Is Attitude Toward Masturbation Related to Sexual Arousal?
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Introduction

According to a 1999 article in the Journal of the American Medical Association, as many as 43% of women and 31% of men have some form of difficulty in their sexual functioning (Carroll 2005). There are many factors that contribute to one’s sexual arousal: both physical and psychological. One’s sexual attitudes can contribute or be a negative force to sexual functioning. For example, women with orgasmic disorders have more negative attitudes about masturbation, believe more myths about sexuality, and possess greater degrees of sex guilt (Kelly et al., 1990).

Sexual values in the United States, particularly negative attitudes towards masturbation, have had a strong influence historically from conservative Christian teachings and masturbation myths of the medical and psychological communities (Carroll 2005). A long-standing taboo against learning and talking about sexuality has delayed sexuality as a legitimate and important field of study until very recently. Female sexuality especially, has taken a backseat to male sexuality. In the 20th century sexology research pioneered by scientists such as Kinsey, Masters and Johnson and others, seriously began to explore sex scientifically (Carroll 2005). Their research has shown that not only is masturbation common, but it has no negative effects on health or sexual well-being (Carroll 2005). If anything, it is the opposite. In fact, today the most effective treatment for female orgasmic disorder, developed by LoPiccolo and Lobitz (1972), involves teaching a woman to masturbate to orgasm (Carroll 2005).

From my readings of the literature, there seem to be two main focuses in studies of masturbation and sexual arousal. One way looks at sexual behavior: for example, the number of times one masturbates, the number of orgasms one experiences, or the amount of vasocongestion in the pelvis (the physical equivalent of sexual arousal) after exposure to erotic material. Another way of studying sexual arousal and masturbation looks at sexual attitudes: for example, the amount of guilt one experiences while watching erotic material, which sexual activities one thinks are acceptable, and self-perception of what sexual activities a person thinks would or does arouse him or her.

In a study by Mosher and Abramson (1977), subjective sexual arousal to erotic films was measured and compared to attitude towards masturbation in both males and females. Males who viewed the film of the male masturbating reported the most disgust, depression, guilt, and shame. Women who masturbated more frequently reported more sexual arousal to the films than the other 3 groups.

In another study by Mosher and O’Grady (1979), subjective sexual arousal and affective responses to films of masturbatory, homosexual, and heterosexual behavior were studied in males as a function of differences in negative attitudes toward masturbation, homosexual threat, and sex guilt. The personality inventories (e.g., Mosher Forced-Choice Guilt Inventory, Negative Attitudes Toward Masturbation Inventory) again predicted sexual arousal and affective reactions.

A 1985 study in the Journal of Sex Research investigated the relationships of sex, sex guilt, and authoritarianism to affective and arousal responses after viewing explicit heterosexual and opposite- and same-sex masturbation slides. Compared to females, males expressed more positive attitude and higher sexual arousal in response to all but the
same-sex masturbatory theme. Ss with higher sex guilt expressed less positive attitude about the stimuli, with the least positive attitude expressed by high-guilt Ss after exposure to slides showing same-sex autoeroticism.

However, the research styles of behavior versus attitudes sometimes mix. For example, in the 1981 Journal of Research in Personality, researchers studied negative attitudes toward masturbation using Mosher’s Negative Attitudes Toward Masturbation scale, and then measured the amount of pelvic vasocongestion after reading erotic material in a thermographic analysis. Women who had the most positive attitudes toward masturbation experienced the most pelvic engorgement (the physical equivalent of sexual arousal).

In a 1991 study by Hurlbert and Whittaker, two demographically matched groups of women were used: one group had experienced a masturbatory orgasm, and the other group had never experienced an orgasm through self-stimulation. Significant differences were found between the two groups: masturbators had significantly more orgasms, greater sexual desire, higher self-esteem, and greater marital and sexual satisfaction, and required less time to sexual arousal.

However, a correlation is not always found between masturbation and sexual arousal. Leitenberg et al., 1993, compared masturbatory history practices among college men and women to sexual adjustment, sexual arousability, and sexual behavior. Having masturbation experience during preadolescence and/or early adolescence was not related to intercourse experience, sexual satisfaction, sexual arousal, or sexual difficulties in relationships during young adulthood.

These studies indicate that negative attitudes toward masturbation have theoretical significance and usefulness in research of human sexuality as well as in treating some forms of sexual dysfunctions. The proposed study provides a more general, yet comprehensive assessment of subjective sexual arousal. Instead of responding to erotic stimuli, the subjects will fill out a detailed questionnaire, which describes a variety of sexual situations. Based on previous experience or imagined experience, subjects will rank how arousing they think each situation would be. To measure negative attitude towards masturbation, I will use the well-established Mosher Negative Attitudes Toward Masturbation Scale. However, unlike many of the other studies, I will use male and female subjects equally. I predict that a negative attitude towards masturbation will be related to a poor sexual arousal, especially in sexual situations involving genital touching or oral sex. Likewise, positive attitude towards masturbation should be related to high sexual arousal, especially in the sexual situations mentioned above. I also predict that women will have a stronger relationship between attitude toward masturbation and sexual arousal than men. This is based on the fact that women masturbate less than men on average, and therefore may be less comfortable touching or being touched on their genitals. My findings should correlate with similar results found in previous studies from Mosher and Abramson (1977), Mosher and O’Grady (1979), and others.

**Method**

**Participants**
Approximately 50 males and 50 females, 17+ undergraduate students at the University of Minnesota Duluth will take part in this study. Participation will be voluntary.
Procedure

 Volunteers of the study will complete two questionnaires. Subjects will be asked to fill out Abramson and Mosher’s “Negative Attitudes Toward Masturbation Inventory (NAMI)” and Hoon and Chambless’ “Sexual Arousability Inventory- Expanded (SAI-E)”. The subjects will be asked to fill out the questionnaires only once. Before beginning the questionnaires, subjects will be asked for their voluntary consent and have an opportunity to ask questions. Once data has been collected, the questionnaires will be scored and entered for statistical analysis. I will use Multiple Logistic Regression. The dependent variable will be gender; the independent variables will be attitudes and self-reported arousability. Three relationships will be examined: attitude toward masturbation and arousal in all subjects, attitude toward masturbation and arousal in women, and attitude toward masturbation and arousal in men. These relationships will be compared against each other, and I will see if I am able to predict someone’s gender based on their attitude towards masturbation and self-reported arousal. All data will be kept confidential. Participants may have an opportunity to receive extra credit in a class for participation in the study.

Timeline

January – preparation and some recruitment for the study.
February- Questionnaires given, data collected, and data entered into SPSS 11.0 or Excel.
March - Perform statistical analyses of data and begin research paper.
April: Complete research paper and prepare for the National Conference for Undergraduate Research. Attend NCUR. Participate in the Twin Ports Undergraduate Psychology Conference.
May- participate in the UROP showcase at the University of Minnesota Duluth.

Budget

See enclosed form.

Educational Objectives

This research study will assist me in many educational goals. It will give me valuable research experience, and help prepare me for graduate studies. I have a strong interest in human sexuality and the biological bases of psychology. This research will allow me to explore more into this field and may help guide me in future career decisions.

Relationship to Professor’s Work

Dr. Lloyd has areas of expertise in physiological psychology of emotions and species-specific behavior, experimental design, and evolutionary psychology. He has done research on sexuality, and is currently working on a project in this field titled “Gender and Orientation on Cerebral Laterality in the Temporal Lobes Using EEG”.
Bibliography


Leitenberg, Harold; Detzer, Mark J; Srebnik, Debra. Gender differences in masturbation and the relation of masturbation experience in preadolescence and/or early adolescence to sexual behavior and sexual adjustment in young adulthood. *Archives of Sexual Behavior. Vol 22*(2), Apr 1993, pp. 87-98. U Vermont, Burlington, US.
