

Women's bodies and minds agree less than men's on what's sexy

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Women's minds and genitals respond differently to sexual arousal, whereas in men, the responses of the body and mind are more in tune with each other, according to Assistant Professor Meredith Chivers, from Queen's University in Kingston, Canada, and her international collaborators, Michael Seto, Martin Lalumićre, Ellen Laan, and Teresa Grimbos. Their meta-analysis of the extent of agreement between subjective ratings and physiological measures of sexual arousal in men and women is published online this week in Springer's journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.

The human sexual response is a dynamic combination of cognitive, emotional and physiological processes. Chivers and colleagues were interested in the degree to which an individual's experience of sexual arousal mirrors physiological genital activity and whether gender difference in this agreement (commonly reported in individual studies) would be found when a meta-analysis of sexual psychophysiology studies was conducted.

The authors reviewed 134 studies, published between 1969 and 2007, which measured the degree of agreement between subjective experiences of sexual arousal and physiological genital responses. Overall, the studies reviewed data collected from over 2,500 women and 1,900 men. Participants indicated how aroused they felt during or after they were exposed to a variety of sexual stimuli, called subjective arousal. Researchers measured the physiological responses to the sexual stimuli using different methods, including changes in penile erection for

men and changes in genital blood flow for women.

Men's subjective and physiological measures of sexual arousal showed a greater degree of agreement than women's. For the male participants, the subjective ratings more closely matched the physiological readings indicating that men's minds and genitals were in agreement. For the women, however, the responses of the mind and genitals were not as closely matched as men's, suggesting a split between women's bodies and minds. The readings from the physiological measurements and their subjective ratings were, in some cases, significantly different.

The researchers then looked at factors in the studies that might shed some light on this gender difference. They identified two methodological differences, in particular, that may play a role.

The type of sexual stimuli - their content and how it was presented e.g. visually or as an audio recording - made no difference to how well the subjective and physiological responses mirrored each other in men. However, it did influence women's responses. Women exposed to a greater range and number of sexual stimuli - content and presentation - were more likely to have stronger agreement between subjective and physiological responses.

The timing of the assessment of self-reported sexual arousal also had an effect. When participants were asked to rate their subjective arousal at the end of each stimulus, men's responses were closer to one another than women's. However, when both men and women were asked to rate their arousal whilst they were exposed to the stimulus, the gender difference disappeared because men's concordance dropped to the range of women's.

The authors conclude: "The assessment of sexual arousal in men and women informs theoretical studies of human sexuality and provides a

method to assess and evaluate the treatment of sexual dysfunctions. Understanding measures of arousal is, therefore, paramount to further theoretical and practical advances in the study of human sexuality. Our results have implications for the assessment of sexual arousal, the nature of [gender differences](#) in sexual arousal, and models of sexual response."

More information: Chivers ML et al (2010). Agreement of self-reported and genital measures of sexual arousal in men and women: a meta-analysis. Archives of Sexual Behavior.

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