

Researchers investigate the role of tickling in adult sexuality

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Scientists at the Institute of Pathophysiology of the University Medical Center Mainz made the first comprehensive analysis on how adults use tickling in connection with sexual activity. As part of their study, they surveyed 719 people with a so-called tickling fetish. The paper is [published](#) in the journal *Frontiers in Psychology*.

The results of the study show that human sexuality encompasses a variety of forms of expression that need to be studied and understood in greater depth.

Most people laugh when they are tickled. But there are also individuals for whom tickling or being tickled triggers [sexual arousal](#). This [sexual preference](#) is referred to as a tickle fetish or knismolagnia.

"Previous studies on ticklishness have mainly focused on the sensory consequences and playful aspects of tickling. In our study, we investigated the role of tickling in a sexual context for the first time. In doing so, we are challenging previous findings because the range of experiences that lead to sexual pleasure is much wider than previously recognized," explained Dr. Shimpei Ishiyama, Head of the Neurogelotology Research Group at the Institute of Pathophysiology at the University Medical Center Mainz.

The Mainz research group is investigating the neuronal background of laughter and positive experiences. In their current study on tickling in the context of adult sexuality, the scientists identified different roles in the interaction (tickler, tickled) as well as different tickling methods and intensities.

Most of the 719 study participants stated that tickling can satisfy them sexually. Almost half of the respondents reported being able to achieve

sexual satisfaction without tickling. A quarter of respondents, on the other hand, said that they experienced orgasms exclusively through tickling.

Another interesting result of the study: Relevant childhood experiences, such as the depiction of tickling in cartoons, played a decisive role in some of the respondents developing a tickling fetish later on.

"Tickling is an intimate activity that requires a certain level of mutual trust. It can bond individuals and serve as an outlet for sexual energy. Future studies should therefore investigate the mechanisms by which tickling triggers [sexual pleasure](#). Our study results could pave the way for this further research into human sexuality," says Dr. Ishiyama.

More information: Sarah Dagher et al, Tickle fetishism: pleasure beyond playfulness, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2024). [DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1342342](#)

Provided by University Medical Center of the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz

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