

PREPARED FOR ANYTHING?

FURTHER INVESTIGATION OF GENITAL CATEGORY-SPECIFICITY IN WOMEN

Kelly D. Suschinsky

kelly.suschinsky@uleth.ca



Martin L. Lalumière

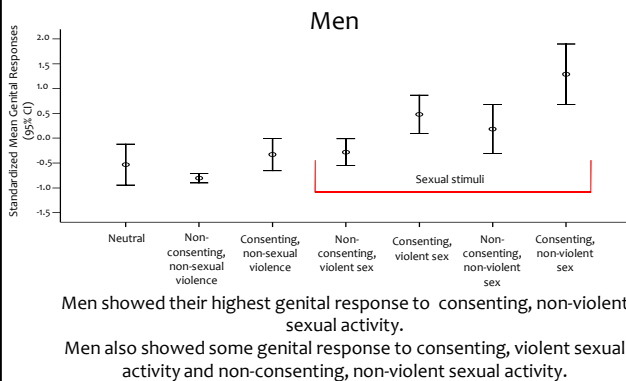
martin.lalumiere@uleth.ca

Background

- **Category-specific sexual arousal:** sexual arousal that is dependent on certain features of a sexual stimulus
- **Men's genital responses tend to be category-specific, but women's do not**
 - Men show their greatest genital response to stimuli involving their preferred sexual partners
 - Women show approximately equal (and high) genital responses to stimuli depicting preferred and non-preferred sex partners^{1, 2, 3}
- **The preparation hypothesis** suggests that **any** sexual cue should produce a genital response in women, even cues that are unappealing to women⁴
- **Prediction:** Women will show high genital responses to any stimulus that has sexual content, regardless of the degree of violence or consent described, whereas men will only exhibit high genital responses to consenting, non-violent sexual activity

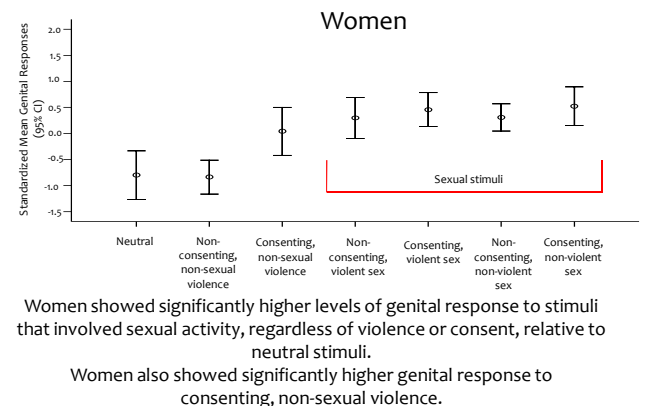
Method

- **Participants:** 9 men (M age = 23.4, SD = 3.0), 11 women (M age = 21.8, SD = 2.7); self-identified sexual orientation as either bi-sexual or heterosexual
- **Genital measures:** circumferential phallometry or vaginal photoplethysmography
- **Stimuli:** audiotape narratives of interactions with a man, told by a woman from her point of view
- Narratives varied based on three types of content, which were factorially crossed:
 - *violence* (violence/injury versus none)
 - *consent* (consent/enjoyment versus refusal/displeasure)
 - *sexual content* (sexual versus non-sexual)
- Participants heard 2 stories from each of seven stimulus categories (one category was not used: non-sexual, non-violent, non-consent)
- **Data reduction:** genital responses were standardized within subject; responses were then averaged to create mean stimulus category scores for each subject
- **Data analysis:** 2 (sex) X 7 (stimulus category) ANOVA; dependent variable = mean genital response



Results

There was a significant interaction between sex and stimulus category, $F(6, 108) = 2.74, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .13$.



Summary and Discussion

- Preliminary results from this study support the preparation hypothesis: Women showed increased genital arousal to any stimulus category that involved sexual activity, relative to the neutral stimulus category, even when they rated the stimuli as unpleasant and anxiety-inducing (data not shown)
- Men's genital responses were category-specific with regard to type of sexual activity, as found in previous studies⁵
- Women's increased genital response to the consenting, non-sexual violence category may have been due to the phrasing of the scripts for these stories (e.g., "Don't stop, don't stop!"; "Oh, yes, please, please; punish me, beat me!")
- Further investigation is required to determine the influence of other stimulus features on genital responding and the degree of lubrication produced by various stimuli

References

- 1) Chivers, M. L., Rieger, G., Latty, E., & Bailey, J. M. (2004). A sex difference in the specificity of sexual arousal. *Psychological Science*, 15, 736 – 744.
- 2) Laan, E., Sonderman, M., & Janssen, E. (1996). Straight and lesbian women's sexual responses to straight and lesbian erotica: No sexual orientation effects. Poster presented at the 22nd Annual Meeting of the International Academy of Sex Research, Rotterdam, Netherlands.
- 3) Suschinsky, K. D., Lalumière, M. L., & Chivers, M. L. (in press). Sex differences in patterns of genital sexual arousal: Measurement artifacts or true phenomena? *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.
- 4) Van Lunsen, R., & Laan, E. (2004). Genital vascular responsiveness and sexual feelings in midlife women: Psychophysiological, brain, and genital imaging studies. *Menopause*, 11, 741 – 748.
- 5) Lalumière, M. L., Quinsey, V. L., Harris, G. T., Rice, M. E., & Trautrimas, C. (2003). Are rapists differentially aroused by coercive sex in phallometric assessments? *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 989, 211-224.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the University of Lethbridge Research Fund.

The authors would like to thank Dr. Meredith Chivers, Meg Ebsworth, Annabree Fairweather, Aria Johnston, Daniel Krupp, and Sandeep Mishra, as well as the participants who volunteered their time.