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The timing of orgasm and sexual satisfaction

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THE TIMING OF ORGASM AND
SEXUAL SATISFACTION

by

Jacqueline L. Newman

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

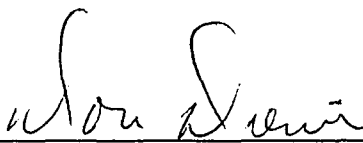
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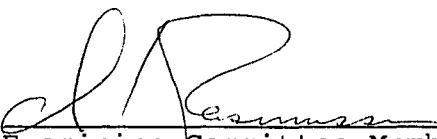
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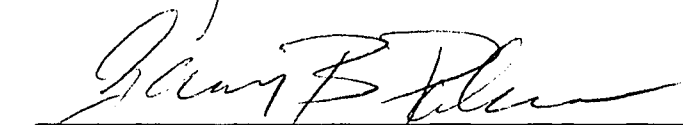
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ABSTRACT

Although sexual satisfaction is often defined subjectively, researchers have attempted to discover predictor variables that may be common to most individual's conceptions of sexual satisfaction. The discovery of such predictor variables would help create a unifying definition that could be consistently applied across the population of sexually-active individuals. The existence of such a unified definition would be functionally important for those individuals seeking sex therapy. The goal of the present study was to partially replicate and extend past research. It was hypothesized that for both women and men a relationship exists between the timing of orgasm and sexual satisfaction. Specifically for women, it was hypothesized that women who orgasm before or at the same time as their partners would report to be more sexually satisfied than women who orgasm after their partners. A one-way between subjects analysis of variance for both men and women revealed no significant differences for either gender. It is recommended that a more precise method of determining orgasm timing be employed to replicate the study.

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INTRODUCTION

Sexual satisfaction has been defined as a subjective evaluation of the degree to which one is content with one's sex life (Pinney, Gerrard & Denney, 1987). Sexual satisfaction has also been described as a complex result of both effective physical and psychological stimulation with positive evaluations of the experience (Frank, Downard & Lang, 1986). According to this latter definition, if one is capable of attaining a desirable amount of physical arousal and has positive expectations and interpretations about sexual experiences, then it is likely that one will be sexually satisfied. Despite the variability of its meaning, researchers have attempted to discover predictor variables that may be common to most individuals' conceptions of sexual satisfaction. The discovery of such predictor variables would help create a unifying definition that could be consistently applied across the population of sexually-active individuals.

The majority of past research, though, has focused on sexual dysfunctions and how they may contribute to lowering levels of sexual satisfaction among couples experiencing them. Hence, there have been few global attempts at defining sexual satisfaction among the general population of

sexually-active individuals. Some researchers view this underrepresentation of research as unfortunate because sexual dissatisfaction, without the presence of any actual dysfunction, is often a complaint of couples undergoing marital therapy (Schover, 1982). It is, therefore, the goal of this paper to focus on the determinants of sexual satisfaction among the general sexually-active population.

Review of the Literature

Variables predicting sexual satisfaction can be classified into two major categories, self-related variables and partner-related variables. Both self-related and partner-related variables can be further divided into physiological and psychological variables.

Self-Related Variables

Physiological self-related variables involve bodily changes and responses to sexual arousal and stimulation. In their pioneering work, Masters and Johnson (1966) described four stages of sexual response in both genders: excitement, plateau, orgasm, and resolution. Each stage involves specific physical changes that take place within the body. Although these physical components play a important role in sexual satisfaction, it is believed that psychological components play an even more influential role (Pinney, Gerrard & Denney, 1987).

Almost any of the many variables in the psychological make-up of an individual can be responsible for contributing

to sexual satisfaction. General components such as drive, living in the here-and-now, memories, anxiety, guilt, and emotions have been found to be influential in either increasing or decreasing one's sexual satisfaction level (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1979; Kaplan, 1974; Waterman, Chiauzzi, & Gruenbaum, 1979; Wells, Lucas & Meyer, 1980). Specific components of the psychological make-up include body-image satisfaction, self-esteem, gender role, assertiveness, and communication. Regarding the first component, body-image satisfaction, research indicates that individuals of both genders who display negative attitudes toward their physical appearance have, among other problems, self-esteem and sexual difficulties (Butters & Cash, 1987; Kimlicka, et al., 1983). In addition, self-acceptance, a component of self-esteem, and pleasure from sexual activity are significantly correlated in females. Nathan and Joanning (1985) suggest these findings mean that women who view themselves as adequate sexual partners are more likely to enjoy sexual activity.

Further, integrating the gender role component, data indicate that androgyny and masculinity might be associated with self-esteem, body satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction in women (Kimlicka, Cross & Tarnai, 1983). Safir, Peres, Lichtenstein, Hock and Shepler (1982) found that if one of both partners in a marriage were androgynous, the chances of sexual competence within the couple increased.

Specifically, sexual competence was defined as being sexually adequate for one's partner.

In an attempt to demonstrate the integration of gender role and sexual satisfaction, Rosenweig and Dailey (1989) analyzed data obtained from subjects via the Bem Sex Role Inventory, the Hudson Index of Sexual Satisfaction, and the Spanier Dyadic Adjustment Scale. They concluded that sexually androgynous men and women were more sexually satisfied than their stereotypic counterparts. In addition, they found that men and women who display androgynous characteristics in social situations but who perceive themselves as feminine in the sexual situation reported even more sexual satisfaction than any other gender role-oriented group. They speculated that perceiving oneself as feminine in sexual situations facilitates making the stereotypical female association between sex and the emotional satisfaction of commitment and communication, and hence, leads to greater sexual satisfaction.

Hurlbert (1991) assumes that part of the reason androgyny might be responsible for facilitating sexual satisfaction is that androgyny is positively related to assertiveness and the ability to communicate. In his study, Hurlbert (1991) instructed subjects to record in a diary the frequency of sexual activity, the number of orgasms and the amount of sexual desire, and to complete Hudson's Index of Marital Satisfaction and Index of Sexual Satisfaction. He

found that sexually assertive women frequently experienced more orgasms and rated themselves as having greater subjective desire for partaking in sexual activity than did sexually nonassertive women. He attributed androgynous/sexually-assertive women's greater sexual satisfaction to their ability to communicate likes and dislikes to their partners, to concentrate on themselves, to be active in initiating sex, and to direct sexual activity to get what they want (Hurlbert, 1991). Similarly, the Hite Report (Hite, 1976) indicated that females were more likely to orgasm and be sexually satisfied when they take responsibility for and control over their stimulation. Further, according to Hurlbert (1991), in order to take control to obtain sexual satisfaction, the women must be able to assert their own sexual needs, and thus display androgynous characteristics.

Despite existing support for a relationship between gender role and sexual satisfaction, Frank and his colleagues (1986) found contradictory data. They found that in women, it is not gender role that exerts a direct influence on sexual satisfaction, but rather attributions that are internal, self-enhancing, and that promote positive expectations for future interaction. In other words, sexual satisfaction seems facilitated by the belief that one has the capacity to reach orgasm and pleasure if one is motivated and makes the effort.

Partner-Related Variables

Several partner-related variables, both physiological and psychological in nature, exist which serve to influence sexual satisfaction. Psychological partner-related variables include perceptual accuracy of partner's desires, agreement over initiation and frequency over sex, and quality of the relationship (Kirkpatrick, 1980). Nathan and Joanning (1985) found that both genders reported being more sexually satisfied when their partners displayed more perceptual accuracy, or having accurate knowledge of one's partner's preferred sexual activities. Although Kirkpatrick's (1980) and Nathan and Joanning's (1985) findings include both women and men, most of the existing research has focused only on females.

For women, Pinney, Gerrard, and Denney (1987) found relationship commitment and relationship quality to be the most effective facilitators of sexual satisfaction. After analyzing scores derived from the Pinney Sexual Satisfaction Inventory, Bentler's Heterosexual Behavior Inventory, Hudson's Index of Sexual Satisfaction, a demographic and life experiences questionnaire, the Langston version of a sex guilt inventory, and an orgasm consistency questionnaire from 275 female subjects, Pinney et al. were able to speculate that women who are involved in committed relationships are better able to communicate their sexual needs and desires to their partners. In addition, they

speculate that sexual satisfaction increases feelings of commitment to a relationship, and that women place a lot of importance on interpersonal aspects of sexual experiences.

Addressing the physical partner-related variables, research indicates that orgasms achieved with a partner are preferred to those achieved without a partner (Darling, Davidson, & Cox, 1991). Newcomb and Bentler (1983) indicate that for women, orgasms achieved with a partner are characterized by greater physiological satisfaction, more intimacy, and deeper pelvic sensations. These findings suggest that the partner-relationship context within which one experiences orgasm and the physiological influence of this environment have a substantial impact on how physiological aspects of orgasm are perceived by women.

Greater physiological satisfaction is also facilitated by actual physical stimulation provided by one's partner. In fact, sexually dissatisfied women have complained about receiving inadequate clitoral stimulation, and lack of foreplay during the sexual encounter (Darling et al., 1991; Davidson & Darling, 1988). This also seems to suggest that greater physiological satisfaction is facilitated by the mere adequacy of stimulation given by one's partner.

A recent study regarding sexual satisfaction and physical partner-related variables which addressed female sexual response and the timing of partner orgasm was conducted by Darling, Davidson and Cox (1991). In this

study Darling and colleagues distributed self-created questionnaires consisting of 122 open-form and closed form items concerning sexual attitudes, sexual behavior, and sexual response to 868 female professional nurses. Data from 709 nurses was analyzed via chi square tests, student t-tests and analyses of variance. It was found that women who orgasm before or at the same time as their partner are more sexually satisfied than those women who orgasm after their partner. In addition to being less physiologically and psychologically satisfied, those women who orgasm afterwards desired more changes in their relationships. They desired more foreplay, more frequent intercourse, and a more romantic approach prior to starting sexual intercourse. Also, those women who orgasm after their partner, were more likely to experience guilt and fake orgasms than those who orgasm before or at the same time as their partner.

No replications of this study have been completed. In addition, no data exists concerning men's preferences for the timing of orgasm in relation to one's partner. Therefore, the goal of the present study is to partially replicate the Darling and colleagues study and to also specifically address males' preferences for timing of orgasm. It is hypothesized that for both women and men there will exist a relation between the timing of orgasm and sexual satisfaction. Specifically for women, it is hypothesized that, women who orgasm before or at the same

time as their partners will report to be more sexually satisfied than women who orgasm after their partners.

METHOD

Subjects

Sixty-five mental health professionals and University of Nevada at Las Vegas graduates, undergraduates and staff (28 males and 37 females) participated in the study. Subjects were solicited in large groups either in a classroom or office setting. Subjects were required to meet the requirement of being currently in a sexual relationship.

Materials

Two instruments were employed in this study. The Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS; Hudson, 1990) was used to assess the degree of sexual satisfaction felt by each subject in a current sexual relationship. The ISS consists of 25 questions answerable on a 7-point Likert scale. Scores are interpreted such that the lower a given score, the more satisfied the subject is. According to Hudson (1992), items were designed so that they will not be offensive to people having different moral convictions and attitudes with respect to human sexual behavior. Reliability and validity co-efficients have been established at .90 or larger and .60 or larger respectively.

An 18-item multiple choice questionnaire produced by the experimenter was used to gather demographic information

(i.e. gender, age, marital status), as well as information about one's sexual patterns (i.e. method of orgasm, frequency of sexual activity, timing of orgasm). No reliability or validity information has been established for this instrument.

Design and Procedure

Subjects were approached by the experimenter either in a classroom setting or on an individual basis. All subjects who were solicited participated. Expressed written consent was obtained from all subjects when possible; consent forms and the questionnaires were kept detached at all times to ensure anonymity. After completing the questionnaires, subjects were instructed to insert their materials into a large manilla envelope to provide anonymity. Participation took approximately 15 minutes.

RESULTS

Eighty-four questionnaires were distributed and all were returned. Of the total, only 65 were utilized in the study; 19 were discarded due to having not been completed properly or completely. The sample consisted of thirty-seven females and twenty-eight males; the mean age of the females was 29.8 (range: 19-42 years) and the mean age of the males was 35.9 (range: 21-59 years). Thirty-eight (58.4%) of the subjects were married, 16 (24.6%) were single, 4 (6.2%) were engaged to be married, 6 (9.2%) were divorced and 1 (1.5%) was widowed.

Among the female subjects, 20 (54.05%) were married, 10 (27.03%) were single, 2 (5.41%) were engaged, 4 (10.81%) were divorced, and 1 (2.70%) was widowed at the time of data collection. Further, 8 (21.62%) described the length of their current relationship as less than one year, 14 (37.84%) as one to five years, and 15 (40.54%) as five or more years. In these relationships, 25 (67.57%) of the females reported that the activity through which they most often achieve orgasm was intercourse, 10 (27.03%) named foreplay as the activity, and 2 (5.40%) named afterplay. Finally, with regard to what activity their partners most

often achieved orgasm, 35 (94.59%) named intercourse and 2 (5.41%) named foreplay; there were no reports of the females' partners achieving orgasm through afterplay.

Among the male subjects, 18 (64.29%) were married, 6 (21.43%) were single, 2 (7.14%) were engaged, and 2 (7.14%) were divorced at the time of data collection. Further, 6 (21.43%) reported the length of their relationship as less than one year, 10 (35.71%) as between one and five years, and 12 (42.86%) as five or more years. In the context of their current relationship, all 28 (100%) males named intercourse as the activity through which they most often achieve orgasm. For their partners, 18 (66.67%) of the males reported intercourse as the most common activity to obtain orgasm, 8 (29.63%) reported foreplay, and 1 (3.70%) reported afterplay. Both male and female participants reported engaging in sexual activity on the average of 7 times per month.

Among the female subjects, 24 (64.9%) reported orgasming before their partners, 6 (16.2%) orgasming after their partners, and 7 (18.9%) orgasming simultaneously. For the males, 8 (28.6%) orgasm before their partners, 17 (60.7%) orgasm after their partners, and 3 (10.7%) orgasm simultaneously.

The Hudson Index of Sexual Satisfaction yielded the following results. For sexual satisfaction as a function of marital status, it was found that the mean satisfaction

score for married females was 17.33 (2.00-43.33), 7.66 (7.33-8.00) for engaged females, 18.67 (3.33-38.00) for single females, 11.33 (4.00-22.67) for divorced females, and 12.67 for the one widowed female. Similarly, the mean satisfaction score for married males was 20.22 (.67-44), 18.67 (11.33-26.00) for engaged males, 14.89 (8.67-26.00) for single males, and 12.96 (11.33-14.58) for divorced males (see Table 1).

For relationship length, the mean satisfaction score for females in the less than one year range was 15.67 (3.33-38.00), 14.86 (2.00-42.67) for the 1-5 year range, and 19.86 (8.67-43.33) in the more than 5 year range. For males, the mean satisfaction score for the less than one year range was 14.54 (8.00-26.00), 16.00 (.67-38.00) for the 1-5 year range, and 22.45 (3.33-44.00) for the more than 5 year range (see Table 2).

When considering activities through which orgasms are most often achieved, the female satisfaction means were as follows: for orgasms achieved via intercourse the mean satisfaction score was 16.26 (2.00-43.33), 16.20 (3.33-38.00) for orgasms achieved via foreplay, and 19.00 (12.67-25.33) for orgasms achieved via afterplay. Given that 100% of the males identified intercourse as their most common means of achieving orgasm, their mean satisfaction score for activity is identical to their overall sexual satisfaction score, 18.45 (.67-44.00) (see Table 3). Finally, the mean

satisfaction score for females whose partners most often reach orgasm through intercourse was 15.33 (2.00-43.33) and 35.00 (32-38) for those whose partners orgasm through foreplay. For the males, the mean satisfaction scores were 17.96 (.67-36.67) for those whose partners orgasm via intercourse, 20.67 (8.00-44.00) for those whose partners orgasm via foreplay, and 16.67 for the one male whose partner orgasms during afterplay (see Table 4).

The Index of Sexual Satisfaction was employed to assess satisfaction scores as a function of the timing of orgasm. For females the mean satisfaction scores were as follows: 15.72 (2.00-38.00) for those in the before category, 14.11 (8.00-25.33) in the after category, and 19.24 (7.33-43.33) in the simultaneous category. Similarly, for males the mean satisfaction scores were as follows: 15.83 (.67-36.67) in the before category, 21.84 (6.67-44.00) in the after category, and 6.22 (4.67-10.67) in the simultaneous category (see Table 5).

Two-way analyses of variance (Gender x Relationship Length; Gender x Timing) could not be performed due to unequal cell sizes, consequently separate one-way analyses of variance were performed on data from each gender. One-factor between-subjects analyses of variance focusing on sexual satisfaction and length of current relationship revealed no significant differences either for females, $F(2,34)=1.50$, or males, $F(2,25)=1.27$ (see Tables 6 and 7).

More importantly, one-factor between-subjects analyses of variance addressing the relationship of sexual satisfaction and the timing of orgasm also revealed no significant differences for either females, $F(2,34)=.38$, or males, $F(2,25)=2.88$ (see Tables 8 and 9).

DISCUSSION

The intention of this research was to partially replicate previous research conducted by Darling, Davidson and Cox (1991) and determine whether women who experienced orgasm before or at the same time as their partners are more sexually satisfied than women who experienced orgasm after their partners. It was also hypothesized that there would be a relationship between the timing of orgasm and sexual satisfaction for men.

Similarities were found regarding the females' method of orgasm. In both studies, females reported orgasming during intercourse always or almost always between 65.9% (Darling et al.) and 67.57% (current) of the time. Interestingly, these percentages were confirmed in the current study by 66.67% of the males who named intercourse as the activity through which their partners most often achieve orgasm. Unlike the Darling, et al. study, however, no relationship for females was found between the timing of orgasm and sexual satisfaction.

The differences in results may stem from the measuring devices used to record the data. The device used to measure sexual satisfaction in the Darling et al. study was a Likert type scale produced by the experimenters, whereas the device

used to measure the data in the current study was the Hudson Index of Sexual Satisfaction which yields a raw numerical score. It is hypothesized that the Hudson score may be too general a measure of sexual satisfaction to reflect the differences seen in the former study. Further, the same Likert type method was employed to ascertain the timing of orgasm in the former study, hence yielding a more accurate profile of timing. In the current study, a single forced-answer multiple choice question was employed to obtain the same timing profile hence limiting the respondents.

This present flaw in design is also exemplified in the mere percentages falling in the timing categories. In the Darling et al. study the percentages of subjects in the categories were fairly evenly distributed in the before and after categories, leaving the smallest percentage of subjects to fall in the simultaneous category. In the present study, a disproportionately large number of female subjects fell in the before category, leaving a relatively small percentage in the after and simultaneous categories. Further, the smallest percentage fell into the after category, not the simultaneous category as in the former study.

No significant differences between sexual satisfaction and the timing of orgasm were obtained for the males. It is difficult to speculate why no significant results were found, being that there is no past research from which to

extrapolate, however, two hypotheses can be generated. It is hypothesized that significance was not obtained either because of the same faulty methodology speculated to have affected the females' results or because there is truly no relationship between the two variables.

APPENDIX
TABLES OF RESULTS

Table 1

Sexual Satisfaction as a Function of Marital Status

Status	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Females			
Single	10	18.67	13.96
Engaged	2	7.66	.48
Married	20	17.33	9.59
Divorced	4	11.33	8.61
Widowed	1	12.67	--
Males			
Single	6	14.89	6.06
Engaged	2	18.67	10.37
Married	18	20.22	13.85
Divorced	2	12.96	2.30
Widowed	0	--	--

Table 2

Sexual Satisfaction as a Function of Relationship Length

Relationship Length	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Females			
Less than 1 year	8	15.67	12.49
1-5 years	14	14.86	10.07
5 or more years	15	19.86	9.99
Males			
Less than 1 year	6	14.54	6.27
1-5 years	10	16.00	10.64
5 or more years	12	22.45	14.04

Table 3

Sexual Satisfaction as a Function of the Type of Activity
Through Which Orgasm is Achieved

Activity	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Females			
Foreplay	10	16.2	10.22
Intercourse	25	16.26	11.23
Afterplay	2	19.00	8.95
Males			
Foreplay	0	--	--
Intercourse	28	18.45	11.74
Afterplay	0	--	--

Table 4

Sexual Satisfaction as a Function of the Type of Activity
Through Which Partner's Orgasm is Achieved

Activity	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Females			
Foreplay	2	35	4.24
Intercourse	35	15.33	9.84
Afterplay	0	--	--
Males			
Foreplay	8	20.67	13.98
Intercourse	18	17.96	12.91
Afterplay	1	16.67	--

Table 5

Sexual Satisfaction as a Function of the Timing of Orgasm

Timing	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Females			
Before	24	15.72	9.65
At Same Time	7	19.24	16.30
After	6	14.11	6.89
Males			
Before	8	15.83	9.95
At Same Time	3	6.22	3.91
After	17	21.84	12.00

Table 6

One-factor Analysis of Variance Summary Table for Female
Sexual Satisfaction and Length of Current Relationship

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between Subjects	329.75	2	164.88	1.50	<.05
Within Subjects	3730.09	34	109.71		
Total	4059.84	36			

*critical $F(2,34) = 3.32$

Table 7

One-factor Analysis of Variance Summary Table for Male
Sexual Satisfaction and Length of Current Relationship

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between Subjects	343.30	2	171.65	1.27	<.05
Within Subjects	3383.74	25	135.35		
Total	3727.04	27			

*critical $F(2,25) = 3.39$

Table 8

One-factor Analysis of Variance Summary Table for Female
Sexual Satisfaction and the Timing of Orgasm

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between Subjects	89.52	2	44.76	.38	<.05
Within Subjects	3970.32	34	116.77		
Total	4059.84	36			

*critical $F(2,34) = 3.32$

Table 9

One-factor Analysis of Variance Summary Table for Male
Sexual Satisfaction and the Timing of Orgasm

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between Subjects	698.46	2	349.23	2.88	<.05
Within Subjects	3028.58	25	121.14		
Total	3727.04	27			

*critical $F(2,25)=3.39$

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