endorsed the extent to which vibrator use contributed to sexual arousal, orgasm, and pleasure.

Conclusions. Vibrator use during both solo and partnered sexual acts was common among the gay and bisexually identified men in this sample and was described by men as adding to the quality of their sexual experiences. **Reece M, Rosenberger JG, Schick V, Herbenick D, Dodge B, and Novak DS. Characteristics of vibrator use by gay and bisexually identified men in the United States. J Sex Med 2010;7:3467–3476.**

Key Words. Gay; Bisexual; Vibrator; Sexual Health

Introduction

Vibrators are widely available through traditional sexuality-focused retail outlets (e.g., adult bookstores and sex shops) and also through in-home sex toy parties, internet retailers, and large mainstream consumer retail stores [1–7]. Today's vibrators include a wide range of shapes, sizes, and textures, being designed and marketed for use by women, men, and couples during both solo and partnered sexual events [6,7]. While vibrators are a staple of today's sexuality-

focused marketplace, until recently, the majority of scientific research related to their use had focused on vibrators in a therapeutic context [8–11].

A recent nationally representative survey of adults ages 18 to 60 in the United States documented that vibrator use during solo and partnered sexual interactions is common, with 52.5% of women and 44.8% of men reporting having ever used a vibrator [6,7]. These studies advanced our understanding of vibrator use, particularly following a time in the United States that had seen a

rapid evolution in the design of vibrating sexual toys and the expansion of their availability.

Prior to the study by Reece and colleagues [7], knowledge about vibrator use by men was limited. Kinsey [12] reported rare use of vibrators by women, and vibrator use by men appeared infrequently in Hite's study of male sexuality, where small numbers of men described having used them [13]. Data from the 1992 National Health and Social Life Survey indicated that about one-fifth of men ages 18–59 found using a vibrator or dildo to be somewhat or very appealing, but only 2% had purchased such a product during the previous 12 months [14]. A nationally representative survey in Australia found that 12% of men had used some sex toy in the previous year [15] and a random-digit dial survey in Seattle found that 20.3% of men used a sexual enhancement product (defined as “vibrators, beads and balls, dildos, pumps, extenders or rings”) during a typical 4-week period [16]. One consistency across these studies is that they primarily collected data from men who were identified as heterosexual and whose reports of partnered vibrator use occurred mainly with women [17].

In the most recent study by Reece and colleagues [7], slightly higher, although not statistically different, rates of having ever used a vibrator were observed among men who identified as bisexual (66.7%) or gay (50.0%) compared with heterosexually identified men (44.5%). Approximately two decades ago, researchers in Australia explored whether men who have sex with men had used “sexual aids” both alone and with their sexual partners, with about half of men in that sample reporting having ever used a sexual aid and one-fifth reporting having done so with regular or casual partners [18].

To date, no large scale studies have intently examined vibrator use by men who have sex with other men. In addition, no studies have assessed how men (of any sexual orientation) specifically use vibrators or others sex toys on their bodies or the bodies of their sexual partners. Details such as these would be clinically useful given that side effects and safety recommendations could vary based on use. In addition, data related to men's pleasure and enjoyment of vibrator use could inform sexual health professionals as they work to develop their communications about vibrator use for male clients.

Aims

The purpose of this study was to document the extent to which gay and bisexually identified men

use vibrators during solo and partnered sexual interactions, the sexual and relational situations within which they are used, and how these men use vibrators on the genitals or anus of oneself or a sexual partner.

Methods

Participant Recruitment and Data Collection

This study was conducted via a participatory effort with one of the world's largest internet sites for men seeking social or sexual interactions with other men. An electronic internal email recruitment message was sent to registered users of the site at the time of the study (July 2009) who resided within the 50 U.S. states or the District of Columbia. The message provided a brief description of the study, its incentives, and a link to the study website. Individuals visiting the study website were able to read a detailed description of the study and the consent form. Upon consenting, men were able to complete the questionnaire which took approximately 20 minutes. Participants were offered the opportunity to receive an electronic coupon valued at USD10 for merchandise from an affiliate of the site from which they were recruited.

Recruitment messages remained in each individual's electronic mailbox for 7 days, after which any unopened emails were automatically removed. A total of 127,489 individuals opened the recruitment email and 43,477 (34.1%) clicked on the link to the study website and consent form. Of those, 26,257 (60.4%) participated in the study. All study protocols were approved by Institutional Review Board at the academic institution of the first author.

Main Outcome Measures

Participants completed items related to their sociodemographics, health status and health-related behaviors, sexual behaviors, and vibrator use.

Sociodemographics

Measures included age, gender (male, female, transgender male to female, transgender female to male), sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, level of education completed, U.S. state of residence, employment status and housing situation. Participants also responded to items related to their relationship status (married, partnered, divorced,

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