

Study shows men as likely as women to distinguish between desire and arousal

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The theory is that men and women are completely different in the way that they experience arousal and express desire. But the first large-scale study trying to tease apart what goes on in the minds and bodies of men and women when it comes to sex shows that there are more differences within each gender than there are across gender lines.

Or to put it differently, despite any physical evidence to the contrary, men are just as likely as women to say, "I may look like I'm ready for sex, but I'm just not that into it," says Sabina Sarin, a doctoral student in the Dept. of Psychology at McGill University, who led the study, under the supervision of Professor Dr. Irving Binik.

Study details

Researchers have tested 140 medically healthy heterosexual participants between the ages of 18 and 50, and they continue to look for further study participants. Their goal is to distinguish between disorders that relate to [sexual desire](#) (what goes on in our minds) and those that relate to physical arousal (what goes on in our [genitals](#)). By measuring changes in both participants' genital temperature (as a measure of physical changes associated with arousal) and in their subjective descriptions of desire, the researchers found that:

- Masturbation and [sexual fantasies](#) are not necessarily indicators

of the desire to have sex for either men or women, a fact that runs counter to popular beliefs on the subject

- Men distinguish between desire for sex and having an erection, i.e. an [erection](#) does not equal desire
- An important difference between men and women was that for women, a lack of desire to have sex often led to arousal issues during sex, whereas for men the situation was reversed, meaning that a lack of arousal during sex (erectile problems) often led to a lack of desire to have sex.
- Women who describe themselves as having arousal problems don't necessarily have low genital temperatures, i.e. they may be physically ready to have [sex](#) (lubricated), but whether they have the desire to do so may depend more on their state of mind

Provided by McGill University

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