

**When Orgasm Does Not Equal Pleasure:
Three Empirical Studies on How Orgasm Experiences Can be “Bad”**

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents three empirical studies that challenge notions of orgasm as a universally positive experience. Specifically, my research asks: Can orgasm experiences during consensual sex be “bad”? What do “bad” orgasm experiences mean for people’s relationships, sexuality, and psychological health? How might acknowledging “bad” orgasm experiences help us identify coercive behaviors in new ways? By answering these questions, my dissertation offers novel evidence that orgasm can co-occur with negative affect during consensual sex in ways that adversely impact people’s lives.

In Chapter 1, I review how the medical, research, and cultural movements of the past century have positioned orgasm as a universally positive experience. I propose that these movements have created two interconnected assumptions, both of which have substantial risks that have not been addressed in research. These assumptions are that: 1) sex is always positive when consent and orgasm are present, and 2) trying to facilitate a partner’s orgasm is necessarily a positive behavior.

In Chapter 2, I present my first study, which demonstrated how orgasm experiences during consensual sex can be “bad.” To do this, I asked participants ($N = 726$) to describe negative experiences with orgasm during consensual sex. Participants 1) described their experiences in negative ways despite orgasm occurrence, 2) reported that these negative orgasms were less pleasurable than other orgasms, and 3) suggested that their negative orgasm experiences had negative psychological, relationship, and sexual outcomes. These findings are

the first to demonstrate that orgasm plus consensual sex does not necessarily equate to a positive experience.

In Chapter 3, I present my second study, which showed that sex with orgasms can have negative outcomes, reinforcing that orgasm experiences can be “bad.” Participants ($N = 430$) reported whether they had ever experienced three types of bad orgasm experiences (with sexual coercion and/or orgasm coercion) with their partner. They also filled out measures of avoidance motivations (i.e., the motivation to consent to sex to avoid conflict), and psychological, relationship, and sexual outcomes. Structural equation modeling showed that bad orgasm experiences predicted significantly stronger avoidance motivations and worse psychological distress, relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and sexual functioning. Results highlighted that orgasm does not erase or invalidate the adverse effects associated with coercive and other negative experiences.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I present my third study, which demonstrated that some attempts to facilitate a partner’s orgasm can manifest as “orgasm coercion.” Participants ($N = 912$) described what sexual partners have said or done that made them feel pressured to orgasm. Results showed that the orgasm pressure tactics described by participants were analogous to sexual coercion tactics (i.e., pressuring someone into having sex), and that orgasm pressure was associated with sexual coercion, compliance (i.e., faking orgasm), and negative psychological/relationship effects. Results further showed how the assumption that orgasms are always positive poses substantial risks by promoting and masking coercive behaviors.

Together, the findings from this dissertation highlight an important point previously absent from research on sexuality: that orgasm during consensual sex does *not* equal pleasure, the presence of desire/arousal, or the absence of negative affect. As such, these findings provide

a framework that, for the first time, may help people understand how their orgasm experiences can be “bad” (e.g., due to coercion, pain, disinterest, and/or other negative emotions) despite a cultural landscape that otherwise denies this possibility.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Orgasm is considered by many to be the most satisfying aspect of sex. It is similarly described by women and men as a rush of intense, explosive, sexual pleasure and is often characterized as the ultimate peak and resolution of sexual activity (Vance & Wagner, 1976). As such, orgasms are generally assumed to be wholly positive experiences that all individuals should achieve, or at least try to. Accordingly, a deluge of media messages encourages individuals to pursue better, more frequent, and more mind-blowing orgasmic experiences as a way to improve their sex lives, maintain relationship satisfaction, and promote overall well-being (Attwood, 2005; Barker et al., 2018; Frith, 2015; Lavie-Ajayi & Joffe, 2009; Opperman et al., 2014).

Orgasm's association with positive, successful sex is certainly connected to notions of physical pleasure; but, decades of scientific and medical research have also promoted positive portrayals of orgasm through assessments of orgasm in relation to psychological, physical, and spiritual health. For example, Freud's (1905) assertion that women's vaginal orgasms represent sexual maturity (and that clitoral orgasms represent immaturity) promoted the notion that women's vaginal orgasm occurrence aligned with psychological health. Orgasm absence in general, and absence of vaginal orgasm specifically, were taken as indicators of psychological disorder (Freud, 1905). In contrast, Masters and Johnson's (1966, 1970) work associated orgasm occurrence, regardless of vaginal or clitoral origin, with normal physiological functioning for

women and men. However, they did so by defining orgasm as the natural “peak” in their physiological analysis of the human sexual response cycle.

During the sexual revolution of the 1960s-70s, sexual pleasure and orgasm became symbolic of free love and a means to discovering oneself, positioning orgasm occurrence as a sign of progressive sexuality and orgasm absence as a sign of regressive sexual ideology (Braun et al., 2003; Seidman, 1989). Notably, this ideology included ideas within the feminist movement that promoted the superiority of the clitoral orgasm, which was lauded by activists as a celebration of women’s sexuality and a rejection of male sexual expectations (Atkinson, 1974; Johnston, 1973; Kamen, 2000; Segal, 1994; Singer & Singer, 1972). Research has also long suggested that men’s orgasm and ejaculation (within the context of partnered sex) are a necessary and healthy way to relieve their supposed insatiable sexual desire (Wiederman, 2005); and studies crediting men’s orgasm with an extended lifespan continue to make news headlines (Rider et al., 2016). Together, these assertions have contributed to an overall message that orgasm, along with being essential for sexual pleasure, is necessary to successful functioning of the mind, body, and spirit.

As a result, orgasm is intertwined with social meanings that reinforce orgasm occurrence as inherently positive in ways that extend beyond notions of physical pleasure. For example, heterosexual women perceive their orgasms as a romantic and sexual highpoint, a symbol of womanhood (Gilfoyle et al., 1992; Lavie & Willig, 2005), and of normality (Nicolson & Burr, 2003). Heterosexual women also often still feel that having vaginal orgasms is superior to having clitoral orgasms, despite evidence that clitoral and vaginal orgasm are biologically indistinguishable (Mah & Binik, 2001). For women partnered with women, some see their orgasms as enforcing a purposeful rejection of heterosexual norms in which male partners have

typically received more pleasure in sexual encounters than women (Bolsø, 2005; L. E. Gordon, 2006; Nichols, 1987). Men's (of diverse sexual identities) orgasms, on the other hand, serve as a demonstration of their masculinity, as long as the man's orgasm does not happen too quickly or after too long (Symonds et al., 2003; Waldinger & Schweitzer, 2005), with some men even reporting that sex without orgasm occurrence does not "count" (Salisbury & Fisher, 2014). Furthermore, research has suggested that transgender individuals of various gender identities who have undergone medical gender-affirmation view orgasm as the primary indicator of erotic sensitivity following hormonal and surgical transition-related medical processes (Doorduyn & van Berlo, 2014).

The positive social meanings associated with orgasm extend to how individuals perceive their partner's orgasms, too, linking individuals' self-concepts to partners' orgasm occurrence. For example, research has shown that, when women orgasm during sex with men, men perceive the woman's orgasm as a masculinity achievement and as a reflection of their own sexual proficiency and success (Chadwick & van Anders, 2017; Gilfoyle et al., 1992). In addition, research has shown that women's and men's orgasms are an important determinant of women partner's sexual self-esteem (Fahs, 2014b; McClelland, 2014; Nicolson & Burr, 2003; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014), and that men partnered with men gain personal satisfaction from their partner's orgasm occurrence (Hoppe, 2011; Reynolds, 2007; Schilder et al., 2008). Accordingly, research has suggested that partners of all genders and sexual orientations view orgasm reciprocity as a symbol of sex that is not only "good" but also "fair" (Bolsø, 2005; Braun et al., 2003; Gordon, 2006; LaFrance et al., 2017; Nichols, 1987).

Critiques of the Orgasm Imperative

Of course, scholars have increasingly critiqued the “orgasm imperative” (i.e., the notion that orgasm should or must be the goal of sex), asserting that positioning orgasm as the ultimate symbol of sexual satisfaction and sexual health constrains experiences of satisfying sexual pleasure and pathologizes orgasm absence (Denman, 2004; Koedt, 1973; Tiefer, 2004). Specifically, researchers have argued that, because orgasm occurrence has come to symbolize success and is assumed to always be positive, orgasm absence has been inappropriately labeled as a psychological and/or physical dysfunction that may drive women and men to seek otherwise unnecessary medical treatment when orgasm does not occur (Denman, 2004; Koedt, 1973; Tiefer, 2004).

The critique that the orgasm imperative can constrain sexual pleasure and pathologize orgasm absence has served to disrupt the notion that orgasm occurrence is necessary for sex to be positive and healthy, and specifically has helped to refute non-orgasmic sex as dysfunctional and inherently not pleasurable. For example, research has shown that many women and men of varying sexual identities feel that orgasm is *not* an essential component of their sexual pleasure and that intimacy and affection can be equally if not more important (Bolsø, 2005; Grace et al., 2006; Lavie & Willig, 2005). In addition, studies have shown that both women and men fake orgasms (Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010; Roberts et al., 1995), suggesting that the desire to portray sex as normatively successful (i.e., orgasmic) may often trump individuals’ ability to communicate a desire to end sex or engage in other potentially non-orgasmic activities. Furthermore, scholars have asserted that orgasm absence relates to socio-behavioral contexts rather than psycho-physiological dysfunctions (Armstrong et al., 2012; Wade et al., 2005). Specifically, they have highlighted how heteronormative sexual scripts and gendered power dynamics contribute to orgasm absence; and, many scholars have focused on promoting more

diverse –and specifically queer– notions of sexual pleasure in which other facets of sexual experience (e.g., intimacy, empowerment, non-orgasmic physical sensations) can characterize sexual satisfaction (Barker, 2011; Denman, 2004; Jagose, 2010; Tiefer, 2004; Wincze & Carey, 2001).

Unchallenged Assumptions in Research on Orgasms

The scholarship critiquing the orgasm imperative has certainly helped to refute the notion that orgasms are, in fact, “imperative” for sex to be good, satisfying, and healthy. Specifically, such scholarship has served to deconstruct the assumption that orgasm absence is necessarily negative and/or bad. However, while this has been useful in re-conceptualizing orgasm absence, we are still left with two other assumptions inherent to the orgasm imperative: 1) that sex is always necessarily positive or pleasurable when orgasm is present; and 2) that trying to facilitate a partner’s orgasm is necessarily a positive behavior. These assumptions have yet to be interrogated in research on orgasms. But, I propose that both continue to stage potential negative contexts and repercussions for people’s sexuality.

The first assumption – that sex is always necessarily positive or pleasurable when orgasm is present – presumes that, even though orgasms are no longer considered the ultimate sign of sexual success, they are still assumed to be desired, enjoyed, and/or something of a bonus when they do occur. But, are orgasms *always* experienced in universally positive ways? Based on evidence that women and men can orgasm while being sexual assaulted, we know that the answer is no (Levin & van Berlo, 2004). Importantly, such evidence (along with evidence that orgasm is not always even a sexual experience; Herbenick et al., 2018; Herbenick & Fortenberry, 2011) has highlighted that physical stimulation alone is sometimes enough to elicit a physiological orgasm response, even in situations when negative affect is high and psychological

and physical arousal and desire are absent (Levin & van Berlo, 2004). However, while many scholars have been sympathetic to the possibility that orgasm experiences can be negative in assault cases, the central message heralded by survivors and the psychologists who treat them – that orgasm does not necessarily equate enjoyment– has been surprisingly absent from the discourse on sexuality more generally. That is, research has yet to explore whether orgasm experiences (i.e., experiences in which orgasms occur and/or experiences of orgasms themselves) can be “bad” (i.e., negative or even just non-positive) in non-clinical¹ circumstances other than sexual assault; and specifically, whether orgasm experiences can be bad during *consensual sex*.

Importantly, the lack of attention to how orgasm might also co-occur with negative affect during consensual sex has potential negative repercussions for people’s sexuality. That is, consent is typically presumed to reflect at least some level of willingness to have sex if not an outright pursuit of sex and pleasure, positioning consensual sex as a context in which orgasm is assumed to always be wanted and enjoyed, or at least a welcomed bonus (Atkinson, 1974; Johnston, 1973; Kamen, 2000; Segal, 1994). As a result, the presence of consent and orgasm together are largely perceived as irrefutable evidence of a positive sexual experience, making negative affect seem especially improbable and/or irrelevant. Thus, if negative affect can co-occur with orgasm during consensual sex, it is possible that experiences of negative affect may be doubted or ignored. For example, perpetrators of problematic sexual behaviors (e.g., gaining

¹ Some research has arguably shown that orgasm experiences can be bad during consensual sex for clinical reasons. For example, research has shown that many men experience stress, shame, and guilty associated with premature ejaculation (Porst et al., 2007; Symonds et al., 2003). And, studies have found that women and men can experience painful orgasms because of medical interventions, side effects from medications, or comorbid sexual dysfunctions (Finger et al., 1997; A. S. Gordon et al., 2003; McCabe et al., 2016; Mogorovich et al., 2013).

consent – or its appearance – through coercion) may feel that a target’s orgasm occurrence validates their behaviors and trumps the negative affect felt by the target. Similarly, targets themselves may struggle to label a partner’s behaviors as problematic if they believe that their own orgasm occurrence means they must have somehow “wanted it” all along (Katz et al., 2007). This self-blame can discourage these individuals from seeking subsequent emotional support and psychological counseling to combat the effects of distressing sexual encounters and relationships (Katz et al., 2007).

The second assumption – that trying to facilitate a partner’s orgasm is necessarily a positive behavior – presumes that, because orgasms are wanted, desired, and a bonus when they do occur, trying to ensure that a partner orgasms is a positive behavior that reflects an altruistic investment in partner pleasure. Yet, some studies have suggested that individuals sometimes say or do something that puts pressure on their partner to have an orgasm, calling to question whether investment in partner orgasm is always truly positive. For example, when discussing cultural norms related to women’s orgasm, women have stated that men will sometimes repeatedly ask them “did you come?” during sexual encounters in a way they find pressuring (Grace et al., 2006; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014). In studies on reasons for faking orgasm, women have also mentioned that a partner previously acted upset, disappointed, or even angry when their (the woman’s) orgasm did not happen (Fahs, 2014b; Goldey et al., 2016; Hite, 1976; Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010; Roberts et al., 1995). Despite such evidence, however, research has yet to explore pressuring a partner to orgasm as a behavioral phenomenon or consider how it might negatively impact those who experience it.

The inattention to circumstances in which partners pressure one another to orgasm may also have negative impacts. Pressuring someone in any capacity may translate into the possibility

of coercion, raising the possibility that pressuring a partner to orgasm might be a coercive behavior. And, coercive behavior in sexual contexts can have serious repercussions. For example, perpetrating sexual coercion (i.e., pressuring someone into having sex) has been associated with exploitative tendencies like psychological abuse, destructive verbal conflict patterns, and endorsement of sexual dominance (Katz & Myhr, 2008); thus, pressuring a partner to orgasm could also be an extension of these negative behavioral patterns. Similarly, experiencing sexual coercion has been associated with negative effects on individuals' relationships and sexual functioning (Katz & Myhr, 2008), as well as higher levels of depression, anger, and social anxiety (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; Zweig et al., 1999). As such, if pressuring a partner to orgasm is, in fact, coercive, experiencing this kind of pressure might have similarly negative effects on individuals. But again, the negative affect and other outcomes associated with being pressured to orgasm may be doubted or ignored because "encouraging" a partner to orgasm is typically seen as a positive, altruistic action.

The Role of Gender/Sex² and Sexual Identity

Individuals of diverse gender/sex and sexual identities (henceforth referred to as gender/sex/ual for brevity; Chadwick & van Anders, 2020; van Anders et al., 2020) may have bad orgasm experiences and/or be pressured by a partner to orgasm in coercive ways. However, gender/sex/ual identity scripts for sex and orgasm suggest that there may be possible gender/sex/ual identity differences in the frequency and impact of having these kinds of experiences (Gilfoyle et al., 1992; Gordon, 2006; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014; Wiederman, 2005).

² I use the term "gender/sex" to recognize the complex, sometimes inextricable relationship between sociocultural gender and evolved/physical sex and the ways that people and/or identities can reflect a mix of both for many people (van Anders, 2015).

As such, it is worthwhile to also consider how gender/sexual identities might shape the potential for individuals' bad orgasm experiences, experiences of orgasm pressure from partners, and their outcomes.

Women and Bad Orgasm Experiences

Research generally concurs that women are more likely to experience sexual encounters characterized by negative affect than men; for example, women (and especially bisexual women) are more likely to experience coercion, feel obligated to comply to unwanted sex, and experience worse reactions to consensual but unwanted sexual encounters (Ford & Soto-Marquez, 2016; Livingston et al., 2004; Martin et al., 2011; Martin-Storey et al., 2018; Murchison et al., 2017; Satinsky & Jozkowski, 2014; D. Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1991). As such, women may have more bad orgasm experiences by nature of having more frequent negative sexual encounters.

However, research has also shown that negative affect can be an impediment to women's orgasm occurrence (Brotto et al., 2008; Fahs, 2014b; Trudel & Saint-Laurent, 1983). Women may therefore be especially unlikely to have bad orgasm experiences because they usually do not orgasm during encounters characterized by negative affect. But, consequently, this could also mean that partners or confidants do not believe that women's orgasm experiences could ever be bad, leading them to dismiss women's bad orgasm experiences when they do occur. As such, while women's bad orgasm experiences might occur infrequently, they may feel *especially* bad for women when they happen.

Furthermore, there is reason to believe that women partnered with men may be pressured to orgasm in coercive ways more often than women with partners of other genders. Specifically,

women partnered with men have fewer orgasms overall – studies have shown that bisexual³ and heterosexual women (with estimates up to and beyond 70%) do not orgasm during most sexual activities with men – which means they may be more likely to be in scenarios where a partner is motivated to pressure them (Frederick et al., 2018; Hite, 1976; Wade et al., 2005). Additionally, men are typically seen as responsible for eliciting women’s orgasms and men stand to succeed or fail at demonstrating their masculinity when a woman’s orgasm does or does not occur (Armstrong et al., 2012; Chadwick & van Anders, 2017; Roberts et al., 1995; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014). As such, men may be especially motivated to exert orgasm pressure on women partners. Notably, the risk of experiencing orgasm pressure may be especially high for bisexual women partnered with men because of stereotypes that bisexual individuals are sexually insatiable and/or lying about their sexual identity (M. Barker & Langdridge, 2008; Matsick & Rubin, 2018); that is, men may also pressure bisexual women partners to orgasm to gain “proof” of their own viability as the woman’s sexual partner.

Of course, women partnered with women may experience orgasm pressure, too. Though, it is perhaps worth noting that women’s orgasms occur frequently in women’s same-sex sexual encounters (Beaber & Werner, 2009; Blair et al., 2018; Breyer et al., 2010; Coleman et al., 1983; Frederick et al., 2018; Garcia et al., 2014), with some estimates indicating that 76-89% percent of lesbian women (almost) *always* have an orgasm when having sex with a partner (Coleman et al., 1983; Jay et al., 1979; Loulan, 1988). As such, women partnered with women may

³ The research assessing frequency of orgasm among bisexual women noted that they did not have specific information on the gender/sex identity of the bisexual women’s partners, but that another dataset collected on the same website suggested partners were mostly men (Frederick, John, Garcia, & Llyod, 2018). Supporting this, findings for bisexual and heterosexual women’s orgasm frequency were statistically similar.

experience orgasm pressure less frequently because they experience fewer scenarios in which partners are threatened by the possibility of orgasm absence.

However, some lesbian women have stated that they feel pressured to follow lesbian sexual scripts that pedestal orgasm reciprocity (Cohen et al., 2008), and some have expressed concerns that they or their partners will be perceived as selfish or regressive (within the relationship and/or the lesbian community) if one partner regularly gives or receives more orgasms than the other (Gordon, 2006; Nichols, 1995). Additionally, up to 20% of lesbians in some studies reported that they fake orgasms sometimes or frequently, presumably to avoid hurting their partner's ego, which suggests that they anticipate negative reactions from their partner if they do not orgasm (Califia, 1979; Fahs, 2014b; Jay et al., 1979). Together, this suggests that women partnered with women do experience orgasm pressure from their partners, though perhaps less often than for women partnered with men.

Men and Bad Orgasm Experiences

Men's orgasms are conceptualized as an inevitable aspect of any sexual encounter (Gilfoyle et al., 1992); and, over 90% of men report that they expect to and usually orgasm during sexual activities (Frederick et al., 2018; Hite, 1976; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014; Wade et al., 2005). This means that men (of all sexual identities) may generally orgasm regardless of the circumstances of the encounter. As such, men may have bad orgasm experiences often because they generally orgasm even when coercion, compliance, orgasm pressure, and/or any other negative affect is present. However, because men are socialized to believe that all sexual interactions and orgasms are positive (Smith et al., 1988; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1991; Wiederman, 2005), it could also be the case that men are unlikely to characterize sexual experiences as bad – and are therefore unlikely to have (or at least perceive/report) “bad”

orgasm experiences. Of course, as with women, cultural sexual scripts that dictate orgasms (and especially men's orgasms) as always universally positive may also lead partners and other confidants to dismiss the bad orgasm experiences that men do have, consequently worsening negative affect for men when bad orgasm experiences occur.

Additionally, the high rate of orgasm occurrence among men means that they may be pressured by a partner to orgasm less often. However, high rates of orgasm occurrence among men could also mean that men are especially likely to be pressured to orgasm in the circumstances where their orgasm does not occur. Why? The absence of a man's orgasm is framed as particularly unusual, problematic, and representative of a failed sexual encounter (Jackson & Scott, 2002), which could arguably make those partnered with men feel especially bad when a man's orgasm does not occur. In support, some clinical studies have shown that many women partnered with men *do* blame themselves and feel a sense of failure when their male partners cannot get erections and/or have orgasms, especially when erections and/or orgasms were previously frequent (Althof, 2012; Conaglen et al., 2010; Conaglen & Conaglen, 2008; Graziottin & Althof, 2011; Ozgoli et al., 2014). Similarly, some clinical research has suggested that men partnered with men experience feelings of inadequacy or unwantedness when their partner's orgasm does not occur (Catalan, 1993). As such, men seem likely to experience orgasm pressure from partners, though perhaps less frequently than women partnered with men.

Summary

Together, evidence suggests that the halo of positivity surrounding orgasm occurrence actually works to stage negative repercussions for people's sexuality in ways that go unacknowledged. As such, the overarching goal of this dissertation is to interrogate the assumption that orgasms are universally positive experiences by assessing how orgasm can co-

occur with negative affect and include coercive behaviors. I conducted three research studies relevant to this larger goal, each of which is outlined briefly below.

Research Overview

Exploring “Bad” Orgasm Experiences During Consensual Sex

In Chapter 2, I describe my first study, where I used mixed quantitative and qualitative methods to explore whether orgasm experiences can be “bad” during consensual sex among individuals of diverse gender/sex/ual identities. The goals of this study were to: (a) demonstrate whether and how orgasm and negative affect can co-occur during consensual sex; and (b) understand how social location may shape these experiences.

Bad Orgasm Experiences and their Psychological, Relationship, and Sexual Outcomes

In Chapter 3, I describe my second study, where I extend my research from Chapter 2 by testing psychological, relationship, and sexual outcomes associated with bad orgasm experiences in a new sample using structural equation modeling. In this study, I focused on bad orgasm experiences that included coerced sex and orgasm coercion, given that previous research has shown strong links between coercion and negative outcomes; and, I aimed to test whether these links prevailed even when orgasm was present. The goals of this study were to: (a) demonstrate that having orgasms during coerced sex and/or upon experiencing orgasm coercion predicts worse psychological distress, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, sexual functioning, and sexual desire compared to not having these experiences; and (b) assess whether these associations differed between women and men.

Orgasm Coercion: Overlaps Between Pressuring Someone to Orgasm and Sexual Coercion

In Chapter 4, I describe my third study, where I used mixed quantitative and qualitative methods to test whether pressuring a partner to have an orgasm is a coercive behavior. Chapters

2 and 3 offered compelling evidence that some orgasm experiences during consensual sex elicited negative affect for individuals because partners pressured participants to orgasm in ways that overlapped with sexual coercion; yet, no research had previously established this connection. As such, the overarching goal of this study was to: (a) collect evidence as to whether pressuring a partner to orgasm is a coercive behavior (i.e., to demonstrate that “orgasm coercion” exists).

CHAPTER 2

Exploring “Bad” Orgasm Experiences During Consensual Sex

In this chapter, I describe my mixed methods survey research exploring whether orgasm experiences during consensual sex can be “bad.” Importantly, no previous research has explored this topic; thus, this study was designed to offer initial insights into how orgasm and negative affect can co-occur during consensual sexual encounters. Because there may be an infinite number of reasons why orgasm experiences during consensual sex could be bad, I focused on a subset of consensual sexual scenarios that seemed likely to set the stage for bad orgasm experiences to occur: 1) having an orgasm during coerced sex (that individuals feel is consensual), 2) having an orgasm during compliant sex, 3) having an orgasm after feeling pressured to have an orgasm (i.e., orgasm pressure). Arguably, assessing whether orgasm experiences in these scenarios are “bad” offers evidence that bad orgasm experiences exist as broader phenomena, as well as provides details regarding what does and does not contribute to bad orgasm experiences within these specific types of sexual encounters.

Having an Orgasm During Coerced Sex

One scenario that might set the stage for bad orgasm experiences is having an orgasm during non-assaultive forms of verbal sexual coercion (i.e., where individuals are verbally, but not violently pressured to consent to unwanted sex by their partner; Waldner-Haugrud & Magruder, 1995). That is, if orgasm can occur during sexual assault, it follows that orgasms could occur during *any* unwanted sexual encounter, including coerced ones. Notably, although scholars have suggested that sexual coercion is inherently non-consensual (Basile, 1999),

research has shown that many who have experienced sexual coercion define their experiences as consensual sexual encounters (Basile, 2002; Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008; Conroy et al., 2015; Shotland & Goodstein, 1992). As such, people's experiences of consensual sex may include coercion – and, having an orgasm during coerced sex may simultaneously be experienced as having an orgasm during consensual sex. Sexual coercion has been associated with a variety of negative outcomes and affective responses (e.g., poor academic performance, decreased relationship satisfaction and sexual functioning, and increased depression, anger, social anxiety, and substance abuse; Chamberlain & Levenson, 2012; Coker et al., 2002; Crown & Roberts, 2007; Eaton & Matamala, 2014; Edelson et al., 2007; Katz & Myhr, 2008; Janine M. Zweig et al., 1999). Thus, it makes sense that having an orgasm during a coerced sexual encounter could constitute a “bad” orgasm experience during a consensual sexual encounter.

Having an Orgasm During Compliant Sex

Another scenario that might set the stage for bad orgasm experiences during consensual sex is having an orgasm during compliant sex. Compliant sex refers to a sexual encounter whereby an individual consents to unwanted sex, but is not explicitly pressured by their partner (Impett & Peplau, 2003). Sexual compliance can be associated with positive affect when it is approach-motivated (e.g., complying to unwanted sex to increase intimacy or to show love for a partner); but, it can be associated with negative affect when it is avoidance-motivated (e.g., complying to unwanted sex to avoid a fight with a partner; Impett & Peplau, 2003; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). Again, if orgasm can occur during sexual assault, it makes sense that orgasms could occur during avoidance-motivated sexual compliance, which may set the stage for a bad orgasm experience to occur. Some evidence, albeit minimal, from women's discussion of sexual reciprocity further supports that orgasms during sexual compliance exist – for example, in one

study, a woman stated that she felt pressured to continue sexual activity despite feeling too tired and not wanting to because her partner had “put a lot of energy” into successfully giving her an orgasm (Braun et al., 2003).

Having an Orgasm Upon Feeling Pressured to Orgasm

Research has shown that feeling pressured to orgasm can also elicit stress and/or other negative affect. For example, women and men have often stated that they feel *obligated* to orgasm during consensual sexual activities to ensure that sex feels fair and equal between partners (Braun et al., 2003). Women have also reported feeling pressured to orgasm when they feel that their orgasm is “taking too long” (Braun et al., 2003; Gilfoyle et al., 1992). And, men have sometimes described feeling pressured to orgasm in every sexual encounter and at the appropriate time (i.e., not too soon) to avoid feelings of embarrassment and failure (Salisbury & Fisher, 2014). Some individuals have also suggested that partners have pressured them to have orgasms, making the overall experience of orgasm less positive than if they had not been pressured. For example, women have reported feeling frustrated with sexual encounters in which male partners repeatedly asked or nagged them “did you come?” or got upset because the woman had not had an orgasm (Potts, 2000; Roberts et al., 1995; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014). Of course, having an orgasm upon feeling pressured may be positive for some people because it relieves the pressure, but it could also make the entire experience feel stressful, frustrating, or negative in other ways, potentially constituting a bad orgasm experience.

The Current Study

The current study aimed to explore the phenomenon of bad orgasm experiences during consensual sexual encounters. To do this, I asked participants of diverse gender/sex and sexual identities to answer open-ended questions in an online survey about 1) their orgasm experiences

during coerced sex, compliant sex, and feeling pressured to have an orgasm, and 2) how they felt their identities shaped these orgasm experiences. I assessed participants' characterizations of these orgasm experiences using primarily qualitative analyses, though I also conducted quantitative analyses to statistically assess differences in qualitative codes and themes. Specifically, I used deductive analysis to categorize and count patterns in participants' qualitative responses (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) to assess broader themes in participants' responses, and Pearson chi-square tests of independence to test for differences in patterns by categories, participant evaluations, and social location groups.

I note that there may be other types of bad orgasm experiences beyond those characterized by sexual coercion, compliance, and/or pressure to orgasm, and that this study was an exploration into a *subset* of potential bad orgasm experiences. No previous research to my knowledge has assessed orgasm occurrence during coerced sex, compliant sex, and/or sex where an individual feels pressured to orgasm in general; and, no previous research to my knowledge has assessed the notion that orgasm experiences could be bad for any non-clinical reason. Thus, this study was exploratory in nature and sought to understand individuals' experiences on a broad level. As such, I asked the following research questions:

1. Do individuals experience orgasms during sexual coercion, sexual compliance, and/or when they feel pressured to orgasm?
2. Is there evidence that orgasm experiences can be “bad” during consensual sexual encounters?
3. How does social location shape bad orgasm experiences?

Method

Participants

To be eligible for this study, participants had to be 18 years of age or older and must have previously engaged in consensual sexual activity with a partner. I recruited participants through convenience sampling by posting online advertisements (i.e., on Facebook, Reddit, and Craigslist) that viewers could click on to participate and/or share. I designed three different advertisements to recruit participants in general (the ad title stated: “Recruiting Participants for a Study on Sexuality!”), non-heterosexual and/or non-cis-participants (the ad title stated: “Recruiting LGBTQ Participants for a Study on Sexuality!”), and people of color (the ad title stated: “Recruiting People of Color [POC] for a Study on Sexuality!”). In the description for the study, advertisements for LGBTQ and POC participants additionally explained: “We would like to make sure that the experiences of [inserted either: non-majority identified individuals or POC] are represented, as research studies on sexuality are often [inserted either: biased towards majority identified folks or majority white].” Participants reported that they accessed the survey through Facebook (21.2%), Reddit (46.0%), Craigslist (2.8%), a friend (1.5%), and online (1.1%), though many did not report how they found the survey (27.4%). I recruited specifically to increase gender/sex/ual minority⁴ representation through similar advertisements targeted towards gender/sex/ual minority individuals. Targeted advertisements were posted in the same online spaces as general recruitment ads, but also in targeted online spaces (e.g., sexual minority-specific groups on Facebook, gender/sex/ual minority subreddits). First, I assessed the number of participants who reported that they have had an orgasm experience during coerced sex, compliant sex, and/or orgasm pressure (i.e., feeling pressured to have an orgasm). To do this, I

⁴ I use “minority” to refer to groups with marginalized positions within social hierarchies, and “majority” to refer to groups with dominant social positions (van Anders, 2015). Importantly, these terms refer to groups’ relations to power rather than simple statistical frequency.

first created a dataset that included all participants with usable quantitative data. These analyses included 726 participants (M age = 28.42, SD = 7.85). Then, I created a separate dataset for qualitative analyses that included the 289 participants (M age = 28.90, SD = 7.75) who provided descriptions of their orgasm experience. See Figure 2.1 for a flowchart of participant exclusions for each dataset. See Table 2.1 for quantitative and qualitative participant demographics information.

Measures

Health and Demographics Questionnaire

The health and demographics questionnaire section contained items that asked about a participant's age, education, income level, occupation, race/ethnicity, disability status, and religious beliefs. I asked participants to write in their own race/ethnicity identity, disability description, and religious beliefs in an open-ended text box; I coded these descriptions and grouped them based on similarities. Using open-ended text boxes for demographics questions allows participants to provide more accurate descriptions of themselves and their identities compared to check-boxes with pre-determined categories (Hughes et al., 2016; Hyde et al., 2019; van Anders et al., 2014).

Sexuality Questionnaire

The sexuality questionnaire contained items about sexuality, including sexual orientation/identity, sexual activity experience, and orgasm experience. Participants who indicated that they have never engaged in consensual sexual activity with a partner were redirected to the end of the survey, as this was an eligibility requirement for participation. Consensual sexual activity was defined as consensual contact involving the participant's or another person's genitals. Participants had the option to write in their own sexual

orientation/identity in an open-ended text box. For quantitative analyses, I coded sexual orientation/identity by grouping similar identity terms. Quotes in the qualitative results section of the study include the participants' self-reported gender/sexual identity terms.

Relationship Questionnaire

The relationship questionnaire asked participants about their relationship status. Participants had the option to indicate that they were single (with no sexual or romantic contacts), single (with no relationships but some sexual contacts), dating, in a committed relationship, married/common law/in a life partnership via a multiple-choice question. Participants also had the option to write in their own description if they felt none of the given terms described their relationship status.

Orgasm Experience Prompt and Follow-Up Questions

The orgasm experience prompt and follow-up questions were designed to gather information on experiences where participants had an orgasm during coercion, compliance, and/or when they felt pressured to have an orgasm. I did not use the words coercion or compliance in the prompt itself because of concerns that these terms might be stigmatizing or esoteric for participants; however, I confirmed in analyses that the prompt successfully encouraged participants to describe coercion and compliant encounters as defined in previous research (i.e., via the success of the categorization matrix; see Results). Although some scholars have defined coercion and/or compliance as inherently non-consensual, I note that the prompt asks participants to consider *consensual* sexual experiences (i.e., participants self-defined the encounters as consensual). First, participants read the following initial prompt:

*Here, we will ask you about your experiences related to **having an orgasm** during consensual sexual activity. Specifically, we are asking about situations where you felt*

pressured to have an orgasm when you were otherwise uninterested or feeling negative about the sexual activity taking place, or when you did not want to have an orgasm for some reason. Examples of situations like this might include not wanting to engage in sex in the first place, being too tired to continue sexual activity, or not wanting to do certain sexual activities, but then engaging anyway and having an orgasm as a result. Please take a moment to reflect on whether you have had this experience.

Participants indicated whether or not they have had this experience, with the option to answer yes, no, or I'm not sure. Participants who answered no were redirected to the end of the survey. Participants who answer "yes" or "I'm not sure" were asked to describe the situation in an open-ended text box; they were provided with the following prompting questions to stimulate additional details and thoughts about the experience, but they were not required to answer these questions specifically.

What were your negative feelings during and after the sexual activity?

What were your positive feelings during and after the sexual activity?

Did you feel pressured to have an orgasm?

Did your partner do or say anything that made you feel pressured to have an orgasm?

What are some of the thoughts that crossed your mind during the encounter?

I then asked participants to compare the orgasm they described to orgasms they experienced in more positive situations, using the following prompt:

Take a moment to consider how the orgasm in the situation(s) you described compared to orgasms you have had when you did not feel pressured. Was it more pleasurable, less pleasurable, about the same, or something else? Please describe below.

And, I asked participants to indicate the gender/sex identity of the partner(s) that was present in the situation they described.

Finally, participants were asked to consider whether they felt that their identities shaped the experience they described in an open-ended text box. Participants were given the following prompt:

We are also interested in understanding how your identity(s) have shaped experiences like the one you described above. You may have already responded with that in mind but, if not, please take a moment to reflect on whether you have any identities that you feel are relevant or important for us to know more about that would help us better contextualize your experiences. These might include identities we have already asked you about (e.g., your religion, race/ethnicity or culture, gender/sex, etc.). Please include a description of how you think each of your identity(s) has shaped your responses and/or your experiences of the situation you described.

Study Completion Questions

To complete participation in the study, participants answered forced-response questions regarding the number of times they took the survey and whether their answers included joke responses. Responses to these questions allowed us to assess repeat responses and exclude participants who did not answer study questions seriously. Some participants explained in the comments section that they took the survey more than once because their computer crashed part-way through other attempts ($n = 3$); I was able to find and remove duplicate responses for these participants by matching each participant's demographics and qualitative responses to another, incomplete set of responses in the data (note: incomplete responses would have been removed

regardless) (see Figure 2.1 for the number of participants excluded for using joke responses or taking the survey more than once).

Procedure

Approval for this study was obtained from the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board (IRB). Online recruitment advertisements directed participants to follow a survey link where they consented to study participation. Participants completed a short screening questionnaire to determine their eligibility for study involvement. Once they were deemed eligible, they completed the online survey; participants completed health and demographics questions, the relationship and sexuality questionnaires, the orgasm experience questions, and the study completion questions. Participation were compensated through entry into a raffle to win one of four \$50 Amazon.com gift certificates. E-mail addresses were separated from participant responses to ensure anonymity. Upon completion of the study, participants were directed to a debriefing form that described the purpose of the study and provided additional resources about experiences of orgasm.

Analyses

Qualitative responses were first coded using Dedoose Version 8.0.35. The codes were then exported to Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 24.0. All frequencies and quantitative analyses were conducted using SPSS.

Quantitative Analyses

I used the frequency function in SPSS to assess frequencies of participant responses to the initial prompt (where response options were Yes, No, and I'm Not Sure) and codes applied to qualitative responses; and, I used Pearson Chi-Square Tests to test for rate differences in orgasm

experiences types by gender/sex and for differences in orgasm pleasure evaluations by orgasm experience type.

Thematic Analyses

The first and second author conducted thematic analyses on all responses to the orgasm experience questions. I began with a bottom-up approach (i.e., an inductive content analysis as per Braun & Clarke, 2013) to explore patterns in participants' orgasm experience descriptions beyond the presence or absence of coercion, compliance, and/or pressure to orgasm, and for us to consider how participants might characterize their experiences as positive *and/or* negative in nuanced ways.

For the inductive content analysis, I and a research assistant independently read each transcript and summarized participants' responses. We compiled a list of preliminary themes based on these summaries and then discussed these themes to develop a coding scheme. The codes included a name, definition, examples, and exclusions (i.e., when not to code for the theme). To establish reliability of the coding scheme, we coded a subset of the transcripts (20%) and compared their coding, using an iterative process to revise the coding scheme after each round of coding. We then coded each transcript independently and discussed code adjustments when they arose. Notably, during this first round of coding, we broadly categorized whether participants' descriptions included coercion, compliant sex, or desired sex, and whether participants reported feeling pressured to orgasm. The inductive approach showed that feeling pressured to orgasm could be separated into two codes for the subsequent deductive analysis: feeling internally pressured to orgasm (the participant put pressure on themselves to orgasm) and feeling externally pressured to orgasm (the participants' partner said or did something that made the participant feel pressured to orgasm). After reliability was established for each code (greater

or equal to 80% agreement on presence; Boyatzis, 1998), we coded the remainder of the transcripts independently.

In the final stage of analysis, I reviewed the data to create a final thematic map. I compiled quotes that well-represented each theme from participants of diverse gender/sex/ual identities.

Deductive Content Analysis

I then used a deductive content analysis to create a categorization matrix to assess whether participants described orgasm experiences during coerced sex, compliant sex, and/or feeling pressured to orgasm. The categorization matrix included codes based on the type of sexual encounter and whether the participant felt pressured to orgasm because orgasm experiences could be characterized by either or both. The type of sexual encounter was coded as *coerced*, *compliant*, or *desired*. Encounters were coded as *coercion* if the participant reported that their partner explicitly pressured them into unwanted sexual activity (e.g., by making the participant feel guilty, persistent touching, threatening to break up or get angry), *compliance* if the participant reported that they freely consented to sexual activity that they did not desire (i.e., they were not explicitly pressured by their partner), or *desired* if the participant did not describe coercion or compliance and/or if the participant explicitly stated that they desired the sexual activity. If the participant felt pressured to orgasm (i.e., orgasm pressure), we coded the type of pressure as *internal* or *external*. Orgasm pressure was coded as *internal* if the participant reported that they put pressure on themselves to have an orgasm and/or *external* if the participant reported that their partner explicitly said or did something that made them feel pressured to have an orgasm. If the participant did not describe feeling pressured to have an orgasm or explicitly stated that they did not feel pressured to orgasm, we coded the type of orgasm pressure as *no*

pressure. Coding orgasm experiences by the type of sexual encounter and type of orgasm pressure resulted in a 3 (encounter: coerced, compliant, desired) x 3 (orgasm pressure: internal, external, no pressure) categorization matrix. See Table 2.2 for the number of participant descriptions that were categorized under each of the nine orgasm experience types.

I also used deductive content analysis to code participants' orgasm pleasure evaluations – that is, whether participants said that their orgasm experience was *more pleasurable*, *less pleasurable*, or *about the same* compared to orgasms when they did not feel pressured.

Results

Do Individuals Experience Orgasms During Sexual Coercion, During Sexual Compliance, and/or When They Feel Pressured to Orgasm?

To assess whether individuals experience orgasms during sexual coercion, during sexual compliance, and/or when they feel pressured to orgasm, I first calculated the rate of participants from the total sample ($N = 726$) who reported that they have had an experience like one in the initial prompt. When asked if they had ever had such an experience, 48.1% ($n = 349$) said yes, 15.4% ($n = 112$) said I'm not sure, and 35.5% ($n = 265$) said no. A research assistant and I read all qualitative responses for participants who provided them, checked that the descriptions responded to the prompt as requested, and found that 53 of the participants who responded that they were unsure described an encounter that fit the prompt description. Thus, I concluded that overall, 55.4% ($n = 402$) of the participants reported having had an experience like one in the initial study prompt.

Of the 402 participants who had an experience like one in the study prompt, 289 described their experience. I was able to categorize most of their descriptions (96.19%) according to the categorization matrix, highlighting that people do experience orgasm during

sexual coercion, sexual compliance, and/or when they feel pressured to orgasm. See Table 2.2 for the number of participants who described an orgasm experience that fit into each category. Descriptions that did not fit into one of the nine categories either did not include enough information to be categorized ($n = 5$), or the description was characterized solely by gender identity conflict ($n = 10$), which is discussed in more detail in the results assessing participants' descriptions of their social location.

A chi-square test of independence assessing associations between the type of sexual encounter and the type of orgasm pressure was significant, $\chi^2(4) = 112.18, p < .001$. Thus, I conducted a two-sided test of equality for column proportions to examine specific differences, first entering the type of sexual encounter as columns, then entering the type of orgasm pressure as columns. Tests were adjusted for all pairwise comparisons using the Benjamini-Hochberg correction. The Benjamini-Hochberg procedure decreases the false discovery rate, defined as the expected proportion of the number of erroneous rejections to the total number of rejections (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995).

The comparisons of column proportions showed the following: Among coerced sex encounters, the proportion of participants who described no pressure (18.9%) or an external pressure (21.1%) to orgasm was significantly greater than the proportion of participants who described an internal pressure to orgasm (4.5%), all p 's = .009. The proportion of participants who described no pressure or external pressure to orgasm did not significantly differ, $p = ns$. Among compliant sex encounters, a significantly higher proportion of participants described no pressure to orgasm (78.7%) compared to internal (35.8%) or external (18.8%) pressure to orgasm, all p 's < .001; but, a significantly higher proportion of participants described internal compared to external pressure to orgasm, $p = .018$. Among desired sex encounters, a

significantly higher proportion of participants described internal (59.7%) or external (60.0%) pressure to orgasm compared to no pressure to orgasm (2.5%), $p < .001$; but, the proportion of participants who described internal versus external pressure to orgasm did not differ significantly, $p = ns$.

Across descriptions of non-pressured orgasms, a significantly higher proportion of participants described compliant sex (70.6%) than coerced sex (52.3%) or desired sex (3.2%), $p = .026$, $p < .001$; however, a significantly higher proportion of participants described coerced sex than desired sex, $p < .001$. Across descriptions of internally pressured orgasms, a significantly higher proportion of participants described desired sex (42.6%) than coerced sex (6.8%) or compliant sex (17.6%), all p 's $< .001$; however, there was no significant difference between the proportion of participants who described coerced sex versus compliant sex, $p = ns$. Across descriptions of externally pressured orgasms, a significantly higher proportion of participants described desired sex (54.3%) or coerced sex (40.9%) than compliant sex (11.8%), all p 's $< .001$; there was no significant difference between the proportion of participants who described coerced sex versus compliant sex, $p = ns$.

Can Consensual Sexual Encounters That Include Orgasm Be “Bad”?

Participants' descriptions of experiences where they had an orgasm during coerced sex, compliant sex, and/or orgasm pressure provide compelling evidence that consensual sexual encounters that include orgasm can be “bad.” Specifically, three themes from the combined deductive and thematic analyses supported the notion of “bad orgasm experiences”: 1) participants characterized their encounters in negative and/or non-positive ways despite orgasm occurrence, 2) participants more often described these orgasms as less pleasurable than in other non-pressured encounters, and 3) participants suggested that their experiences had negative

impacts on their relationships, sexuality, and/or psychological health. Not all experiences were bad, however, as shown by this additional theme: 4) some participants who experienced an orgasm during coercion, compliance, and/or orgasm pressure reported experiences that were characterized by positive or mixed feelings. I expand on each theme and provide illustrative quotes below.

Theme 1: Participants Characterized Their Encounters in Negative and/or Non-Positive Ways Despite Orgasm Occurrence

Many participants' encounter descriptions were – at face value – negative and/or non-positive. Generally, reports often suggested that orgasm co-occurred with and sometimes worsened the negative and/or non-positive affect associated with unwanted sex and/or feeling pressured to orgasm. Such descriptions were present within each category of the categorization matrix. The following examples of negative and/or non-positive orgasm experiences presented in Table 2.3 showcase how negative and/or non-positive affect can co-occur with orgasm across varying types of encounters.

Theme 2: Participants More Often Described These Orgasms as Less Pleasurable Than in Other Non-Pressured Encounters

To assess participants' evaluations of orgasm quality, I coded whether participants reported that their orgasm was more pleasurable, less pleasurable, about the same, or something else. Overall, 66.1% of participants reported that the orgasm was less pleasurable, 19.7% reported that the orgasm was about the same, 4.8% reported that the orgasm was more pleasurable, 1.4% reported a combination (e.g., “sometimes less but sometimes it’s about the same”), 1.7% reported that they did not remember how their orgasm during the bad orgasm

experience compared to other orgasms, and 5.9% did not report information about the quality of their orgasm.

I tested whether these ratings differed by orgasm experience type by conducting a Pearson chi-square test of independence. To ensure that no more than 20% of cells in the chi-square test had an expected count of less than 5, I compared orgasm quality ratings (less pleasurable vs. about the same) with seven of the orgasm experience types (I excluded non-pressured orgasms during desired sex and internally pressured orgasms during coerced sex because they had cell counts of less than five). The chi-square test was not significant, $\chi^2(6) = 4.03$, $p = .673$, suggesting that the proportion of orgasms that were rated as less pleasurable was similar across the types of sexual encounters.

Some descriptions included additional details about the orgasm itself and/or its role in their overall experience of pleasure and provided insight into what participants meant when they said their orgasm was less pleasurable. Generally, participants suggested that their orgasms were physically weaker, physical reactions only, emotionally less pleasurable, or painful.

Weaker Orgasms. Participants frequently described the orgasms in their bad orgasm experiences as physically weaker than other orgasms, suggesting that negative affect can dampen the physical sensation of orgasm. One participant, when describing orgasms during encounters where she was tired, stress, bored, or concerned with her partner's ego, explained, "They [the orgasms] were rushed, shallow, and unsatisfying at worse, and a neutral physical feeling at best" (Lesbian Woman, 27). Other participants made similar statements, again emphasizing diminished physical sensation; for example, "Orgasms when I'm tired or disinterested often simply feel weaker or forced" (Heterosexual Man, 23); "It was dull for lack of better word" (Heterosexual Woman, 22).

Physical Reactions Only. Descriptions of orgasms also suggested that orgasms can sometimes occur as a solely physical response with no pleasure at all. For example, one woman reported, “[The orgasm was] less pleasurable...sometimes there was no climax and I orgasmed but it kind of sucked and didn't really feel like an orgasm but physically it was” (Heterosexual Woman, 24). Similarly, a man reported, “It [the orgasm] was much less pleasurable because it was purely technical. Very short and purely physical without so to say ‘brain-gasm.’ 1/10” (Heterosexual Man, 29).

Emotionally Less Pleasurable. Other participants stated that the physical sensation of orgasm was similar compared to orgasms in other encounters, but that the *emotional* component was worse in ways that made the orgasm less pleasurable overall. For example, as one participant stated, “The actual physical experience is about the same but the emotions are less pleasurable” (Queer, Nonbinary, 20). Other participants echoed this in statements such as “It was physically the same amount of pleasure but I wasn't able to enjoy the pleasure” (Bisexual Trans Man, 18) and “The physical sensation of orgasm was about the same, but I was emotionally upset” (Bisexual Man, 37). These reports highlight how even when physical pleasure *was* present at orgasm, this did not necessarily mean that the orgasm was perceived as pleasurable overall.

Painful. In addition to orgasms feeling weaker, just physical, or emotionally worse, some participants reported that their orgasm felt physically painful. While painful orgasm can indicate a sexual function disorder, these participants indicated that their painful orgasm was specifically due to the circumstances of the encounter. For example, one participant explained, “[The orgasm was] less pleasurable. It felt like the physiology of an orgasm without the emotional/spiritual component. It was also painful, like I didn't have any adrenaline to buffer the physical sensation” (Heterosexual Woman, 35). Other participants implied that the pain at orgasm occurred because

the circumstances of the encounter meant that they were not fully sexually aroused. For example, one participant said:

I was too tired to continue (internally) but I felt pressured to continue until the person I was having sex with had an orgasm. I also had an orgasm but it was physically painful because I was tired. Although I am usually assertive in sexual encounters, sometimes I feel that I should not stop until the person gets off. [The orgasm was] less pleasurable (Bisexual Woman, 24).

Theme 3: Participants Suggested That Their Experiences Had Negative Impacts on Their Relationships, Sexuality, and/or Psychological Health

Relationships and Sexuality. A number of participants expressed frustration with their partner for pressuring them to have sex and/or an orgasm and highlighted how this decreased their satisfaction with the relationship. For example, a participant explained:

There were multiple occasions during my first marriage where my ex-husband pressured me to have sex, even bartering or making agreements, and I rarely ever had an orgasm, due to either disinterest or not having intercourse for a long enough time to become aroused. It was a major emotional strain and it definitely took a toll on our relationship. [The orgasm was] less pleasurable - it was painful, less 'strong' or impactful, and not so much of a release (Heterosexual Woman, 36).

Other participants similarly described how consensual sexual experiences that included orgasm negatively impacted their sexual satisfaction and/or functioning. The negative impacts on sexual satisfaction and/or functioning were perhaps already evidenced by participants' reports that their orgasms were generally less pleasurable psychologically and physically than in other experiences. However, participants also provided examples beyond orgasm quality; for example,

one participant explained how being pressured to have sex or orgasm led them to lose interest in the sexual activity more generally:

I take a while to orgasm. The last girl I was seeing really made it a point to try and make me orgasm via oral stimulation, and it would go on and on until I was tired/disinterested. I would feel bad because she thought it was taking so long due to lack of skill on her part (though that wasn't the case), and I would really do my best to 'help' myself along until I would finally climax, but by then it was not satisfying in the slightest and I was just happy to be done. This problem also occurred during sex, and she was much less hesitant about divulging her feelings about it, often saying, 'I just want you to cum' and 'cum for me'. I definitely understand it was supposed to be a turn on, but knowing her frustration and the problems we had had before I would immediately lose interest in sex and it really felt more like I was just being pressured into climaxing for her own satisfaction. It [the orgasm] was absolutely less pleasurable and satisfying (Heterosexual Man, 20).

Additionally, I noted that some participants also reported that it was more difficult to have an orgasm during coerced sex, compliant sex, and/or orgasm pressure; and in some cases, this led to an inability to orgasm in future encounters. As one participant said:

In the end, I started to have a lot of trouble having orgasms with her at all, because the pressure to come made me feel too stressed out, but when this first became an issue I sometimes let sex continue past the point where I would have preferred to stop, and then I would come by fantasizing about something else, and feel rather icky and unaffectionate afterwards. I remember these experiences quite negatively – on a physical level, I would have an orgasm without feeling much pleasure, and during and afterward I would feel

disconnected and irritated that she seemed to expect me to perform for her regardless of my pleasure (Bisexual Woman, 26).

Psychological Health. Participants also implied that having an orgasm during coerced sex, compliant sex, and/or orgasm pressure had a negative impact on their psychological health. Generally, a number of participants cited feeling upset, frustrated, or emotionally detached. For example, a participant stated:

I have felt pressured to continue sexual activity because my partner was enjoying herself and wanted to achieve orgasm and wanted me to as well. I felt sad, anxious, and ashamed. My positive feelings (pleasure) were fleeting and I felt sad and detached afterwards (Gay, Nonbinary, 33).

Furthermore, many participants also reported feeling frustrated with or betrayed by their body because their orgasm was unwanted, or they felt they should not have had an orgasm during an undesired sexual encounter. This participant explained feelings of disgust associated with orgasming after allowing a partner to touch their genitals despite not wanting to be touched:

When you're having sex with someone, they usually want to feel like they are making you feel good. There's a strong pressure to orgasm so they can feel like they succeeded. And sometimes I don't even want to be touched on my genitals at all, during sex, because sometimes gender dysphoria is really bad and it feels awful to be touched there. But some of the time I will just close my eyes and try to clench through the feelings of white noise and static and let an orgasm pass through my body, almost against my own control or desires, and I'm immediately filled with sorrow afterwards, and I feel disgusting and betrayed by my own body (Bisexual, Nonbinary, Transmasculine, 29).

Importantly, participants also implied that the act of having an orgasm during an encounter otherwise characterized by negative affect meant that their concerns were not taken seriously by partners. For example, this participant explained how their partner would brush off their concerns because of the assumption that they must have enjoyed the encounter:

For the past couple of years, sometimes, before we start sex, I'll ask if it's alright if she can bring me to orgasm using her hand or her mouth if I'm able to resist having an orgasm before she experiences one. She occasionally agrees, but when the time arrives, after she's experienced an orgasm...she always ignores me and holds me so I can't pull my penis out of her, then works hard to bring me to orgasm inside her vagina while I irritatedly ask her to stop...When I ask why she does this, she just says, 'You enjoyed it, didn't you?', or something like that, and brushes me off...I feel used and ignored, and pressured to have an orgasm in a way I don't always want to...[The orgasm was] much less pleasurable. I'm focused entirely on my frustration and disappointment (Heterosexual Man, 35).

Theme 4. Some Participants Reported Orgasm Experiences That Were Characterized by Positive or Mixed Feelings

Although many participants described how their orgasm experiences during coerced sex, compliant sex, and/or orgasm pressure were bad, this was not the case for every participant. That is, many participants suggested that their experiences were generally positive or included mixed positive and negative aspect(s). Notably, many participants who reported generally positive experiences suggested that their reasons for engaging in unwanted sex were approach-motivated (e.g., they engaged in unwanted sex to increase intimacy, improve the relationship, etc.). That positive experiences included descriptions of approach motivations aligns with previous research

that has suggested that approach motivations for sex are associated with positive outcomes (Impett et al., 2005; Impett & Peplau, 2003; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). For example, one participant said:

There have been several instances where I was tired, or not in the mood to have sex. My partner initiated it, I was at first annoyed but then got into it. I reminded myself that intimacy is special and we are not always guaranteed time, so that helped reduce my annoyance. Once I was more turned on, I was receptive to it and then engaged (Lesbian Woman, 28).

Additionally, a number of participants who reported generally positive experiences cited their partner's intentions as important to their positive perception of the encounter; that is, participants were more likely to feel positively towards the encounter if they felt their partner was acting out of interest in the participant's pleasure or the relationship. For example, this participant highlighted their partner's enthusiasm as influential to their orgasm experience during compliant sex:

[I was] tired. Not as into it as I normally am. Partner was, however, deeply into the moment. They 'kept at me' and, while I wasn't enthusiastic or even interested, their enthusiasm on my behalf eventually got me going... What was a moment's duty became closer to real fun because of their urgent desire that I, in fact, have fun. [The orgasm was] differently pleasurable. It was OK as orgasms go, but seeing how pleased my partner was afterwards recast the experience in a more positive light than it felt in the moment (Bisexual Woman, 52).

Similarly, this participant noted that they were grateful that their partner was invested in their pleasure at all:

I have not had any negative feeling during and after the sexual activity. My partner frequently feels like I must have an orgasm, although I am usually content while we are having sex. My positive feelings are that my partner wants to ensure that he is pleasing me. Sometimes he will ask if I've had an orgasm and if not, he will continue sexual activity in an attempt to make me orgasm...I think my gender has made me appreciate that my man wants to make sure he is pleasing me because sometimes there is the misconception that men are only concerned about themselves. It [the orgasm] was about the same (Heterosexual Woman, 32).

Other participants reported that certain aspects of their experiences were positive, but, these were often contextualized within orgasm experiences that were negative in some way.

For example, this participant highlighted how their bad orgasm experiences eventually lead to better sexual communication with their spouse:

My wife pressured me into having sex, into which I half-heartedly got into because I couldn't listen to her whine afterwards...In the middle of it I was just thinking to stop when she climaxed but then that would be more whining and complaining and emotional blackmail so I just soldiered on. Positive feelings was that after that couple of times I decided to not do that again because it just damages our relationship...we talked about it and she now understands that it was wrong and that an erection and (or) orgasm doesn't mean I enjoyed it really...it was positive experience at the end, or better said...[a] negative experience which lead to positive ends (Heterosexual Man, 29).

And, in this example, a participant highlighted how their orgasm served as a relief because it allowed them to end an unwanted sexual encounter:

I had sex once with someone who was a friend. I was ambivalent about having sex with this person because of how it might change our relationship...my sex partner did not directly pressure me to have an orgasm but clearly wanted me to, because he had. I wanted to have an orgasm because it would help bring the sexual encounter to closure. [The orgasm was] less pleasurable! Although it did bring me relief to orgasm because it helped mark the end of the encounter (Queer Woman, 36).

How Does Social Location Shape Bad Orgasm Experiences?

I conducted two Pearson chi-square tests to assess whether gender/sex identity (women vs. men) or sexual identity groups (sexual minority vs. sexual majority) were more likely to describe certain orgasm experience types in the categorization matrix. To ensure the validity of the chi-square test, I consolidated gender/sex/ual identity groups, excluded non-binary participants from this analysis because of an insufficient sample size for chi-square analyses, and did not include orgasm experience types with cell counts of less than five (i.e., I excluded internally pressured orgasms during coerced sex or non-pressured orgasms during desired sex).

The Pearson chi-square test assessing the association between gender/sex and orgasm experience type was not significant, $\chi^2(6) = 9.59, p = .143$. That is, the proportions of women who described each orgasm experience type was statistically similar to the proportions of men who described each orgasm experience type.

The Pearson chi-square test assessing the association between sexual identity and orgasm experience type was significant, $\chi^2(6) = 14.68, p = .023$. Using a two-sided test of equality for column proportions (adjusted for all pairwise comparisons using the Benjamini-Hochberg correction), I found the following significant differences: the proportion of sexual majority participants who described a non-pressured orgasm during coerced sex (15.2%) was significantly

higher than the proportion of sexual minority participants who described a non-pressured orgasm during coerced sex (4.7%), $p = .003$. Additionally, the proportion of sexual minority participants who described an internally pressured orgasm during compliant sex (11.8%) was significantly higher than the proportion of sexual majority participants who described an internally pressured orgasm during compliant sex (4.0%), $p = .031$. All other proportion comparisons within the chi-square test were not significant, all p 's = ns.

Although the chi-square tests suggested that there were few significant differences in the proportions of gender/sex/ual identity groups who reported various orgasm experience types, participants' qualitative responses suggested that gender/sex/ual identity, along with other factors, still shaped their experiences in meaningful ways. Specifically, I found that, when asked to consider whether they felt that their identities shaped the experience they described, participants cited gender, sexual identity, race/ethnicity, and religion as important. I expand on each of these social location descriptions below and provide illustrative quotes.

Gender/sex/ual Identity Scripts and Stereotypes

Many participants cited that their gender/sex and/or sexual identity shaped their orgasm experiences. Specifically, participants often explained how gendered sexual scripts and stereotypes about their sexual orientation contributed to their experience in negative and/or positive ways.

For example, many women who had sex with men said that they felt pressured to have orgasms to bolster men's egos and make them feel sexually accomplished. As one participant said, "Women often feel pressured to have orgasms when having sexual activity with men because it's important to the man to please them" (Heterosexual Woman, 34).

Interestingly, however, women also cited the stereotype that most men are not concerned about women's orgasms; and thus, they felt that they should be grateful for their male partner's interest in their orgasm. For example, one participant stated, "I think that as a woman, there's an expectation that men aren't good or don't care as much about the female orgasm, so when you find a guy who does care, you should hold on to them and appreciate them even when you don't necessarily care about orgasming that night" (Heterosexual Woman, 32).

Men (both sexual majorities and minorities), on the other hand, often cited frustration with the stereotype that men are always interested in sex and that their orgasms are easy and occur during every sexual encounter. As one man said, "The narrative seems to be that men can orgasm just about any time and don't need much to get there. I think I felt obligated to get there even at times I would have been content to stop" (Heterosexual Man, 32). Notably, much of the coercion that men experienced seemed to stem from this narrative as well; men reported that their partners would feel especially unskilled or unattractive when the man's orgasm did not occur because eliciting men's orgasm is supposed to be an easy task. As another man stated, "Maybe, as a male, I thought that I had to ejaculate in order for the sex to come to a happy end. My girlfriend definitely thought that, she was crying, saying that she couldn't give me pleasure" (Heterosexual Man, 28).

Participants also described how sexual identity stereotypes contributed to bad orgasm experiences. For example, multiple bisexual participants discussed the stereotype that bisexual individuals are lying about their "true" sexual identity and suggested that they and/or their partners might see orgasm occurrence as proof that they are really interested in sexual encounters with people of different genders. For example, one bisexual man reported, "As a bisexual man I feel obligated to perform with men and women every time. If I don't orgasm with a woman, it's

evidence that I'm really gay...if it's with a man it's 'are you seeing someone else, are you leaving me?' (Bisexual Man, 25). Similarly, a bisexual woman said, "Sometimes people can believe that, because you're bisexual, you're secretly never happy with them and are always lying about enjoying yourself. That adds a complicated layer to admitting when you are not having a good time" (Bisexual Woman, 24).

Furthermore, a number of sexual minority women cited that they feel pressured to orgasm during every sexual encounter because of stereotypes that women are especially good at giving other women orgasms. A participant explained, "With some female partners, there is pressure to orgasm because of the assumption women are very effective at pleasuring other women, and I don't want to have a big discussion over not orgasming" (Bisexual Woman, 30). This stereotype sometimes overlapped with the expectation that women are more selfless than men when it comes to sexual pleasure, and some women highlighted how this can also be used to invalidate concerns about coercion. For example:

...We got into a number of fights about this, where I would get upset over feeling pressured sexually, and she would respond that she was just interested in my pleasure and wanted to see me come, and I think that this was kind of fed by ideas about queer women's sex being more sensual and egalitarian...she was affronted that I would refer to the situation as sexual pressure, even though she would sulk and make fun of me if I turned her down...(Bisexual Woman, 26).

Other women, however, suggested that their woman partner *was* particularly selfless and caring in ways that neutralized the negative affect associated with the experience:

I think the fact that I am gay and attracted to women primarily helped the previous situation be okay rather than awful. It was far from the best sex I've had, but the fact that

she was a friend and a woman who was skilled at reading emotions and providing aftercare helped me feel secure even when I wasn't 150% into the encounter itself...If this had happened with a man I believe it would have been traumatic to me (Lesbian Woman, 23).

Note that the participant attributed her partner's actions to the partner's gender/sex identity rather than her personality, highlighting how the participant used gendered stereotypes to reflect more positively on an orgasm experience that was otherwise characterized as bad.

Gender Identity Conflict

A number of participants reported that the distress related to the misalignment of their gender identity and sex contributed to their bad orgasm experience in some way ($n = 38$). I refer to this experience broadly as gender identity conflict.

Ten participants (Trans Women, $n = 8$; Trans Nonbinary/Agender, $n = 1$; did not report gender, $n = 1$) provided orgasm experience descriptions that focused *only* on how their gender identity conflict negatively influenced their orgasm experiences; that is, they did not describe experiences related to sexual coercion, compliance, and/or feeling pressured to orgasm and were therefore not categorized according to the categorization matrix. These findings suggest that, for some individuals, gender identity conflict is what made their orgasm experience bad. For example, one participant said:

As a trans female with a female partner sometimes after orgasm I feel a lot of dysphoria and unhappiness with my body. I suppose some of it feels a little sad as a reminder of being in the wrong body and some of it feels like jealousy and sadness that I will never be able to feel the true sensation of having a female orgasm...it's hard to explain but that actually used to happen a lot before I came out to my wife. They [orgasms] feel about the

same physically. Sometimes when I'm feeling less pressure or dysphoria I don't have as much after thought but physically they are basically the same (Bisexual Trans Woman, 29).

Other participants who reported gender identity conflict ($n = 29$) reported that their orgasm experiences were characterized by gender identity conflict *and* coerced sex, compliant sex, and/or orgasm pressure; that is, their descriptions were categorized according to the categorization matrix. This suggests that gender identity conflict sometimes intertwined with or contributed to other bad aspects of their experiences rather than defined them. For example, this participant described how gender identity conflict perhaps *exacerbated* the negative affect elicited during a compliant sexual encounter in which the participant was externally pressured to orgasm. They said:

I was bored, a little sore and wanted to go to sleep. My partner at the time wanted to be a 'considerate' lover which to him meant I had to orgasm first...neither I or any of the partners I had before my husband were very good at talking about sex either before during or after. They would ask for praise after, 'did you cum? was it good for you?' kind of thing. It didn't help that I would dissociate because of dysphoria, so I would often be watching sex from outside myself and analyzing my performance to seem more like my assigned sex rather than allowing myself to feel what was going on. If they [orgasms] happened at all they would be shorter, with fewer repeating waves of pleasure and leave me feeling physically cold and not wanting to be touched (Pansexual, Genderfluid, 21).

Similarly, other participants described how gender identity conflict was more central to, but still not the only cause of their bad orgasm experience. For example, this participant reported

that their gender identity conflict *set the stage for* bad orgasm experiences characterized by externally pressured orgasms. They said:

I have never liked orgasming. My wife, however, feels insufficient, ugly, and otherwise negatively when she is unable to bring me to orgasm. There was a period when I had just begun transitioning where she was very concerned about our ongoing sex life and feeling like it might prevent us from being able to remain together. At that time I was essentially terrified that if I couldn't orgasm I was going to lose my wife. There was no pleasure from orgasm at that time. At other less stressful times it usually feels okay. I am a pre-op trans girl, and there's a large amount of dysphoria surrounding my genitals. I assume that's the primary cause for my sexual malfunction (Gay Trans Woman, 27).

Importantly, while most participants who reported gender identity conflict as defining or contributing to their bad orgasm experience identified as trans and/or nonbinary, not all trans and/or nonbinary participants reported gender identity conflict as a part of their bad orgasm experience ($n = 39$); that is, gender identity, gender identity conflict, and/or sexuality do not always or necessarily intertwine. A few participants stressed the importance of clarifying this; for example, one participant included a comment to us that said: “I want to be clear that not every trans person has this experience or feels this way about their body” (Queer, Nonbinary Trans, 25).

Race/Ethnicity

Seven participants mentioned their race when asked if they felt any aspect of their identity contributed to their experience. Three of these participants were Black women who mentioned that they felt stereotyped or fetishized in ways that contributed to their negative experience. For example, one woman said:

...with the partner mentioned, he sized up my body in ways that felt dehumanizing, commenting on me having a figure built for athletics and childbirth, which as a Black woman is pretty upsetting. Although I generally refer to and understand myself as a woman, I feel a deep dissociation from womanhood and from my body, which is...seen as deviant from the Eurocentric concept of womanhood, being seen as mostly a nearly nonhuman sexual object (Bisexual Woman, 19).

Moreover, two participants discussed how race influenced their experiences of privilege in ways that might contextualize their bad orgasm experiences. One participant was a white woman who described how being privileged and white likely made her less worried about her boundaries or consent being violated even when she had sex that was not entirely desired (Bisexual Woman, 37). Conversely, a Multiracial/Latino man suggested that societal, personal, and historical disadvantages may have generally left him more susceptible to an abusive relationship in which he was often coerced into sex (Heterosexual Man, 29).

Religion

Nine participants identified ways they felt religion influenced their sexuality and therefore potentially their orgasm experiences. Four participants cited that their Christian and/or Catholic upbringing created conflict, shame, and/or guilt around their sexuality that extended to sex and orgasm more generally. For example, as one of these participants explained, “Being brought up in traditional Catholic culture at the beginning of my sexual activities made me feel bad about having [an] orgasm and sex as well” (Bisexual Man, 29). Another participant, however, suggested that their background as a Christian led them to have positive views of marital sex, which meant that they chose to have sex even when they did not want to as a way to ensure their wife’s happiness (Heterosexual Man, 25). The other four participants who

mentioned religion suggested that becoming agnostic, atheist, or non-religious helped them become happier with and more open-minded about their sexuality and orgasms.

Together, participants discussions of gender, sexual identity, race/ethnicity, and religion highlighted how social location can shape bad orgasm experiences.

Discussion

In this study, I explored the phenomena of bad orgasm experiences during consensual sexual encounters. To do this, I asked participants of diverse gender/sex/ual identities about three types of sexual scenarios that might set the stage for bad orgasm experiences to occur.

Specifically, I asked participants whether they have ever had an orgasm during coerced sex, compliant sex, and/or when they felt pressured to have an orgasm (i.e., orgasm pressure), and if so, to describe the encounter in an open-ended text box. I also asked participants to consider how their identities may have contributed to the encounter they described. Using quantitative and qualitative analyses, I then assessed if and how orgasm experiences can be “bad” during consensual sexual encounters.

Results provided compelling evidence that bad orgasm experiences during consensual sexual encounters occur. That is, the majority of participants confirmed that they have experienced orgasm during coerced sex, compliant sex, and/or orgasm pressure; and, among such encounters, I found three themes that showcased that many of these orgasm experiences were “bad.” Specifically, I found that participants 1) described their experiences in negative and/or non-positive ways despite orgasm occurrence, 2) reported that their orgasms were less pleasurable compared to other, non-pressured orgasm experiences, and 3) suggested that their orgasm experiences had negative impacts on their relationships, sexuality, and/or psychological health. Additionally, however, I found that 4) some participants who experienced an orgasm

during coercion, compliance, and/or orgasm pressure reported orgasm experiences that were generally or somewhat positive.

Results also highlighted how social location shaped bad orgasm experiences – that is, participants suggested that gender/sex/ual identity scripts and stereotypes, gender identity conflict, race/ethnicity, and religion shaped their perceptions of and responses to having an orgasm during coerced sex, compliant sex, and/or orgasm pressure. Below, I discuss these findings and their implications for conceptualizations of the role of orgasm in sexual encounters.

The Evidence for and Implications of “Bad” Orgasm Experiences

Results showed that orgasms can occur during coerced sex, compliant sex, and orgasm pressure and that these experiences were often described in negative and/or non-positive ways. These findings highlight that orgasms can co-occur with negative affect during consensual sexual encounters, contrasting with previous research that has positioned negative affect as inhibitive for orgasm occurrence, especially for women (Fahs, 2014b; Kiefer et al., 2006). Of course, this does not mean that negative affect *never* inhibits orgasm occurrence; rather, it suggests that negative affect does not *always* inhibit orgasm occurrence. Most importantly however, the fact that orgasm can co-occur with negative affect shows that orgasms during consensual sexual encounters are not always universally positive experiences. This finding runs counter to how orgasms are portrayed in media messages and also to much of academic and medical discourse.

Participants also reported that the orgasms they experienced during coerced sex, compliant sex, and orgasm pressure were generally less pleasurable than those that occurred when they did not feel pressured. Specifically, participants suggested that their orgasms were weaker, felt like physical reactions only, were emotionally less pleasurable, and sometimes painful because of lack of arousal. Previous research has certainly evidenced that orgasms vary

in quality physiologically and psychologically (Fahs, 2014b; Mah & Binik, 2002, 2005). But notably, such research has typically focused on how affect *improves* orgasm quality, which at its worst is still assumed to be positive. For example, in the Orgasm Rating Scale, participants are only able to rate their cognitive-affective experience according to positive adjectives like loving, euphoric, relaxing, and ecstasy (Mah & Binik, 2010). The scale does not include options to rate orgasms according to negative adjectives, which perhaps bolsters misconceptions that orgasms cannot be negative. However, the current study highlights that negative affect can *reduce* orgasm quality during consensual sex by dampening or negating the physical and/or psychological pleasure associated with orgasm. Arguably, that the experiences described by participants could negatively affect orgasm pleasure in this way further suggests that orgasm experiences can be “bad” – at least compared to other orgasm experiences if not overall.

Participants’ also reported that their experiences negatively impacted their relationships, sexuality, and/or psychological health, further supporting that orgasm experiences can be “bad.” Notably, *why* these experiences had these negative impacts varied. For some participants, the negative impacts were attributed to the circumstances of sexual activity rather than the orgasm itself. That is, participants reported that the act of being coerced, feeling pressured to comply, or feeling pressured to orgasm was what elicited the negative effects – the orgasm was just a by-product of the encounter. That such encounters were negative aligns with previous research showing that sexual coercion, compliance, and feeling pressured to orgasm can have negative consequences (Baier et al., 1991; Braun et al., 2003; Brown et al., 2009; Eaton & Matamala, 2014; Gilfoyle et al., 1992; Muise et al., 2013; Potts, 2000; Roberts et al., 1995), though the current study is the first to my knowledge to show that these consequences may persist even when orgasm occurs.

Whereas some participants suggested that their orgasm was just a by-product of a negative encounter, others reported that their orgasm *worsened* the relational, sexual, and/or psychological effects of being coerced, feeling pressured to comply, or feeling pressured to orgasm. Specifically, a number of participants reported feeling upset because their orgasm occurrence led their partner to believe that the partner's problematic behaviors were wanted all along; and, as a result, participants felt ignored in ways that negatively impacted their relationship, sexual desire, and/or sexual functioning. Additionally, some participants suggested that their orgasm's occurrence made them feel "sad and detached" or "betrayed" by their own body because their orgasm seemed to invalidate the negative affect they were experiencing.

Evidence that orgasm occurrence can worsen the negative effects of coercion, compliance, and orgasm pressure highlights an important risk inherent to the current societal notion that orgasms are universally positive experiences. That is, the assumption that orgasms are universally positive – especially when they occur during consensual sex – potentially motivates individuals to assume that orgasm equals consent and enjoyment despite a partner's complaints or expressed disinterest/dissatisfaction. Additionally, assuming that orgasms can only occur when sex is wanted or enjoyed may have detrimental effects on the psychological health of those who have orgasm during sexual encounters characterized by negative affect. For example, having an orgasm may lead individuals to question or doubt to their own perceptions of a negative and/or problematic sexual encounter. Again, findings support the message that orgasm does not necessarily equate enjoyment (Levin & van Berlo, 2004); and, continuing to assume that it does risks dismissing people's lived experiences.

Although many participants described negative aspects and consequences of their experiences, there were also some positive and mixed descriptions of orgasm experiences during

coerced sex, compliant sex, and/or orgasm pressure. These findings highlighted how orgasm experiences during coerced sex, compliant sex, and/or orgasm pressure do not necessitate a “bad” experience. They also highlighted how such experiences can be comprised of changing, mixed, and/or conflicting affective responses. For example, a number of participants reported that they consented to unwanted sex because of approach-motivations (e.g., to increase intimacy, improve their relationship, to express gratitude towards their partner). Similar to findings from other studies, these approach motivations allowed them to characterize an otherwise unwanted encounter in a positive light either once the encounter began or in hindsight (Impett & Peplau, 2003; Impett et al., 2005; Muise et al., 2013). In these circumstances, orgasm occurrence often bolstered the participant’s positive feelings about the encounter and buffered against the negative affect that characterized their initial lack of desire. Of course, although responses like this suggest that orgasm occurrence does sometimes reflect an individual’s change in affect during an encounter, this was only the case for some participants. These positive descriptions should not be taken to mean that orgasm *always* reflects that an encounter changed from unwanted to wanted or unenjoyable to enjoyable, as is evidenced by other participants who reported that their experience was negative despite orgasm.

Other participants suggested that the encounter in which they had an orgasm was negative overall, but that it led to positive outcomes. For example, some participants suggested that the bad experience inspired better communication with their partner about their sexual needs. The positive role of communication in bad orgasm experiences aligns with findings from other studies demonstrating that better communication skills improve sexual and relationship satisfaction and buffer against the impacts of occasional negative encounters (Byers, 2005; Cupach & Comstock, 1990; Litzinger & Gordon, 2005). For other participants, the positive

outcome was that orgasm allowed the participant to end the sexual encounter. In these cases, orgasm occurrence during coerced sex, compliant sex, and/or orgasm pressure served a positive function; though arguably, orgasming for the sake of ending an encounter (i.e., “getting it over with”) suggests that the sexual experience was at least somewhat “bad” – or at least that it became unwanted (Muisse et al., 2013).

Social Location Shapes Bad Orgasm Experiences: Gender, Sexual Identity, Gender Identity Conflict, Race/Ethnicity, and Religion

Participants suggested that their identities – and the expectations surrounding them – also shaped their orgasm experiences. Specifically, participants cited expectations related to gender, sexual identity, gender identity conflict, race/ethnicity, and religion as important in the sexual experiences they described.

When citing gender/sex expectations, many women who had sex with men reported feeling pressured to have an orgasm to protect their male partner’s ego; and, many women who were explicitly pressured by their partner to orgasm reported that their partner was concerned about demonstrating his sexual skill. These reports align with sexual scripts that position women’s orgasm as a masculinity achievement for men and reflect the notion that men are likely to become upset when women do not orgasm with them (Chadwick & van Anders, 2017; Fahs, 2014b; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014). Furthermore, because men are stereotyped as uninterested in women’s sexual pleasure at all, some women felt that they should be especially grateful for men who express interest in women’s orgasms. These feelings of gratitude perhaps align with the notion that men who are invested in women’s orgasms are “enlightened” compared to men who are not, giving “enlightened” men an especially valued status as sexual partners (Gilfoyle et al., 1992). Investment in a partner’s sexual pleasure is not necessarily bad in itself; however,

findings suggest that women may feel pressured to engage in or continue unwanted sex because they feel pressured to value their male partner's "enlightened" approach to sexuality over their own desires.

Sexual minority and majority men reported resentment towards the stereotype that men are always interested in sex and that their orgasms are easy and occur during every sexual encounter. For many men, this assumption meant that they felt pressured to unwanted sex and to orgasm no matter how they felt about the encounter. Notably, findings highlight that, while men are typically socialized to believe that all sexual interactions and orgasms are positive (Smith et al., 1988; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1991; Wiederman, 2005), many men experience sexual encounters that include orgasm in negative ways. In line with some clinical research, these findings challenge the notion that men are "always in the mood" for sex (Murray, 2019), and demonstrate that men can and do have bad orgasm experiences despite assumptions that men's sexual and orgasm experiences are always positive.

Participants also described how their bad orgasm experiences were shaped by stereotypes and expectations related to their sexual identity. For example, some bisexual participants suggested that they felt pressured to orgasm with sexual partners of multiple genders to prove to their partners that they were "truly" bisexual, citing the stereotype that bisexual individuals are secretly gay or straight, but just currently undecided (Barker & Langdridge, 2008; Matsick & Rubin, 2018). Additionally, many sexual minority women reporting feeling like they had to orgasm with their women partners during every sexual encounter because of the assumption that women are especially skilled at giving other women orgasms (Walker, 2014). And, some sexual minority women in the study said their attempts to discuss the coercive behaviors they described with their women partners were dismissed because of the notion that women's sexual

relationships with other women are inherently egalitarian (Bolsø, 2005; Gordon, 2006; Nichols, 1987).

Gender identity conflict also played a role in participants' bad orgasm experiences – this was more central for some individuals and more tangential for others. That is, some participants felt that their gender identity conflict is what made the orgasm experience bad, similar to other research (Doorduyn & van Berlo, 2014); in these cases, participants said that their orgasm sometimes felt like an unwelcome reminder of unwanted genitals and/or a by-product of an encounter where gender identity conflict led them to psychologically disengage from the experience. For other participants, gender identity conflict perhaps set the stage for bad orgasm experiences by creating other stressors in the participant's relationship with their partner. Importantly, findings highlight how gender identity conflict can impact sexual relationships through different channels (i.e., sometimes through gender identity conflict directly related to bodies, but sometimes through the stress that gender identity conflict can have on a relationship) depending on the individual; these findings align with qualitative research on trans-identified individuals' experiences of relationships (Bauer & Hammond, 2015; Iantaffi & Bockting, 2011; Lenning & Buist, 2013). Notably, some participants with gender identity conflict clarified that the experiences they reported in the current study are not the experiences of all gender/sex minority individuals and should not be generalized as such.

Participants who reported that race/ethnicity shaped their bad orgasm experiences cited how their minority or majority status made others more or less likely to engage in problematic behaviors during their sexual encounters. For example, one Black woman participant described how a man's comment that she had an "athletic" body (an arguably racist comment that calls forth stereotypes about the athleticism of Black individuals; Walzer & Czopp, 2011) sharpened

the negative affect she felt during the sexual experience. Relatedly, one White woman posited that being privileged and white may have made her less worried about her boundaries or consent being violated even when she had sex that was not entirely desired. Such comments perhaps point to the important role that race/ethnicity can play in shaping perceptions of power in sexual relationships. These comments also highlight how racialized stereotypes and/or microaggressions may contribute to or set the stage for bad orgasm experiences to occur.

Some participants also suggested that religion played a role in how they perceived their sexuality more generally, which may have contributed to their perceptions of orgasm occurrence during coerced sex, compliant sex, and/or orgasm pressure. For example, some participants discussed how their religion upbringing created shame and guilt around sexuality, which extended into their feelings about sex and orgasm more generally. Others suggested that religion (or becoming non-religious) helped them become more open-minded about their sexuality and orgasms, though it was unclear how being more open-minded shaped their bad orgasm experiences specifically.

Limitations and Future Directions

My findings are based on qualitative research from an online convenience sample. Thus, results are representative of the participants in the study and generalizations beyond the current study's sample are limited. For example, participants in the study were perhaps especially comfortable discussing sexuality, given their decision to participate in a research study on sexuality topics. Participants also had to visit particular online websites (e.g., Facebook, Reddit, Craigslist) to see advertisements for the study; thus, the sample represents those who visit these websites and are comfortable using computers to answer questions and describe their experiences. Additionally, this study was subject to the advantages and disadvantages inherent to

asking qualitative research questions online. In particular, this format did not allow us to ask follow-up questions, which means I was unable to clarify unclear statements from participants or acquire more details about the meaning behind participant's responses. Using an online, non-interactive format also means that I was unable to clarify questions for participants who may not have understood them. Furthermore, when I asked participants to reflect on whether or not they had ever had an orgasm experience like one in the prompt, participants had the option to answer yes, I'm not sure, or no. Describing specific scenarios in the prompt may have encouraged participants to recast previous experiences in light of these descriptions when they otherwise might not have described them this way. This means that participants may have been more likely to answer "yes" when I asked them whether or not they had ever had such an experience.

Furthermore, although I sought to understand whether orgasm experiences can be "bad," I did not ask participants if they would or would not characterize the experience(s) they described as "bad." Rather, I asked participants to describe orgasm experiences that occurred during consensual but unwanted sex and/or encounters where they felt pressured to orgasm. I believe that negative descriptions, lessened pleasure, and other negative impacts provide evidence that orgasm experiences can be "bad," but, it is certainly possible that participants might disagree with this conclusion – for example, because they have mixed (but not entirely "bad") feelings about the encounter, they do not wish to portray their partner as "bad," or other reasons. Future research should include participants in the discussion of what constitutes a "bad" orgasm experience.

Additionally, this study only asked about orgasms during consensual sexual encounters that included coerced sex, compliant sex, and/or pressure to orgasm. Through assessing these types of encounters specifically, I was able to gain insight into orgasm experiences that were

arguably “bad”; however, there may be other types of bad orgasm experiences that were not explored in this study. Now that the phenomena of bad orgasm experiences have been established, future research should consider how orgasm experiences might be bad in a wider variety of contexts.

That participants named gender/sex, sexual identity, gender identity conflict, race/ethnicity, and religion in their descriptions highlights social location as an influential factor in individuals’ bad orgasm experiences. The sample was diverse in terms of gender/sexual identity, but participants were still relatively homogenous in other ways (e.g., race/ethnicity, education level, class). The homogeneity of the sample leaves open questions about how other social locations that were not represented in the sample might be relevant for individuals’ bad orgasm experiences. For example, there is reason to believe that women of color may experience more bad orgasm experiences and/or have worse outcomes than white women. Research has shown that Black women feel less comfortable asserting boundaries in sexual encounters where they seek pleasure than white women (Chmielewski, Bowman, & Tolman, 2020); and, women of color’s negative sexual experiences are more likely to be dismissed than those of white women because of racist stereotypes that already characterize Black and brown women as hypersexual and “un-rapeable” (Bryant-Davis et al., 2010; Danieli, 1998; Donovan & Williams, 2002; West, 2006). Additionally, research has shown that socially advantaged women eroticize sexual safety more than socially disadvantaged women (Higgins & Hirsch, 2008). Socially advantaged women may therefore experience fewer sexual encounters characterized by negative affect – and therefore fewer bad orgasm experiences – than socially disadvantaged women. However, I was unable to assess possible racial/ethnic and class-based differences due to low recruitment of participants from these identity groups in my sample.

Additionally, sample sizes were too small to assess nuanced differences between gender/sex/ual identity groups. Thus, I consolidated participants into women versus men and sexual minorities versus majorities for chi-square tests assessing differences in orgasm experiences types of the categorization matrix. Consolidating participants may have erased important nuances within gender/sex/ual identity groups. For example, I excluded non-binary participants from the chi-square test assessing the association between gender/sex and orgasm experience type. And, by creating sexual minority groups that combined participants of varying sexual minority identities, I was unable to assess whether reports of orgasm experience types differ by sexual minority identity. Given the important role of gender/sex/ual identity according to participants in their qualitative descriptions, future research should recruit larger samples sizes to assess these nuances.

Furthermore, I asked participants to reflect on how they felt their identities impacted their experiences, which perhaps requires participants to be aware of how their identities impact the way they move through the world. Many participants may not have known or previously considered how their identity impacted their experiences.

Conclusion

Overall, results from the current study highlight that orgasms during consensual sexual encounters are not universally positive experiences. Findings also refute the notion that orgasm occurrence during consensual sex means the encounter was wanted, arousal was present, and the experience was pleasurable. I hope the findings of this study will draw attention to an understudied phenomenon and will help individuals make sense of orgasm experiences that are negative and/or non-positive.

CHAPTER 3

Bad Orgasm Experiences and their Psychological, Relationship, and Sexual Outcomes

In this chapter, I describe my quantitative survey research testing associations between bad orgasm experiences that included coerced sex and/or coerced orgasms and negative psychological distress, relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, sexual functioning, and sexual desire. This research aimed to extend the findings from Chapter 2 by assessing bad orgasm experiences and these negative outcomes in a new sample using structural equation modeling. Negative outcomes are generally accepted as evidence that the causal behaviors are problematic (Coker et al., 2002; Katz & Myhr, 2008; Klettke et al., 2019); thus, demonstrating that bad orgasm experiences are associated with negative outcomes will further support that orgasm experiences can be “bad.”

Bad Orgasm Experiences with Coercion

I focused only on bad orgasm experiences that included coercion because previous research has shown strong links between coercion and negative outcomes. For example, non-assaultive, verbal sexual coercion has been associated with poor academic performance, decreased relationship satisfaction and sexual functioning, and increased depression, anger, social anxiety, and substance abuse (Chamberlain & Levenson, 2012; Coker et al., 2002; Crown & Roberts, 2007; Eaton & Matamala, 2014; Edelson et al., 2007; Katz & Myhr, 2008; Zweig et al., 1999). Similarly, research has shown that orgasm coercion can be distressing, lead to loss of interest in sex, make it more difficult to have orgasms, lead to pain upon orgasm occurrence,

and/or negatively affect an individual's relationship with their partner, among other outcomes (Chadwick et al., 2019; Potts, 2000; Roberts et al., 1995; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014). Given that my goal was to test whether links between coercive experiences and negative outcomes prevailed even when orgasm was present, assessing these scenarios was ideal for this follow-up.

Psychological, Relationship, and Sexual Outcomes

I also chose to specifically assess psychological, relationship, and sexual outcomes – that is, psychological distress, relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, sexual functioning, and sexual desire – because previous research on coercion and participants from the research in Chapter 2 implicated negative effects in these arenas of their lives.

Psychological Distress

Psychological distress generally refers to non-specific negative feelings that negatively impact aspects of daily life (Kessler et al., 2002). Notably, psychological distress tends to be highly correlated with a wide array of psychological conditions (e.g., depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder), with the added benefit of being faster and easier to assess than individual conditions on their own. As such, measures of psychological distress are often used as broad indicators for more severe psychological effects that require clinical treatment.

Notably, research has generally shown that experiencing non-violent forms of sexual coercion (i.e., those that perhaps overlap with consensual sex) is associated with increased psychological distress in women and men (Brown et al., 2009; French et al., 2015; Livingston et al., 2004). Given findings from Chapter 2 that orgasm can co-occur with the negative affect elicited by coercive experiences, it therefore seems plausible that bad orgasm experiences with coercion negatively impact psychological distress, too. Participants' descriptions of their bad orgasm experiences in Chapter 2 also support this – many described their experiences using

terms like “mental torture,” “hollow and mechanical,” “irritating and uncomfortable,” and “not a good experience,” among others. Additionally, some participants described instances where a partner blatantly ignored or doubted the participant’s complaints about coercive behaviors because they had an orgasm. One heterosexual man described an instance where he protested as his partner performed an unwanted sexual act during what was otherwise consensual sex. The man ended up having an orgasm, but when he later tried to address the unwanted behavior, his partner replied, “you enjoyed it, didn’t you?” before “brushing him off.” Dismissing a partner’s feelings of abuse and/or leading an abused partner to believe there are overreacting is sometimes called “gaslighting,” a behavior known to cause psychological distress in targets (Bates, 2020; Brandt & Rudden, 2020; Gass & Nichols, 1988).

Relationship and Sexual Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction typically refers to one’s overall evaluation of their romantic relationship; and, it is often of interest to researchers because higher relationship satisfaction tends to contribute to better mental health, higher levels of overall wellbeing, and even a longer lifespan (Dush & Amato, 2005; Horwitz et al., 1996). Notably, relationship satisfaction tends to be highly associated with sexual satisfaction, defined as individuals’ evaluation of their sexual relationship with their partner (Byers, 2005; Christopher & Sprecher, 2000). Events or behaviors (e.g., stress, coercion) that contribute to lower relationship and sexual satisfaction are generally seen as problematic (Christopher & Sprecher, 2000; Katz & Myhr, 2008).

Research has shown that verbal sexual coercion contributes to lower relationship and sexual satisfaction (Katz & Myhr, 2008; Katz & Tirone, 2010; Livingston et al., 2004), which suggests that these constructs may be at stake even if a target’s orgasm occurs. Participants’ descriptions from Chapter 2 supported this. For example, participant statements like “it was a

major emotional strain and it definitely took a toll on our relationship” and “over time I began to dislike sex all together” directly suggested that bad orgasm experiences negatively impacted relationship and sexual satisfaction.

Sexual Desire

Sexual desire generally refers to an individual’s drive to engage in sexual activity alone or with a partner. Some researchers have framed this drive as innate and biological, but evidence increasingly suggests that it fluctuates according to context (Basson, 2001; Brotto, 2010; Tiefer, 2004). According to a new heteronormativity theory of sexual desire, one of those contexts is sexual coercion. More specifically, the theory proposes that the presence of factors like coercion may contribute to lower levels of sexual desire, at least in women partnered with men (van Anders et al., 2020). In support, one study found that women with verbally coercive partners had lower sexual desire compared to women without verbally coercive partners (Katz & Myhr, 2008). Additionally, participant statements from Chapter 2 such as, “over time I began to dislike sex all together,” may have reflected a decrease in sexual desire resulting from their bad orgasm experience. As such, it is possible that bad orgasm experiences with coercion negatively impact sexual desire.

Sexual Functioning

Sexual functioning refers to physiological aspects of sexual activity such as experiencing sexual desire (though whether or not this is purely physiological is contested, as noted previously), becoming sexually aroused, having and maintain an erection and/or vaginal lubrication, reaching orgasm, and satisfaction from orgasm (McGahuey et al., 2000; Tiefer, 2004). Sexual functioning is of interest to researchers because low sexual functioning is often considered a potential medical disorder; and, individuals with low sexual functioning can

experience high levels of distress. Importantly, research has suggested that contextual factors like coercion can contribute to decreased sexual functioning. For example, one study showed that women who experienced sexual coercion within the last year (vs. women who had not) had significantly lower sexual functioning (Leonard et al., 2008). Another study showed that men who had experienced coercion during intercourse for conception (vs. men who had not) also reported marginally poorer sexual functioning (Peterson & Buday, 2020). As such, bad orgasm experiences with coercion might also contribute to lower sexual functioning, given that orgasm does not necessarily negate or erase negative affect. In support, participant comments from Chapter 2 like, “I started having a lot of trouble having orgasms with her at all because the pressure to come made me feel too stressed out,” directly implicated negative impacts on outcomes related to sexual functioning.

Unclear and Mixed Associations between Bad Orgasm Experiences and Outcomes

Although many participants in Chapter 2 suggested that their bad orgasm experiences had negative outcomes, others reported outcomes that were less clear or mixed. That is, while some participants reported that their bad orgasm experiences affected their sexuality and/or relationships beyond the encounter itself, other participants described negative effects within the immediate context of the bad orgasm experience. Descriptions centered on the immediate context made it unclear how much the experiences mattered in the long-term. For example, participants said things like, “It felt easier at the time to just get it over with than make the situation awkward” and “that really killed the mood.” Furthermore, some participants noted that the effects of their bad orgasm experiences were somewhat positive despite some negative affect – for example, one participant said, “seeing how pleased my partner was afterwards recast the experience in a more positive light than it felt in the moment” (Chadwick et al., 2019). Together,

these findings suggest that bad orgasm experiences may have long-term negative impacts for some. But, given evidence of neutral, unclear, or even positive impacts for others, additional research is needed to understand the outcomes associated with having these experiences.

The Current Study

In the current study, I sought to clarify associations between bad orgasm experiences that included coerced sex and/or coerced orgasms and their outcomes. I defined coerced sex as non-assaultive, verbal pressure to engage in unwanted sexual activity (i.e., where individuals are verbally, but not violently pressured to consent to unwanted sex by their partner; Waldner-Haugrud & Magruder, 1995). Although many scholars suggested that coerced sex and consensual sex are incompatible concepts (Basile, 1999), research has shown they often overlap in people's lived experiences (Basile, 2002; Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008; Beres, 2014; Conroy, Krishnakumar, & Leone, 2015; Shotland & Goodstein, 1992); as such, I defined coerced sex as simultaneously consensual given that participants said they consented. I defined coerced orgasms as orgasms that occurred upon being explicitly pressured by a partner to orgasm. Notably, although Chapter 2 did not describe being explicitly pressured to orgasm by a partner as coercion, I called orgasms under such circumstances "coerced" orgasms in the present study because other research I have conducted (see Chapter 4) demonstrated that pressuring a partner constitutes a form of coercion (Chadwick & van Anders, 2020).

I conducted an online survey that asked participants about three types of orgasm experiences with their current partner that had been characterized as "bad" in Chapter 2: 1) non-coerced orgasms during coerced sex, 2) coerced orgasms during desired sex, and 3) coerced orgasms during coerced sex. Using structural equation modeling, I then tested whether these experiences were associated with participants' psychological distress, sexual functioning,

relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and dyadic sexual desire. I also tested the association between bad orgasm experiences with participants' current partner and faking orgasm with that partner. Given findings from Chapter 2 that orgasm does not nullify negative affect, I expected that such circumstances would be associated with negative outcomes even when orgasm occurs. Accordingly, I developed five hypotheses to test such associations. These hypotheses and the study protocol were preregistered on [aspredicted.org](https://aspredicted.org/#34823) ([#34823](https://aspredicted.org/#34823)).

Hypotheses (H1-H5) for Bad Orgasm Experiences and their Outcomes

My first hypothesis (H1) was that participants who had ever experienced any of the three bad orgasm experiences (i.e., non-coerced orgasm during coerced sex, coerced orgasm during desired sex, or coerced orgasm during coerced sex) with their current relationship partner would have worse (a) psychological distress, (b) sexual satisfaction, (c) relationship satisfaction, (d) sexual functioning, and (e) dyadic sexual desire relative to participants who had never had the bad orgasm experiences with their current partner.

I also imagined that bad orgasm experiences that included coerced orgasm during coerced sex might elicit more negative affect and therefore have the worst outcomes. I predicted that coerced orgasms during coerced sex would have the worst outcomes because experiencing coerced orgasms during coerced sex involves more points of coercion in the sexual encounter: when the perpetrator is trying to initiate sexual activity and when the perpetrator is trying to pressure their partner to orgasm. As such, my second hypothesis (H2) was that experiencing this scenario would be a stronger predictor of negative outcomes than experiencing non-coerced orgasms during coerced sex and coerced orgasms during desired sex. On a similar note, I also considered the possibility that experiencing more of the bad orgasm experience *types* would be associated with worse outcomes; thus, my third hypothesis (H3) was that experiencing more of

the bad orgasm experience types would be associated with worse (a) psychological distress, (b) sexual satisfaction, (c) relationship satisfaction, (d) sexual functioning, and (e) sexual desire.

I also expected that approach versus avoidance motivations might contribute to outcomes associated with bad orgasm experiences. Accordingly, research has shown that individuals' motivations for consenting to unwanted sex are important for how people experience sexual encounters (Cooper et al., 1998; Impett et al., 2005, 2008); that is, individuals with approach motivations (i.e., those who consent to unwanted sex because they want to increase intimacy, experience love, make their partner happy, etc.) tend to experience positive outcomes, whereas individuals with avoidance motivations (i.e., those who consent to unwanted sex because they want to avoid negative consequences) tend to experience negative outcomes. Therefore, my fourth hypothesis (H4) was that approach and avoidance motivations would moderate associations between bad orgasm experiences and outcomes, such that individuals with high approach motivations would have better outcomes than individuals with high avoidance motivations.

Finally, I also considered the role of gender/sex in associations between bad orgasm experiences and outcomes. Previous research has shown that women and men experience coercion at different rates and are impacted by it to different degrees. For example, sexual coercion experiences are common for women *and* men (Struckman-Johnson et al., 2003); but, women are more likely to experience coercion and are more likely to feel obligated to consent to unwanted sex (Livingston et al., 2004; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1991). Additionally, women who have experienced sexual coercion have been shown to experience higher levels of depression, anger, social anxiety, and increased disappointment with sex (Brown et al., 2009; Katz & Myhr, 2008; Livingston et al., 2004; Zweig et al., 1997, 1999), whereas men

have more neutral reactions to similar experiences and experience fewer long-term effects (Struckman-Johnson, 1988; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1994). Scholars have suggested that men's more neutral reactions may be because men are socialized to believe that men cannot be sexually victimized and to perceive any kind of sexual interaction with women as positive (Smith et al., 1988; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1991; Wiederman, 2005). Based on these findings, my fifth hypothesis (H5)⁵ was that associations between bad orgasm experiences and negative outcomes would be stronger for women than men.

Exploratory Hypothesis (EH) about Faking Orgasms and Bad Orgasm Experiences

I also tested a second exploratory hypothesis (EH), which proposed that participants who had ever had a bad orgasm experience with their partner would be more likely to have ever faked an orgasm with that partner. This was an exploratory hypothesis because I did not list it in the preregistration or include it in the original analysis plan, though I did include questions in the survey related to this inquiry because I was interested in what bad orgasm experiences meant for people's orgasm experiences more broadly.

This hypothesis may seem counterintuitive. Having a bad orgasm experience demonstrates an individual's ability to orgasm in negative circumstances, which could reflect an ability to orgasm more easily in general. Indeed, ease of orgasm has been shown to be negatively associated with faking orgasms (Harris et al., 2019). However, having a bad orgasm experience

⁵ In the preregistration, H5 also predicted that associations between bad orgasm experiences and negative outcomes would be stronger for participants with other marginalized identities (e.g., sexual and racial minorities). However, I used convenience sampling as our recruitment strategy, which did not result in large enough sample sizes to assess predictions for each of the marginalized identities listed in our preregistration. As such, the current study only tested H5 predictions for gender/sex differences.

does not necessarily mean that someone's orgasms are always easy, or that they always occur under such circumstances. Individuals who have had bad orgasm experiences may also have been in a situation where their orgasm does not occur, but with a partner who has previously pressured them to have/continue unwanted sex or to orgasm. As such, individuals who have ever had a bad orgasm experience with their partner may be more likely to fake an orgasm – regardless of how often they actually orgasm – because they have been previously prompted to anticipate negative consequences if they do not “go along with” the sexual encounter (Chadwick & van Anders, 2020; Katz & Tirone, 2010; Thomas et al., 2017).

Method

Participants

I recruited 500 participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) using CloudResearch powered by TurkPrime. To ensure quality participation, I recruited experienced MTurk workers with a minimum of 100 tasks and task approval rate of 95% (Litman et al., 2017; Peer et al., 2014). Research has demonstrated that a benefit of using MTurk samples is the greater variation in age, socioeconomic status, and geographic location compared to other convenience sample alternatives (e.g., introductory psychology students; Clifford et al., 2015).

The recruitment ad posted on MTurk was titled “Relationships and Sexual Scenarios (~30 minutes)” and the study was described as a survey on relationships and sexuality estimated to take about 30 minutes. Instructions stated that participants were eligible to participate if they met all of the eligibility criteria and then instructed participants to follow a link to begin the survey. To be eligible for this study, participants had to be 18 years of age or older, have been in a relationship with their current partner for at least six months (I thought that a minimum of six months would help ensure that participants had had enough sexual and relationship experience

with their current partner to be able to answer the research questions), and have had an orgasm during consensual sexual activity with this partner. Participants who completed the survey were paid \$5.00 each.

Participants were excluded from the study if they were ineligible or I was unable to determine their eligibility ($n = 17$). Notably, research has suggested that data from online surveys can be compromised by computer bots (i.e., computer programs that complete online forms automatically) and human bots (i.e., humans who complete surveys quickly and repeatedly without attending to questions thoughtfully). To account for potential bot activity in the survey, I assessed all open-ended questions to ensure that responses made sense and corresponded to the questions asked; this is one effective strategy for identifying bot activity, as bots often write nonsensical answers to open-ended questions (Yarrish et al., 2019). Using this strategy, I excluded participants who did not write in their gender/sex identity or included an unclear answer (e.g., they wrote “cisgender” with no other information) ($n = 17$) and who did not clearly answer the central research questions (either by leaving questions blank or providing nonsensical descriptions in open-ended text boxes) ($n = 26$). I also excluded participants if they reported that they took the survey more than once ($n = 4$), included joke answers in the end-of-survey questions ($n = 15$), the year of their birth did not align with their reported age ($n = 2$) in the end-of-survey questions, their data suggested straight-line responding ($n = 9$), or if more than half (> 2) of their responses on dependent measures were flagged as multivariate outliers ($n = 5$). I assessed straight-line responding via the Relationship Assessment Scale, which was the only scale that included reverse-coded items. To flag multivariate outliers on two or more dependent variables, I calculated the Mahalanobis distance for each dependent variable scale, compared

these values to a chi-square distribution with the same degrees of freedom as the scale, and noted participants with p 's $< .01$ for more than two scales.

Upon running analyses with and without gender/sex minority participants ($n = 4$), I found meaningful differences in the results. The sample size for gender/sex minorities was too small to statistically determine why these differences occurred; thus, I excluded gender/sex minority participants and tested associations in gender/sex majority (i.e., women and men) participants only. This exclusion does not mean that gender/sex minority people's bad orgasm experiences were less important or even necessarily different than gender/sex majorities. Rather, findings highlighted the possibility that bad orgasm experiences may have unique effects for gender/sex minorities and majorities that warrant a more representative analysis or the inclusion of additional contextual variables to further understand this. After these exclusions, the total sample included 430 participants (M age = 37.22 years, $SD = 10.19$). See Table 3.1 for participants' demographic information.

Individual and Social Location Measures

Health and Demographics Questionnaire

The health and demographics questionnaire section contained items that asked about a participant's age, gender/sex identity, sexual orientation/identity, education, income level, occupation, race/ethnicity, disability status, and religious beliefs (see Table 3.1). I asked participants to write their own gender/sex identity in an open-ended text box; and, I asked participants whether I should include them in a transgender category for descriptive purposes. I also asked participants to write in their own race/ethnicity, sexual orientation/identity, identity, disability description, and religion in open-ended text boxes; I coded these descriptions and grouped them based on similarities. Using open-ended text boxes for demographics questions

allows participants to provide more accurate descriptions of themselves and their identities compared to check-boxes with pre-determined categories (Hughes et al., 2016; Hyde et al., 2019; van Anders et al., 2014).

Relationship Questionnaire

The relationship questionnaire asked participants about their relationship status. Participants had the option to indicate that they were single (with no sexual or romantic contacts), single (with no relationships but some sexual contacts), dating, in a committed relationship, or married/common law/in a life partnership via a multiple-choice question. Participants also had the option to write in their own description if they felt that none of the given terms described their relationship status. Participants who reported that they were single were excluded due to ineligibility.

Sexuality Questionnaire

The sexuality questionnaire asked participants whether they had ever had an orgasm during sexual activity with their current partner (*Yes vs. No*). I also asked participants to rate how often they have orgasms with their current partner on a scale from 0 = *Never* to 6 = *Always*, if they have ever faked an orgasm with their current partner (*Yes vs. No*), and how often they fake orgasms with this person on a scale from 0 = *Never* to 6 = *Always*; I used these responses to assess the exploratory question regarding associations between bad orgasm experiences and faking orgasms. Participants who reported that they had never had an orgasm with their current partner were among those excluded due to ineligibility.

Approach and Avoidance Motivations

Participants completed an 18-item measure (adapted from Cooper et al., 1998; Muise et al., 2013) assessing their own motivations for sex and their perceptions of their partner's

motivations for sex. I asked participants to rate, on a scale from 0 = *Never* to 4 = *Always*, how often they engaged in sex with their current partner due to approach motivations (3 items; e.g., “to increase intimacy with my partner”), avoidance motivations (3 items; e.g., “to avoid conflict in our relationship”), and self-interested motivations (3 items; e.g., “to make myself feel attractive”). Participants also rated how often they felt their partner engaged in sex with them using the same list of reasons. These measures showed good internal consistency in the sample ($\alpha > .70$ is adequate, $\alpha > .80$ is good, and $\alpha > .90$ is excellent; Kline, 2015): Cronbach’s α for participants’ approach motivations, avoidance motivations, and self-interested motivations were .81, .85, and .86, respectively. Cronbach’s α for partners’ approach motivations, avoidance motivations, and self-interested motivations were .83, .85, and .84, respectively.

Independent Variables

Bad Orgasm Experience Questions

The bad orgasm experience questions asked participants about their experiences of coerced orgasms during desired sex, non-coerced orgasms during coerced sex, and coerced orgasms during coerced sex with their current relationship partner. Although these questions were designed to ask about coerced experiences, I did not use the word coercion in descriptions because research has shown that individuals can be hesitant to label their experiences with this term (Katz & Myhr, 2008; Livingston et al., 2004; Mynatt & Allgeier, 1990). As such, instructions asked participants to read a series of three sexual scenarios⁶ that included being guilty or pressured into sexual activity and to consider whether they have experienced each

⁶ Before collecting data, I pilot-tested descriptions of the scenarios with members of my lab (including undergraduates, graduate students, and postdocs) to ensure that the three sexual scenarios were distinguishable from one another and instructions were clear.

scenario with their current partner. Participants then had the opportunity to review all three scenarios on one page and were instructed to read each description carefully, think about whether they had ever had a similar experience with their current partner, and make sure they understood how each scenario differed from one another. Instructions also explained that some words in each scenario were bolded and underlined to help participants note the important differences between each scenario. After freely reviewing all three descriptions, participants were presented with each scenario on a new page in random order and asked to answer a series of questions about each scenario. Scenario descriptions (including bolded/underlined words for clarification) were as follows:

Coerced Orgasm during Coerced Sex:

*You did **not** want to have sex and indicated this to your partner. Your partner guilted or pressured you to have sex anyway. You consented to having sex with your partner.*

*During the sexual encounter **you felt pressured to have an orgasm because of something your partner said or did.** You ended up having an orgasm.*

Non-Coerced Orgasm during Coerced Sex:

*You did **not** want to have sex and you indicated this to your partner. Your partner guilted or pressured you to have sex anyway. You consented to having sex with your partner. You ended up having an orgasm, but **there was no pressure or guilt to have an orgasm.***

Coerced Orgasm during Desired Sex:

*You **wanted** to have sex and willingly engaged in sex with your partner. During the sexual encounter **you felt pressured to have an orgasm because of something your partner said or did.** You ended up having an orgasm.*

After each scenario, participants rated how often they had had an experience with their current partner like the one described (options were: 0 = *I have never had this experience with my current partner*, 1 = *Very rarely (1-2 times)*, 2 = *Occasionally*, 3 = *Frequently*, 4 = *Very frequently*, and 5 = *Every time we have sex*). Among participants who answered 1-5 for each scenario, distributions were strongly positively skewed (skewness = 1.38 – 1.54); that is, the majority (> 50%) of participants who had ever had each experience reporting that it occurred very rarely or occasionally. Given the small number of participants who had these experiences more frequently, I decided to recode responses to reflect that the participant had never or ever had the experience (i.e., ratings of zero were coded as 0 = *Never had the experience* and ratings of 1-5 were coded as 1 = *Ever had the experience* for each bad orgasm experience type). I also used these responses to calculate the number of types of bad orgasm experiences participants had experienced (0, 1, 2, or 3 types).

For each bad orgasm experience type, participants who reported that they had ever had the experience (i.e., they answered 1-5) with their current partner were asked to give an example in an open-ended text box. Then, I asked participants whether they felt that experiences like the one described in the scenario impacted their overall well-being (*Yes vs. No*), and if yes, to rate how positive (0 = *Not at all positive* to 4 = *Entirely Positive*) and how negative (0 = *Not at all negative* to 4 = *Entirely negative*) the impact was.

Outcome Variables

Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10)

The K10 (Kessler et al., 2002) is a 10-question screening scale of psychological distress. Participants are asked to rate 10 items about their mood in the past 30 days using a 5-point scale from 1 = *None of the time* to 5 = *All of the time*. Example items ask, “In the past 30 days, how

often did you feel tired out for no good reason?” and “In the past 30 days, how often did you feel worthless?” Higher total scores reflect higher psychological distress. The K10 showed excellent internal consistency: sample $\alpha = .93$.

Arizona Sexual Experience Scale (ASEX)

The ASEX (McGahuey et al., 2000) is a 5-item measure of sexual dysfunction. Participants are asked to rate their overall level of functioning from 1 to 6 on five domains, including sex drive, arousal, vaginal lubrication/erection, ability to reach orgasm, and satisfaction from orgasm. In general, lower total scores reflect lower sexual functioning. Example items include “How strong is your sex drive?” (1 = *No sex drive* to 6 = *Extremely strong*) and “How easily are you sexually aroused?” (1 = *Never aroused* to 6 = *Extremely easily*). The ASEX showed good internal consistency: sample $\alpha = .83$.

Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)

The RAS (Hendrick, 1988) is a 7-item measure of relationship satisfaction. Participants are asked to answer each item using a 5-point scale from 0 to 4. In general, lower total scores reflect lower relationship satisfaction. Example items include “How well does your partner meet your needs?” (0 = *Poorly* to 4 = *Extremely well*) and “To what extent as your relationship met your original expectations?” (0 = *Hardly at all* to 4 = *Completely*). The RAS showed good internal consistency: sample $\alpha = .89$.

The Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction (GMEX)

The GMEX (Lawrance & Byers, 1995) is a 5-item measure that assesses overall sexual satisfaction with a partner. Participants rate their sex life on five 7-point dimensions: *Good-Bad*, *Pleasant-Unpleasant*, *Positive-Negative*, *Satisfying-Unsatisfying*, *Valuable-Worthless*. Lower total scores reflect lower sexual satisfaction. Previous research has suggested that the GMEX has

strong psychometric support for a unidimensional measure of sexual satisfaction (Mark et al., 2014). The GMSEX showed excellent internal consistency: sample $\alpha = .96$.

Sexual Desire Inventory (SDI)

The SDI measures both solitary and dyadic desire; desire is explicitly defined as desire for sexual activity (Spector et al., 1996). The SDI was adapted, as has been done in previous research, by the addition of one question: “During the last month, *how often* have you had sexual thoughts?” (van Anders & Hampson, 2005); thus, the version implemented in the present study included 15 items. Items ask participants to rate their frequency of desire, strength of desire, and the importance of fulfilling these desires on a scale from 0 to 7, where lower total scores reflect lower desire and higher scores reflect higher desire. Example items include “When you have sexual thoughts, how strong is your desire to engage in sexual behaviors with a partner?” (0 = *No desire* to 4 = *Strong desire*) and “During the last month, how often would you have liked to engage in sexual activity with a partner?” (0 = *Not at all* to 7 = *More than once a day*). The questionnaire includes three subscales and all showed good internal consistency in the sample: solitary desire (sample $\alpha = .89$), dyadic desire (sample $\alpha = .85$), and total desire (sample $\alpha = .89$). I was interested in participants’ dyadic sexual desire; thus, only the dyadic sexual desire subscale was used in subsequent analyses.

End-of-Survey Questions

At the end of the survey, I asked participants to complete questions that further allowed me to assess the quality of the data they provided. Specifically, I asked participants to write in the year they were born; by assessing discrepancies between this and the age entered at the beginning of the survey, I was able to exclude participants who may have entered inaccurate or random responses. I also asked participants if they provided any answers that were intended as

jokes; I excluded participants who answered yes. Finally, I asked participants to indicate how many times they took the survey and excluded participants who said they took the survey more than once.

Procedure

I obtained approval for this study from the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the General Research Ethics Board (GREB) at Queen's University. I preregistered hypotheses and the study protocol on [aspredicted.org](https://aspredicted.org/#34823) ([#34823](https://aspredicted.org/#34823)).

Participants followed a survey link posted to MTurk to view the study consent form. Participants who consented completed a short screening questionnaire to determine their eligibility for study involvement. Once deemed eligible, participants completed health and demographics questions, the relationship and sexuality questionnaires, the outcome measures (presented in random order), the bad orgasm experience questions, and then the end-of-survey questions. The survey presented the outcome measures before the bad orgasm experience questions to ensure that the bad orgasm experience questions did not directly affect how participants rated the outcomes. Participation were compensated through MTurk with \$5.00 (USD) for 30 minutes of work. Upon completion, the survey directed participants to a debriefing form that described the purpose of the study and provided additional resources about experiences of orgasm.

Analyses

I conducted analyses using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 and AMOS 26.0. To assess associations between bad orgasm experiences, approach and avoidance motivations, outcomes, and gender/sex, I used chi-square tests of independence, Spearman correlations (which are recommended for data with tailed distributions and outliers; de

Winter et al., 2016), multiple multivariate regression, and structural equation modeling (SEM). To assess the association between bad orgasm experiences and faking orgasms, I conducted a logistic regression.

I controlled for type 1 error using the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure when testing associations between bad orgasm experiences, approach and avoidance motivations, psychological distress, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, sexual functioning, and dyadic sexual desire (see Table 3.2, Table 3.3, and Table 3.4). I also used the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure when assessing the significance of all direct and indirect pathways in the structural equation models. (see Figure 3.1, Figure 3.2, and Table 3.4). I did not use the the Benjamini-Hochberg when the likelihood of type 2 error was high (i.e, in the gender/sex analyses). The Benjamini-Hochberg procedure decreases the false discovery rate, defined as the expected proportion of the number of erroneous rejections to the total number of rejections (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995). Research has shown that the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure is effective for SEM (Cribbie, 2000, 2007).

For gender/sex analyses, I first used the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) to conduct separate regressions – with gender/sex entered as the moderator – on each SEM pathway. I then followed up on pathways of interest using the PROCESS macro for moderated mediation (Hayes, 2013). The advantage of using the PROCESS macro was that I was able to increase the statistical power of the gender/sex tests by simplifying the models. Specifically, the PROCESS macro reduces the number of estimated pathways by using observed instead of latent variables. In this case, we used scale total scores as observed variables. The disadvantage was that, unlike with structural equation models, I was unable to account for measurement error or correlations between outcome variables.

Participants completed at least 95% of the measures included in the study; no variable had more than 1% missing data. Thus, for analyses including SEM, I imputed missing values using Expectation Maximization. Skewness and kurtosis information showed that the data were nonnormally distributed on a multivariate level; Mardia's coefficient was 72.15, with a critical value of 37.88. As such, I performed bootstrapping in AMOS, which has been shown to adequately address issues with non-normal data in SEM (Byrne, 2010; Nevitt & Hancock, 2001).

I used the following indices to assess model fit in the SEM analyses: chi-square goodness of fit test; comparative fit index (CFI; values $> .90$ indicate adequate fit and values $> .95$ indicate good fit); root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; values of .05 or lower indicate good fit and values between .05 and .08 suggest reasonable fit); and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR; values of less than .06 are considered good). As Kline (2015, p. 263) noted, these criteria are not definitive rules as to whether a model should be retained or not; the indices should be regarded as providing descriptive information about model fit.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Close to half (47.2%; $n = 203$) of participants reported that they had ever had at least one of the three bad orgasm experiences. Specifically, 24.7% ($n = 106$) of participants said they had experienced non-coerced orgasms during coerced sex, 31.4% ($n = 135$) of participants said they had experienced coerced orgasms during non-coerced sex, and 11.4% ($n = 49$) of participants said they had experienced coerced orgasms during coerced sex. Participants who reported having ever had these experiences said that these experiences occurred between rarely and occasionally (non-coerced orgasms during coerced sex [$M_{\text{frequency}} = 1.60$, $SD = .78$]; coerced orgasms during non-coerced sex [$M_{\text{frequency}} = 1.84$, $SD = 1.04$]; coerced orgasms during coerced sex [$M_{\text{frequency}} =$

1.37, $SD = .57$). Furthermore, 32.1% ($n = 138$) of participants reported experiencing one of the bad orgasm experience types, 10.0% ($n = 43$) reported experiencing two, and 5.1% ($n = 22$) reported experiencing all three.

Women were significantly more likely to have ever experienced at least one of the bad orgasm experiences than men (58.7% vs. 39.0%, respectively), $\chi^2(1) = 16.13, p < .001$. Specifically, women were more likely than men to have ever experienced non-coerced orgasms during coerced sex (women = 36.9%; men = 15.9%; $\chi^2(1) = 24.66, p < .001$), coerced orgasms during non-coerced sex (women = 39.1%; men = 25.9%; $\chi^2(1) = 8.47, p = .004$), and coerced orgasms during coerced sex (women = 17.3%; men = 7.2%; $\chi^2(1) = 10.66, p = .001$). Results also showed that, among participants who had ever had a bad orgasm experience, women experienced significantly more of the bad orgasm experience types ($M_{\text{number of bad orgasm experience types}} = 1.59, SD = .74$) than men did ($M_{\text{number of bad orgasm experience types}} = 1.26, SD = .56$), $t(201) = -3.61, p < .001$. Notably however, there were no significant gender/sex differences for frequency of experiencing each of the bad orgasm experience types (non-coerced orgasms during coerced sex: $M_{\text{frequency}}$ for women = 1.64, $SD = .69$ vs. $M_{\text{frequency}}$ for men = 1.55, $SD = .90$, $t[104] = -.55, p = .58$; coerced orgasms during non-coerced sex: $M_{\text{frequency}}$ for women = 1.90, $SD = .94$ vs. $M_{\text{frequency}}$ for men = 1.78, $SD = 1.15$, $t[133] = -.64, p = .52$; coerced orgasms during coerced sex: $M_{\text{frequency}}$ for women = 1.32, $SD = .54$ vs. $M_{\text{frequency}}$ for men = 1.44, $SD = .61$, $t[47] = .72, p = .47$).

Preliminary Analyses

I conducted chi-square tests of independence and Spearman correlations to assess associations between the bad orgasm experiences, approach and avoidance motivations, and all outcome variables (see Table 3.2). These preliminary tests showed that all of the bad orgasm experiences were significantly associated with avoidance motivations, but not approach

motivations. Additionally, each bad orgasm experience was associated with at least one outcome, with one exception: none of the bad orgasm experiences were significantly associated with sexual desire. Approach and avoidance motivations were significantly associated with each other, and with all outcome variables.

Notably, H4 predicted that approach and avoidance motivations would moderate associations between bad orgasm experiences and outcomes, such that individuals with high approach motivations would have better outcomes than individuals with high avoidance motivations. Accordingly, in my initial analyses, I ran a multiple multivariate regression that tested additive moderation effects with approach and avoidance motivations as the moderators. Predictors were each bad orgasm experience (each type coded as $-.5 = \textit{never had the experience}$ or $.5 = \textit{ever had the experience}$), approach motivations, avoidance motivations, and interaction terms between each bad orgasm experience and approach motivations, and each bad orgasm experience and avoidance motivations. Dependent variables included psychological distress (K10), sexual satisfaction (GMSEX), relationship satisfaction (RAS), sexual functioning (ASEX), and dyadic sexual desire (SDI). The omnibus test for the model including all predictors and dependent variables was significant, $F(55, 1919.90) = 3.32, p < .001$, Wilks Lambda = .66; and, univariate tests for each dependent variable were significant (psychological distress: $F[11, 418] = 4.00, p < .001$; sexual satisfaction: $F[11, 418] = 8.35, p < .001$; relationship satisfaction: $F[11, 418] = 10.57, p < .001$; sexual functioning: $F[11, 418] = 4.36, p < .001$; dyadic sexual desire: $F[11, 418] = 3.74, p < .001$). However, examination of the parameter estimates showed that H4 was not supported: none of the interaction terms between bad orgasm experiences and approach or avoidance motivations significantly predicted outcome variables (see Table 3.3).

The multiple multivariate regression testing H4 also showed that bad orgasm experiences did not significantly predict any of the outcome variables (see Table 3.3). However, the Spearman correlations from Table 3.2 showed that bad orgasm experiences were significantly associated with psychological distress, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual functioning. One possible explanation for these conflicting findings is the presence of mediation (Mascha et al., 2013; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Thus, I decided to explore the Table 3.2 associations further by testing my hypotheses with mediation models. Specifically, I tested models with avoidance motivations – but not approach motivations – as a *mediator* of associations between bad orgasm experiences and outcomes. The decision to include avoidance but not approach motivations was supported by the data. That is, Table 3.2 showed significant associations between each bad orgasm experience and avoidance motivations, and between avoidance motivations and psychological distress, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual functioning. However, bad orgasm experiences were not associated with approach motivations. Additionally, treating avoidance motivations as a mediator made theoretical sense. Research has shown that prior coercive experiences contribute to what appears to be avoidance-motivated behaviors: future compliance and negative reactions to sexual initiation (Katz & Tirone, 2010; Willis & Nelson-Gray, 2020).

Notably, the data in Table 3.2 also showed that sexual desire was not significantly associated with bad orgasm experiences or avoidance motivations; thus, H1e and H3e (predictions related to sexual desire) were not supported. As such, I removed sexual desire as an outcome when assessing mediation effects.

I used structural equation modeling (SEM) to assess possible mediation effects. Given the above adjustments and variable exclusions, Models 1a-b tested whether associations between

ever having had each bad orgasm experience and measured outcomes (psychological distress, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual functioning) were fully (Model 1a) or partially (Model 1b) mediated by avoidance motivations. Models 2a-b tested whether associations between experiencing more bad orgasm experience types and outcomes (psychological distress, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual functioning) were fully (Model 2a) or partially (Model 2b) mediated by avoidance motivations. Comparing partial versus full mediation models allowed me to examine whether bad orgasm experiences indirectly and/or directly predicted outcomes.

In Models 1a-b and Models 2a-b, I entered bad orgasm experiences (predictor/s) as observed variables. I entered avoidance motivations (the mediator) and each outcome as latent variables with corresponding scale items as indicators. To increase overall power within the models, indicators for psychological distress, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual functioning were assigned to parcels using the item-to-construct balance technique; this technique reduces the number of indicators per latent variable by replacing single indicators with composite scores of two or more indicators (Little et al., 2002). Specifically, I conducted separate exploratory factor analyses (each of which requested a one-factor solution) for the items included in the K10, GMSEX, RAS, and ASEX. Items were assigned to two parcels (i.e., for the GMSEX and ASEX) or three parcels (i.e., for the K10 and RAS) based on their factor loadings. The items with the highest, second highest, and third (where relevant) highest factor loadings were assigned to the first, second, and third (where relevant) parcel respectively, and this process was repeated until all items were assigned to a parcel relevant to their latent variable.

I first tested a measurement model, followed by structural models as per Kline (2015). Because initial analyses showed that bad orgasm experiences were associated with one another

(see Table 3.2), I specified correlated error terms between bad orgasm experiences in Models 1a-
b. Given the significant associations between the outcome measures (see Table 3.2), I also
specified correlated error terms between psychological distress, sexual satisfaction, relationship
satisfaction, and sexual functioning error terms in all models.

Measurement Model

The measurement model was tested by loading the indicators onto their respective latent
constructs using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The model fit was excellent, $\chi^2 (55, N =$
430) = 94.17, $p = .001$, RMSEA = .04 with 90% confidence interval (CI) [.03, .05], CFI = .99,
SRMR = .03. Each indicator loaded significantly onto its specific latent construct (β s = .72 -
.99).

Structural Models

Associations between Each Bad Orgasm Experience, Avoidance Motivations, and Outcomes

Full (a) vs. Partial (b) Mediation. Models 1a-b tested hypotheses H1a-d, which
proposed that ever (versus never) having each bad orgasm experience would predict worse
outcomes. Given that I did not have predictions for full versus partial mediation, I first tested and
compared a full mediation model (1a) and a partial mediation model (1b). Model 1a (see Figure
3.1) included pathways from each bad orgasm experience to avoidance motivations and
pathways from avoidance motivations to each outcome; the model fit was acceptable, $\chi^2 (91, N =$
430) = 137.45, $p = .001$, RMSEA = .03 (90% CI [.02, .05]), CFI = .99, SRMR = .04. Model 1b
included pathways from each bad orgasm experience to avoidance motivations, pathways from
each bad orgasm experience to each outcome, and pathways from avoidance motivations to each
outcome; this model was also acceptable, $\chi^2 (79, N = 430) = 123.13$, $p = .001$, RMSEA = .04
(90% CI [.02, .05]), CFI = .99, SRMR = .03. To assess model differences, I used a chi-square

difference test (Kline, 2015). I found no significant difference between the models, $\Delta\chi^2(12) = 14.32, p = .28$. A nonsignificant difference between models suggests that the models fit the data equally well, in which case the more parsimonious model (i.e., full mediation) is preferred (Kline, 2015). Thus, results supported Model 1a (full mediation).

Model 1a Results. Model 1a results from 1,000 bootstrap samples with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals demonstrated that each of the bad orgasm experiences significantly predicted avoidance motivations. In turn, avoidance motivations significantly predicted higher psychological distress, lower sexual satisfaction, lower relationship satisfaction, and lower sexual functioning (see Figure 3.1).

Table 3.4 summarizes the results of the bootstrapping procedures used to examine the indirect associations in Model 1a. Results showed that there were significant indirect associations between each bad orgasm experience and worse psychological distress, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual functioning. The results indicated the bad orgasm experiences explained 10.3% of the variance of avoidance motivations. Bad orgasm experiences and avoidance motivations explained 4.9% of the variance in psychological distress, 4.1% of the variance in sexual satisfaction, 6.5% of the variance in relationship satisfaction, and 2.6% of the variance in sexual functioning.

Strength Comparisons between Bad Orgasm Experiences and Outcomes. Using Model 1a, I also tested H2, which proposed that coerced orgasms during coerced sex would be the strongest predictor of worse outcomes. This hypothesis was not supported; associations between each bad orgasm experience, avoidance motivations, and outcomes were statistically equivalent to one another. To test this, I first constrained the path between coerced orgasms during coerced sex and avoidance motivations to be equal with the path between non-coerced

orgasms during coerced sex and avoidance motivations. I compared this constrained model to the unconstrained model and found no significant difference in model fit, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = .19, p = .67$. I then constrained the path between coerced orgasms during coerced sex and avoidance motivations to be equal with the path between coerced orgasms during desired sex and avoidance motivations. Again, I compared this constrained model to the unconstrained model and found no significant difference in model fit, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 2.27, p = .13$. Constraining the paths for non-coerced orgasms during coerced sex and coerced orgasms during desired sex to avoidance motivations also showed no significant change in model fit, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 1.63, p = .20$.

The non-significant differences between bad orgasm experience and avoidance pathways suggested that each bad orgasm experience affected avoidance motivations and, thus, the outcome variables similarly. To confirm this, I used Gaskin's (2016) MyModMed estimand for AMOS to compare the regression coefficients for indirect effects of each bad orgasm experience on each outcome. Results confirmed that there were no significant differences between any of the bad orgasm experiences' indirect effects on outcomes (Table 3.5).

Associations between Number of Bad Orgasm Experiences, Avoidance Motivations, and Outcomes

Full (a) vs. Partial (b) Mediation. Models 2a-b tested hypothesis 3a-d, which proposed that experiencing more bad orgasm experience types (0-3) would be associated with worse outcomes. Given that I did not have predictions for full versus partial mediation, I tested and compared a full mediation model (2a) and a partial mediation model (2b). Model 2a (see Figure 3.2) included pathways from the number of bad orgasm experience types to avoidance motivations and pathways from avoidance motivations to each outcome; the model fit adequately, $\chi^2(67, N = 430) = 105.77, p = .002, RMSEA = .04$ (90% CI [.02, .05]), CFI = .99,

SRMR = .04. Model 2b included pathways from each bad orgasm experience to avoidance motivations, pathways from each bad orgasm experience to each outcome, and pathways from avoidance motivations to each outcome; this model also fit adequately, $\chi^2 (63, N = 430) = 99.57$, $p = .002$, RMSEA = .04 (90% CI [.02, .05]), CFI = .99, SRMR = .03. To assess model differences, I used a chi-square difference test (Kline, 2015). I found no significant difference between the models, $\Delta\chi^2 (4) = 6.20$, $p = .18$. Thus, results supported Model 2a (full mediation).

Model 2a Results. Model 2a results from 1,000 bootstrap samples with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals demonstrated that having more of the bad orgasm experience types significantly predicted stronger avoidance motivations. In turn, stronger avoidance motivations significantly predicted higher psychological distress, lower sexual satisfaction, lower relationship satisfaction, and lower sexual functioning. Together, these findings demonstrated that avoidance motivations fully mediated associations between the number of bad orgasm experience types and psychological distress, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual functioning (see Figure 3.2).

Table 3.4 summarizes the results of the bootstrapping procedures used to examine the indirect associations in Model 2a. Results from the 1,000 bootstrap samples indicated that the indirect associations between the number of bad orgasm experience types and worse psychological distress, relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and sexual functioning were significant. Model 2a results showed that the number of bad orgasm experience types explained 9.5% of the variance of avoidance motivations. Number of bad orgasm experience types and avoidance motivations explained 5.0% of the variance in psychological distress, 4.1% of the variance in sexual satisfaction, 6.6% of the variance in relationship satisfaction, and 2.6% of the variance in sexual functioning.

Gender/Sex Differences

H5 proposed that bad orgasm experiences would have stronger negative effects on women than men. To test this, I first used the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017) to independently assess whether gender/sex moderated each pathway in Models 1a and 2a. Additionally, although preliminary Spearman correlations suggested no significant associations with sexual desire in the overall sample (see Table 3.2), I also assessed whether gender/sex moderated the pathway from avoidance motivations to sexual desire. I reincluded sexual desire in the gender/sex analyses because opposite associations for women versus men could have washed out significant associations in the overall sample. Results suggested that H5 was partially supported. Gender/sex significantly moderated paths from avoidance motivations to sexual satisfaction, avoidance motivations to sexual functioning, and avoidance motivations to sexual desire, but not other paths (see Table 3.6.). As such, I then conducted tests of moderated mediation for associations between bad orgasm experiences, sexual satisfaction, sexual functioning, and sexual desire.

Moderated Mediation for Sexual Satisfaction. I followed up on the gender/sex differences in the avoidance motivations to sexual satisfaction path using the PROCESS macro for moderated mediation (Hayes, 2017). To do this, I ran four moderated mediation analyses. In the first three, I entered one bad orgasm experience type as the predictor with the remaining two bad orgasm experience types as covariates. In the fourth analysis, I entered the number of bad orgasm experience types as the predictor, with no covariates. In all four analyses, I entered the avoidance motivations total score as the mediator, the sexual satisfaction total score as the dependent variable, and gender/sex as the moderator of the path between avoidance motivations and sexual satisfaction.

Reiterating findings from the individual regressions, results for the moderated direct effects demonstrated that gender/sex significantly moderated the association between avoidance motivations and sexual satisfaction ($B = -.53$, $SE = .21$, $p = .01$). More specifically, analysis of the moderation effect showed that the association between avoidance motivations and sexual satisfaction was significant for women ($B = -.69$, $SE = .16$, $p < .001$), but not for men ($B = -.16$, $SE = .14$, $p = .27$).

Results for the moderated indirect effects (significance determined using 95% bootstrap confidence intervals based on 1,000 bootstrap samples) showed that gender/sex significantly moderated the indirect effect of having a non-coerced orgasm during coerced sex on sexual satisfaction ($\Delta B = -.55$, $SE = .34$, 95% CI [-1.32, -.02]); specifically, having a non-coerced orgasm during coerced sex predicted significantly lower sexual satisfaction for women ($B = -.72$, $SE = .33$, 95% CI [-1.46, -.19]) but not for men ($B = -.16$, $SE = .16$, 95% CI [-.54, .12]). Gender/sex did not significantly moderate the indirect effects of having a coerced orgasm during non-coerced sex ($\Delta B = -.28$, $SE = .19$, 95% CI [-.72, .04]) or a coerced orgasm during coerced sex ($\Delta B = -.59$, $SE = .42$, 95% CI [-1.59, .02]) on sexual satisfaction. For the number of bad orgasm experience types, results showed that gender/sex significantly moderated the indirect effect on sexual satisfaction ($\Delta B = -.46$, $SE = .24$, 95% CI [-.96, -.02]); having more of the bad orgasm experience types predicted significantly lower sexual satisfaction for women ($B = -.59$, $SE = .22$, 95% CI [-1.08, -.22]), but not men ($B = -.14$, $SE = .14$, 95% CI [-.45, .08]).

Moderated Mediation for Sexual Functioning. I also followed up on the potential gender/sex differences in the avoidance motivations to sexual functioning path using the PROCESS macro for moderated mediation (Hayes, 2017). To do this, I conducted the same four

moderated mediation analyses described above, but with the total score for sexual functioning entered as the dependent variable.

Results showed that gender/sex significantly moderated the association between avoidance motivations and sexual functioning ($B = -.35$, $SE = .13$, $p = .01$), and that the association between avoidance motivations and sexual functioning was significant for women ($B = -.33$, $SE = .10$, $p = .001$), but not for men ($B = .01$, $SE = .09$, $p = .90$).

Results for the moderated indirect effects (significance determined using 95% bootstrap confidence intervals based on 1,000 bootstrap samples) showed that gender/sex significantly moderated the indirect effect of having a non-coerced orgasm during coerced sex on sexual functioning ($\Delta B = -.37$, $SE = .22$, 95% CI [-.87, -.02]); specifically, having a non-coerced orgasm during coerced sex predicted significantly lower sexual functioning for women ($B = -.35$, $SE = .20$, 95% CI [-.83, -.05]), but not for men ($B = .01$, $SE = .10$, 95% CI [-.22, .21]). Gender/sex did not significantly moderate the indirect effects of having a coerced orgasm during non-coerced sex ($\Delta B = -.19$, $SE = .13$, 95% CI [-.50, .02]) or a coerced orgasm during coerced sex ($\Delta B = -.39$, $SE = .27$, 95% CI [-1.04, .004]) on sexual functioning. For the number of bad orgasm experience types, results showed that gender/sex significantly moderated the indirect effect on sexual functioning ($\Delta B = -.30$, $SE = .16$, 95% CI [-.63, -.02]); more bad orgasm experiences predicted significantly lower sexual functioning for women ($B = -.29$, $SE = .14$, 95% CI [-.58, -.05]), but not for men ($B = -.01$, $SE = .08$, 95% CI [-.16, .17]).

Moderated Mediation for Sexual Desire. I followed up on the potential gender/sex differences in the association between avoidance motivations and sexual desire using the PROCESS macro for moderated mediation (Hayes, 2017). To do this, I conducted the same four

moderated mediation analyses described above, but with the total score for sexual desire entered as the dependent variable.

Replicating findings from the individual regressions, results for the moderated direct effects demonstrated that gender/sex significantly moderated the association between avoidance motivations and sexual desire ($B = -1.05$, $SE = .33$, $p = .001$). More specifically, analysis of the moderation effect showed that the association between avoidance motivations and sexual desire was significant for women ($B = -.68$, $SE = .25$, $p = .006$), but not for men ($B = .37$, $SE = .22$, $p = .10$).

Results for the moderated indirect effects (significance determined using 95% bootstrap confidence intervals based on 1,000 bootstrap samples) showed that gender/sex significantly moderated the indirect effect of having a non-coerced orgasm during coerced sex on sexual desire ($\Delta B = -1.20$, $SE = .57$, 95% CI [-2.36, -.18]); specifically, having a non-coerced orgasm during coerced sex predicted significantly lower sexual desire for women than not having one ($B = -.71$, $SE = .44$, 95% CI [-1.72, -.04]) but showed no significant effect for men ($B = .38$, $SE = .29$, 95% CI [-.13, .99]). Gender/sex also significantly moderated the indirect effect of having a coerced orgasm during coerced sex on sexual desire ($\Delta B = -1.17$, $SE = .74$, 95% CI [-2.96, -.06]); however, results showed that the indirect effect was not significant for women ($B = -.76$, $SE = .57$, 95% CI [-2.19, .003]) or men ($B = .41$, $SE = .33$, 95% CI [-.14, 1.17]). Gender/sex did not significantly moderate the indirect effects of having a coerced orgasm during non-coerced sex ($\Delta B = -.56$, $SE = .35$, 95% CI [-1.32, .006]) on sexual desire.

For the number of bad orgasm experience types, results showed that gender/sex significantly moderated the indirect effect on sexual desire ($\Delta B = -.91$, $SE = .40$, 95% CI [-1.77, -.21]); having more of the bad orgasm experience types predicted significantly lower sexual

desire for women ($B = -.59$, $SE = .32$, 95% CI [-1.29, -.02]), but not men ($B = .32$, $SE = .22$, 95% CI [-.10, .76]).

Notably, examination of the unstandardized beta values for associations in women versus men supports the possibility that gender/sex differences explains the previous non-significant associations between bad orgasm experiences, avoidance motivations, and sexual desire (see Table 3.2). Specifically, beta values showed that avoidance motivations negatively affected sexual desire for women, but positively affected sexual desire for men. Assessing positive and negative associations together can cancel out overall effects.

Summary. Results partially supported the hypothesis that bad orgasm experiences would have worse outcomes for women than men. That is, I found evidence that having non-coerced orgasms during coerced sex and having more of the bad orgasm experience types predicted significantly lower sexual satisfaction, functioning, and desire for women, but not for men. However, aside from these differences, results suggested that the three bad orgasm experiences predicted similar outcomes regardless of gender/sex identity.

Links between Bad Orgasm Experiences and Faking Orgasms

Results partially supported the exploratory hypothesis (EH), which proposed that participants who had ever had a bad orgasm with their current partner would be more likely to have ever faked an orgasm with that partner, regardless of how often the participant orgasmed with the partner in general. To test this hypothesis, I conducted a logistic regression that predicted whether participants had ever versus never faked an orgasm with their current partner. I entered the three bad orgasm experiences (with 0 = *Never had the experience* as the reference group for each) as predictors and frequency of orgasms with the current partner as a control variable. The logistic regression was significant, $\chi^2(4) = 105.36$, $p < .001$. Results showed that

ever experiencing coerced orgasms during desired sex and/or ever experiencing coerced orgasms during coerced sex with a current partner were significant predictors of having ever faked an orgasm with that partner, even when controlling for how often participants' orgasmed with the partner in general (see Table 3.7). Non-coerced orgasms during coerced sex were not significantly associated with having ever versus never faked an orgasm.

Discussion

In this study, I assessed whether having bad orgasm experiences predicted worse psychological, relationship, and sexual outcomes. To do this, I asked participants who were in a relationship to complete questionnaires assessing their approach and avoidance motivations, psychological distress, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, sexual functioning, and sexual desire. I also asked participants to read three scenarios describing bad orgasm experiences characterized by non-coerced orgasms during coerced sex, coerced orgasms during non-coerced sex, and coerced orgasms during coerced sex, and to indicate whether or not they had ever experienced each of these types of scenarios with their current partner. I then used structural equation modeling to assess whether bad orgasm experiences were associated with worse outcomes, which bad orgasm experiences had the strongest effects, whether approach and avoidance motivations played a role in the predicted associations, and whether effects differed between women and men. I also tested whether bad orgasm experiences were associated with faking orgasm.

Are Bad Orgasm Experiences Associated with Worse Outcomes?

The first hypothesis (H1a-e) was that participants who had ever experienced any of the three bad orgasm experiences with their current partner would report higher (a) psychological distress, and lower (b) sexual satisfaction, (c) relationship satisfaction, (d) sexual functioning,

and (e) dyadic sexual desire compared to participants who had never had any of the three bad orgasm experiences. Hypotheses 1a-d were supported; I found significant indirect associations between all three of the bad orgasm experiences and higher psychological distress, and lower sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual functioning. However, H1e was not supported; I did not find significant associations between bad orgasm experiences and dyadic sexual desire.

Importantly, associations between bad orgasm experiences and worse psychological distress, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual functioning helped to clarify that the outcomes associated with bad orgasm experiences are largely negative. More specifically, findings supported that the negative outcomes generally associated with experiencing coercive behaviors in sexual encounters (Chamberlain & Levenson, 2012; Coker et al., 2002; Crown & Roberts, 2007; Eaton & Matamala, 2014; Edelson et al., 2007; Katz & Myhr, 2008; Zweig et al., 1999) persist even when the target has an orgasm and perceives the encounter as consensual. Such findings reiterate an important conclusion of Chapter 2: that orgasm occurrence does not erase or preclude negative affect.

Does Experiencing More Coercion Predict Worse Outcomes?

The second hypothesis (H2) was that the bad orgasm experience that included coerced orgasms during coerced sex would be the strongest predictor of worse outcomes because it included more points of coercion in the sexual encounter: when the perpetrator initiated sexual activity and when the perpetrator pressured the participant to orgasm. This hypothesis was not supported; I found that the strength of associations between all three bad orgasm experiences and outcome variables were statistically similar. Importantly, although these findings did not support the predicted association, they demonstrated another meaningful point: that experiencing orgasm

coercion and experiencing sexual coercion have similarly negative outcomes. Such findings matter because investment in a partner's orgasm is typically positioned as positive and altruistic (Gilfoyle et al., 1992; Potts, 2000; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014), and previous research has yet to consider the possibility that investment in partner orgasm could manifest in ways that are coercive and have negative repercussions. As such, demonstrating that the outcomes associated with experiencing orgasm coercion and experiencing sexual coercion were similar helped to show that pressuring a partner to orgasm is a serious form of coercion by highlighting its role in producing negative outcomes. Though, this is not to say that a coercive behavior must in itself have negative outcomes to be taken seriously. Even if a coercive behavior on its own is not directly connected to negative outcomes, it could still be connected to a broader web of destructive conflict patterns such as psychological aggression, partner monitoring, and emotional abuse (Katz & Myhr, 2008). But, that orgasm coercion was clearly connected with negative outcomes perhaps shores up the message that it is a meaningful type of coercion.

The third hypothesis (H3a-e) was that experiencing more of the bad orgasm experience types would be associated with higher (a) psychological distress, and lower (b) sexual satisfaction, (c) relationship satisfaction, (d) sexual functioning, and (e) dyadic sexual desire. H3a-d were supported; results showed that there were significant indirect associations between having more of the bad orgasm experience types and worse psychological distress, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual functioning. However, H3e was not supported; I did not find significant associations between the number of bad orgasm experience types and dyadic sexual desire.

Notably, I hypothesized an association between having experienced more of the bad orgasm experience types and worse outcomes because I thought that experiencing coercion at

multiple points (i.e., at the initiation stage and related to orgasm) would have stronger negative effects. In other words, I thought that more coercion would mean worse outcomes. However, results from H2 suggested that this was not the case, at least when considering bad orgasm experience types independently. As such, it is perhaps possible that H3 was largely supported (even though H2 was not) because having more of the bad orgasm experience types reflected experiencing orgasm coercion and sexual coercion more frequently. This explanation aligns with my findings that people who had any one of the bad orgasm experience types were more likely to have also had another of the bad orgasm experience types, and with previous research demonstrating that coercive behaviors are often connected (Katz & Myhr, 2008).

Do Approach and Avoidance Motivations Matter for Bad Orgasm Experiences?

My fourth hypothesis (H4) was that approach and avoidance motivations would moderate associations between bad orgasm experiences and negative outcomes. This hypothesis was not supported. Preliminary analyses showed that neither approach nor avoidance motivations moderated associations between bad orgasm experiences and outcomes. Instead, results demonstrated that avoidance motivations – but not approach motivations – *mediated* associations between bad orgasm experiences and worse outcomes. Specifically, each bad orgasm experience and having more bad orgasm experiences significantly predicted higher avoidance motivations, which in turn predicted higher psychological distress and lower sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual functioning.

That bad orgasm experiences predicted avoidance motivations – but not approach motivations – in ways that led to negative outcomes perhaps makes sense given that each bad orgasm experience was measured in terms of whether the participant had ever experienced it or not with their current partner. That is, research has shown that experiencing coercion tends to

motivate future compliance because targets have reason to believe that they will face negative consequences from their partner (Chadwick et al., 2019; Katz & Tirone, 2010; Willis & Nelson-Gray, 2020). As such, it follows that experiencing orgasm coercion and/or coerced sex with a relationship partner, even once, may set the stage for increased avoidance motivations and subsequent negative effects regardless of orgasm occurrence. However, the mere *absence* of orgasm coercion and/or coerced sex in someone's sexual relationship arguably does not necessitate that someone is more motivated to have sex with their partner for approach reasons (i.e., to increase intimacy with their partner), potentially explaining why approach motivations was not a significant mediator.

Do Bad Orgasm Experiences Predict Worse Outcomes for Women?

The fifth hypothesis (H5) was that associations between bad orgasm experiences and negative outcomes would be stronger for women than for men. This hypothesis was partially supported. Specifically, I found that the indirect associations between non-coerced orgasms during coerced sex and lower sexual satisfaction, functioning, and desire were significant for women, but not for men. The strength of all other indirect associations between bad orgasm experiences and outcomes were statistically similar.

These findings suggested that orgasming during coerced sex does not affect men's sexual satisfaction, functioning, or desire the way that it affects women's. The effects for sexual satisfaction and functioning could be because women and men define and/or experience sexual satisfaction and functioning differently. For example, research has shown that women conceptualize low sexual satisfaction in terms of degradation and the potential for pain, while men conceptualize low sexual satisfaction in terms of disappointing sexual outcomes, like insufficient sexual stimulation (McClelland, 2009). As such, men's sexual satisfaction may be

more so defined by their ability to get aroused and have an orgasm, while women's is defined by enjoyment of the overall encounter. Given these differences, it is possible that, because a non-coerced orgasm occurred, experiencing coerced sex more broadly did not affect how men rated their sexual satisfaction and consequently, their sexual functioning. Of course, it is worthwhile to note that *orgasm coercion* did seem to similarly matter for men's and women's sexual satisfaction and functioning.

The gender/sex differences for the effects of orgasming during coerced sex on sexual desire are more curious. Tests of significance for women versus men showed that the effect of bad orgasm experiences on sexual desire was similar to sexual satisfaction and functioning; however, examination of the beta values suggested that the association between avoidance motivations and sexual desire were opposite for women versus men. Specifically, higher avoidance motivations predicted significantly lower sexual desire for women but (not significantly) higher sexual desire for men. These directional patterns matter regardless of significance because they could explain why I did not find associations with sexual desire in my preliminary analyses; that is, these opposing associations may have cancelled each other out. As such, these results also call to question: why was the association in men positive enough to cancel out effects for women, which was not the case for sexual satisfaction and functioning? It could be that men who consent to sex for avoidance reasons rate themselves as having higher sexual desire, perhaps to justify why they engage in sex that they might not want or feel entirely positive about. This explanation aligns with research suggesting that men are socialized to believe that all sexual experiences are or should be experienced in positive ways (Smith et al., 1988; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1991; Wiederman, 2005). But, given that

associations between bad orgasm experiences, avoidance motivations, and sexual desire were not actually significant, additional research is needed to explore this possibility.

Are Bad Orgasm Experiences Associated with Faking Orgasms?

Finally, I also tested an exploratory hypothesis (EH), which proposed that participants who had ever had a bad orgasm experience with their partner would be more likely to have ever faked an orgasm with their partner, even when controlling for how easily the participant orgasmed in general. This hypothesis was partially supported. That is, I found that ever experiencing coerced orgasms during desired sex and/or ever experiencing coerced orgasms during coerced sex with a current partner were significant predictors of having ever faked an orgasm with that partner, even when controlling for how often participants orgasmed with the partner in general. However, non-coerced orgasms during coerced sex were not significantly associated with having ever versus never faked an orgasm.

Given that faking orgasms was only associated with the bad orgasm experiences that included coerced orgasms, results suggested that an increased likelihood of faking orgasms was specifically associated with being pressured to orgasm by the partner. Notably, this highlighted that, while participants reported having an orgasm upon being pressured to do so at least once, such pressure from a partner did not always result in orgasm (i.e., because they also reported faking them). As such, ever being pressured to orgasm perhaps communicated that there would be negative consequences when the participants' orgasm did not occur, so much so that participants would rather fake the desired results than face the consequences. Such findings align with research showing that experiencing prior sexual coercion in a relationship can motivate individuals to "give in" to requests for sex in the future to avoid experiencing more sexual coercion (Katz & Tirone, 2010; Livingston et al., 2004; Willis & Nelson-Gray, 2020).

Limitations and Future Directions

Sampling and Study Setup

The sample represents an online convenience sample recruited through MTurk. Although research suggests that participants from MTurk perform similarly to general population samples, generalizations beyond the study sample are limited (Clifford et al., 2015; Peer et al., 2014). Participants had to be registered as workers on MTurk to see advertisements for the study and are therefore representative of individuals who use this site. Additionally, although I included some reverse-coded items in the RAS, most items assessing continuous variables did not include reverse-coded items. This means that I may have been unable to detect straight-line responders who provided inaccurate data.

Furthermore, I asked participants to reflect on whether or not they experienced three bad orgasm experience types. Although I had piloted descriptions of the bad orgasm experiences with lab members to ensure that it was clear how these experiences were distinct, the scenarios were similarly worded. As such, it may have been difficult for participants to distinguish between each of the bad orgasm experiences and determine which ones they had experienced and which ones they had not. Additionally, the task required asking participants to recall past events. Retrospective research is subject to recall bias generally; and, some participants may have been more subject to recall bias than others if more time had passed since the bad orgasm experiences occurred.

Although I was able to assess gender/sex differences using moderated mediation in PROCESS, this analysis did not account for measurement error or correlations between outcomes. Results offered important insights into how certain types of bad orgasm experiences may have different outcomes for women and men, but additional research with larger sample

sizes is needed to offer more definitive conclusions. Additionally, it is important to note that I did not account for the sexual identity of participants in the gender/sex analyses due to small sample sizes. Previous research on sexual coercion has suggested that sexual minority women and other gender/sex/ual minorities are at particularly high risk for experiencing sexual exploitation if their sexual partners include men (Martin-Storey et al., 2018); thus, it is possible that sexual minority women partnered with men could experience more bad orgasm experiences and/or worse outcomes compared to other gender/sex/ual identity groups. Similarly, I excluded gender/sex minorities from analyses because preliminary findings suggested that there may be different patterns, but I did not have large enough samples to analyze these data independently. This does not mean that gender/sex minorities' bad orgasm experiences and associated outcomes are necessarily different; but, additional research with increased representation is needed to understand how this social location might be important.

I used convenience sampling for data collection because I was interested in assessing how bad orgasm experiences might have negative outcomes more broadly. However, this choice resulted in a relatively homogenous sample in terms of sexual identity and race/ethnicity. Given the findings in Chapter 2, other social locations that were not represented in the sample are sure to be relevant for bad orgasm experiences. Thus, future research should consider how other social location factors shape psychological, relationship, and sexual outcomes.

Unanswered Questions

Findings from the present study suggested that the negative effects of coercion persisted even when orgasm occurred, but there are still unanswered questions. For example, it is unclear how coercion experiences that include orgasm compare to coercion experiences that do not. On one hand, it is still possible that orgasm provides at least some protection against negative

outcomes. For example, some participants in Chapter 2 stated that having an orgasm allowed them to experience some enjoyment in an otherwise undesirable encounter. But, it is also possible that orgasm could make negative outcomes worse – other participants in Chapter 2 stated that having an orgasm after experiencing coercion felt especially negative because it sent the message to the perpetrator that they enjoyed the sexual activity when they did not. Future research should compare how orgasm presence versus absence affects the outcomes of individuals' coercion experiences.

Additionally, in the assessment of bad orgasm experiences, analyses required participants to have had a bad orgasm experience only one time. Participants who had bad orgasm experiences with their partner more often may have had worse outcomes than those who only had a bad orgasm experience once, but I was unable to test this due to low variability in bad orgasm experience frequency. Relatedly, it could also be that the participants who had bad orgasm experiences generally experienced sexual coercion and/or orgasm coercion more often than participants who had never had a bad orgasm experience at all; but, they happened to have had an orgasm once (or occasionally) during these encounters. As such, findings for negative outcomes could be attributable to these participants' higher rates of sexual coercion and orgasm coercion in general; and, orgasming on only one of these occasions was not enough to buffer against the negative outcomes associated with sexual coercion and orgasm coercion more broadly. Of course, participants who reported that they had never had a bad orgasm experience might have also experienced sexual coercion and orgasm coercion often, but not have orgasmed during it; but I did not collect these data. Future research is needed to further clarify these points.

Conclusion

Overall, results from the current study highlighted that bad orgasm experiences that included coerced sex and/or coerced orgasm predicted stronger avoidance motivations, which in turn, predicted worse psychological, relationship, and sexual outcomes. Findings refute notions that orgasm somehow erases or precludes the possibility that the sexual encounter could have negative outcomes even if the encounter includes problematic behaviors.

CHAPTER 4

Orgasm Coercion: Overlaps Between Pressuring Someone to Orgasm and Sexual Coercion

In this chapter, I describe my mixed methods survey research exploring whether pressuring a partner to orgasm is a coercive behavior. Importantly, while previous research has shown that people do engage in orgasm pressuring behaviors, no previous research had linked these behaviors to sexual coercion and its effects. Yet, findings from Chapter 2 and 3 suggested that pressuring a partner to orgasm overlaps with sexual coercion in ways that have negative outcomes for those who experience this kind of behavior from a partner. Drawing from previous literature on sexual coercion, as well as findings from Chapter 2 and 3, this study aimed to clarify and provide additional support to show that pressuring a partner to orgasm is a coercive behavior. Of note, while Chapters 2 and 3 considered how scenarios that included orgasm occurrence could be negative, this study sought to assess pressuring a partner to orgasm as a behavior phenomenon in general, regardless of orgasm occurrence.

Defining Coercion

To consider whether or not pressuring a partner to orgasm is coercive, it is important to first delineate what I and others mean when using the term “coercion” to characterize sexual behaviors. Some scholars have used sexual coercion as an umbrella term for sex that occurs under any type of duress, including sexual assault (Struckman-Johnson et al., 2003). But, other scholars have defined sexual coercion as separate from sexual assault because it involves trying to psychologically pressure a target into going along with sexual activity – for example, by

begging, sweet-talking, manipulating, and/or emotionally threatening them – rather than physically threatening them (Livingston et al., 2004).

In the present study, I was interested in how pressuring a partner to orgasm might be coercive in the broadest range of ways; thus, I used the definition of coercion that included threats or acts of physical violence. I note, however, that this meant that my definition of sexual coercion included scenarios that are more clearly nonconsensual alongside those that are considered ambiguously consensual. For example, agreeing to sex under threats or acts of physical violence is generally considered a clear example of nonconsensual sex, and I would include this as an example of sexual coercion. But, sex under non-violent forms of pressure (e.g., agreeing because a partner asked repeatedly, begged, or acted disappointed) is sometimes perceived and/or experienced as consensual, and I would also include this as an example of sexual coercion; though whether or not such scenarios are truly consensual depends on how one defines consent (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999; Muehlenhard et al., 2016; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007; Willis & Jozkowski, 2019). With these ambiguities in mind, I decided to define coercion as primarily dependent on the tactics that a perpetrator uses to try to get what they want from a target. Specifically, I defined coercion as pressuring someone to do something by implying that noncompliance will result in unpleasant consequences, with consequences ranging from mild (e.g., a partner's annoyance and/or disappointment) to severe (e.g., experiencing physical harm).

Considering Potential Paradoxes

The notion that pressuring a partner to orgasm could be a coercive behavior may seem paradoxical for a number of reasons. For one, pressuring a partner to orgasm may be considered a positive behavior that reflects an altruistic investment in a partner's pleasure. This assumption

stands in direct contrast with the notion that perpetrators of coercion are necessarily selfish (Anderson, 2017). But, giving a partner an orgasm often does have personal stakes, where *absence* of a partner's orgasm can reflect one's own inadequate sexual skills (Braun et al., 2003; Chadwick & van Anders, 2017; Cohen et al., 2008; Gordon, 2006; Opperman et al., 2014; Potts, 2000; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014). As such, it is possible that (at least some) people who pressure their partner to orgasm do so for selfish reasons – that is, because they also stand to gain benefits from their partner's orgasm occurrence (e.g., masculinity, proof of sexual skill). This is not to say that the coerciveness of a behavior depends on whether a perpetrator's reasons for pressuring someone are selfish versus altruistic. Exerting pressure on someone could still be coercive even with the best intentions in mind, arguably because it can still involve threatening a negative consequence if the target does not comply (Anderson, 2017). But, that there is something to gain from a partner's orgasm occurrence perhaps increases the coercive potential of wanting a partner to orgasm.

Another reason that the concept of coerced orgasms may seem paradoxical has to do with the assumption that orgasms are always experienced in universally positive ways. That is, because coercion is characterized as a negative experience, the notion of coercing someone to have an orgasm may seem impossible. However, Chapter 2 showed that orgasm experiences can be “bad” during consensual sexual encounters, with many participants stating that orgasms in these types of encounters are not necessarily wanted and/or do not feel physically or emotionally pleasurable (Chadwick et al., 2019). That orgasms can be negative further suggests that pressuring someone to have one, especially when they do not want to, could be coercive.

It is worth noting that pressuring a partner to orgasm could still be coercive even if the pressured partner *wants* to have an orgasm and/or enjoys the experience of orgasm. This

possibility aligns with the perspective that wantedness is distinct from the factors (e.g., consent) that determine whether or not a sexual encounter is coercive (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007).

Some example scenarios demonstrate how this distinction could apply to orgasm pressure.

Someone could desire to orgasm for their own sake but also believe they must orgasm to appease the pressure exerted by their partner. Similarly, someone could be coerced into orgasming and then enjoy the physical sensation of orgasm despite disliking the experience of coercion. As such, there may be cases where coercion occurs even if the pressured partner wants and/or enjoys the experience of orgasm.

Additional Evidence for Orgasm Coercion

Further supporting that pressuring a partner to orgasm could be a coercive behavior, some evidence has suggested that the tactics used to pressure partners to orgasm overlap with sexual coercion tactics. For example, in sexual coercion, perpetrators often repeatedly ask a partner for sex (Livingston et al., 2004; Struckman-Johnson et al., 2003). People also sometimes pressure their partner to orgasm by repeatedly asking them if they have had an orgasm (Darling & Davidson, 1986; Potts, 2000). Perpetrators of sexual coercion also often emotionally manipulate their partners by threatening to break up, getting upset or acting disappointed, or by accusing the partner of not loving or being sexually attracted to them (Eaton & Matamala, 2014; Fiebert & Tucci, 1998; Livingston et al., 2004; Struckman-Johnson et al., 2003). And, Chapter 2 showed that individuals received similar threats and accusations in response to their orgasm absence (Chadwick et al., 2019). Furthermore, there is evidence that pressuring a partner to orgasm can itself function as a sexual coercion tactic; that is, it can be used to pressure a partner into continuing sexual activity that is no longer desired. Some participants from Chapter 2 reported

that their partner insisted on continuing sexual activity until the participant orgasmed, even though the participant stated that they wanted to stop (Chadwick et al., 2019).

Research has also shown that individuals who are pressured to orgasm *react* in ways that are similar to individuals who are sexually coerced. That is, people facing either form of sexual pressure often “give in” to appease the perpetrator’s anxiety and/or prevent other unpleasant consequences. For example, in sexual coercion scenarios, people often have sex when pressured to do so to appease their partner and/or avoid negative consequences (Impett & Peplau, 2003; Katz & Tirone, 2010). Similarly, when pressured to orgasm, people *fake* orgasms to stop the partner’s pressuring behaviors (e.g., repeatedly asking if they orgasmed) and/or prevent negative reactions (Darling & Davidson, 1986; Hite, 1976; Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010; Roberts et al., 1995). As such, faking orgasms could provide evidence that orgasm pressure is coercive because, similar to sexual coercion, the pressuring behavior threatens targets in ways that motivate them to appease the perpetrator.

Finally, there is some evidence that the *impacts* of pressuring a partner to orgasm could be similar to the impacts of sexual coercion. For example, Chapter 2 showed that being pressured by a partner to orgasm *or* experiencing sexual coercion led the pressured partner to negatively evaluate the sexual encounter itself, even when orgasm did occur. Additionally, research has shown that sexual coercion can negatively impact relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, sexual functioning, and psychological health (Livingston et al., 2004; Struckman-Johnson et al., 2003; Zweig et al., 1997, 1999). Chapter 3 demonstrated similar associations between being pressured by a partner to orgasm and negative outcomes.

Together, the evidence suggests that pressuring a partner to orgasm mirrors patterns of sexual coercion, supporting that pressuring a partner to orgasm may be a coercive behavior. But,

research has yet to recognize that pressuring a partner to orgasm exists, let alone its potential as a form of coercion. As such, the current study explored pressuring a partner to orgasm as a behavioral phenomenon and assessed whether pressuring a partner to orgasm is coercive.

The Current Study

I conducted an online, mixed methods survey that asked participants of diverse gender/sex/ual identities about their experiences of being pressured by a partner to orgasm. To assess whether pressuring a partner to orgasm is a coercive behavior, I tested four hypotheses (H1-H4) to demonstrate overlaps between orgasm pressure and the more general concept of sexual coercion, defined as pressuring someone into having sex by implying that noncompliance will result in negative consequences.

The first hypothesis (H1) was that lifetime experiences of orgasm pressure would be associated with lifetime experiences of sexual coercion – specifically, I predicted that participants who had experienced orgasm pressure would be more likely to report that they had experienced sexual coercion, and a higher frequency of orgasm pressure experiences would be associated with higher frequency of sexual coercion experiences. The second hypothesis (H2) was that orgasm pressure would be associated with “giving in” to the partner’s demands – specifically, I predicted that participants who had experienced orgasm pressure would be more likely to report that they had faked orgasms during sexual activities with a partner, and, a higher frequency of orgasm pressure experiences would be associated with a higher frequency of faking orgasms. The third hypothesis (H3) was that the tactics used to pressure people to orgasm would be analogous, similar, or equivalent to sexual coercion tactics. Finally, the fourth hypothesis (H4) was that experiencing more orgasm pressure in a given sexual relationship would be

associated with worse self-perceived psychological/emotional and relationship outcomes associated with the most recent incident in which orgasm pressure occurred with that partner.

Method

Participants

To be eligible for this study, participants had to be 18 years of age or older and have previously engaged in consensual sexual activity with a partner. I recruited participants through convenience sampling by posting online advertisements (Facebook, Reddit, and Twitter) that viewers could click on to participate and/or share. I designed three different advertisements to recruit participants in general (the ad title stated: “Recruiting Participants for a Study on Sexuality!”), non-heterosexual and/or non-cis-participants (the ad title stated: “Recruiting LGBTQ Participants for a Study on Sexuality!”), and people of color (the ad title stated: “Recruiting People of Color [POC] for a Study on Sexuality!”). In the description for the study, advertisements for LGBTQ and POC participants additionally explained: “We would like to make sure that the experiences of [inserted either: non-majority identified individuals or POC] are represented, as research studies on sexuality are often [inserted either: biased towards majority identified folks or majority white].” Participants reported that they accessed the survey through Twitter (86.7%), Reddit (5.8%), Facebook (5.3%), via a friend (0.8%), or online (0.5%), though some did not report how they found the survey (0.9%). Participants were excluded from the study if the participant exited the survey before answering any questions ($n = 106$), indicated that they were ineligible to participate ($n = 20$), or did not answer the central research questions ($n = 24$). Notably, research has suggested that data from online surveys can be compromised by computer bots (i.e., computer programs that complete online forms automatically) and human bots (i.e., humans who complete surveys quickly and repeatedly without attending to questions

thoughtfully). To check for bots in the survey, I assessed all open-ended questions to ensure that responses made sense and corresponded to the questions asked; this is one effective strategy for identifying bot activity, as bots often write nonsensical answers to open-ended questions (Yarrish et al., 2019). Using this strategy, I excluded participants who wrote unclear answers to the gender/sex identity question – for example, they wrote “cisgender” with no other information ($n = 35$), “transgender” with no other information ($n = 1$), or they did not write their gender/sex ($n = 7$). After these exclusions, the total sample included 912 participants (M age = 31.31 years, $SD = 9.41$). Qualitative analyses included the 340 participants who provided a description of their experience after they reported that a sexual partner has said or done something that made them feel pressured to orgasm. See Table 4.1 for participant demographics information across the entire sample and within the qualitative sample.

Measures

Health and Demographics Questionnaire

The health and demographics questionnaire section contained items that asked about a participant’s age, gender/sex, education, income level, occupation, race/ethnicity, disability status, and religious beliefs. I asked participants to write in their own gender/sex identity. I also asked participants to write in their own race/ethnicity identity, disability description, and religious beliefs in open-ended text boxes; I coded these responses and grouped them based on similarities for descriptive purposes.

Sexuality Questionnaire

The sexuality questionnaire asked participants to report their sexual identity (in an open-ended text box), number of lifetime consensual sexual partners, and the gender/sex identities of their previous sexual partners. I also asked participants how often they orgasm during sexual

activities with partners (0 = *Never* to 6 = *Always*), if they had ever faked an orgasm during sexual activities with a partner (*Yes* or *No*), and how often they fake orgasms during sexual activities with a partner in general (0 = *Never* to 6 = *Always*).

I also assessed participants' lifetime experiences of sexual coercion (e.g., being pressured into having sex) by asking them if they had ever "engaged in sexual activities despite not wanting to" because a partner made them feel guilty, became angry or threatened to leave them, and/or threatened them with physical violence. If a participant answered yes to any of these reasons, I asked them to rate how often that type of scenario had happened (0 = *Never* to 6 = *This has happened every time I have sex*). Importantly, I noted that these questions only assessed a fraction of participants' possible lifetime sexual coercion experiences. Sexual coercion can also include wanted sex (e.g., someone could pressure a target who otherwise wanted to have sex into doing so because they did not realize the target wanted to have sex), a target's noncompliance (e.g., someone could pressure a target to have sex but the target could refuse), and tactics other than guilt, emotional threats, and physical threats.

Participants who had never engaged in sexual activity were considered ineligible and redirected to the end of the survey. Consensual sexual activity was defined as consensual sexual contact with another person involving the participant's or another person's genitals.

Relationship Questionnaire

The relationship questionnaire asked participants to check a box defining their relationships status. Options included single (no sexual or romantic contacts), single (no relationships, some sexual contacts), dating, committed relationship, married/common law/life partnership, and the option to include an alternative description if none of the choices sufficiently described their relationship status.

Orgasm Pressure Questions

The orgasm pressure questions gathered information on participants' experiences of being pressured to orgasm by a partner. First, I asked participants about such experiences in general – specifically, I asked, “*Has a sexual partner ever said or done anything that made you feel pressured to have an orgasm during a sexual encounter with them?*” Participants answered yes or no. If the participant answered yes, I asked, “*What has a sexual partner said or done that made you feel pressured to have an orgasm?*” and presented participants with an open-ended text box where they could write their answer. Next, I asked, “*In general, how often would you say this has happened to you? (i.e., someone has said or done something that made you feel pressured to have an orgasm during a sexual encounter with them)*” and gave participants the option to answer on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 0 = *Never* to 6 = *This has happened every time I have sex*.

I then asked participants to think back to and describe (in open-ended text boxes) the most recent incident that they could remember where a sexual partner said or did something that made them feel pressured to have an orgasm. Asking about the most recent incident allowed me to gather event-specific data for a given encounter where orgasm pressure occurred. Specifically, I asked: *During the most recent incident, why did you feel pressured to have an orgasm (for example, what did your partner say or do)? What did you do in response to this pressure? What did your partner say or do after you responded that way? Why do you think your partner wanted you to have an orgasm?* Given the goals of the present research, I only reported on what the partner said or did that made participants feel pressured to orgasm and how participants responded to this pressure.

Following these questions, I asked participants to note the gender/sex identity of the partner from the incident in an open-ended text box, how long ago the incident took place (0 = *Within the last week* to 6 = *More than two years ago*), what their relationship to the partner was at the time of the incident (open-ended text box), and how often the partner has said or done something that made the participant feel pressured to orgasm (0 = *It only happened that one time* to 4 = *It happens/happened every time or almost every time we have/had sex*), among other follow up questions that were not included in the present study analyses. I also asked participants whether the most recent incident psychologically/emotionally affected them. If participants answered yes, I asked them to rate how positive (0 = *Not positive at all* to 4 = *Entirely positive*) and how negative (0 = *Not negative at all* to 4 = *Entirely negative*) the effect was. If participants answered no, their response was coded as not positive at all (0) and not negative at all (0) to reflect that there was no effect. Similarly, I asked participants whether the most recent event affected their relationship with the partner (sexual or otherwise). If participants answered yes, I asked them to rate how positive (0 = *Not positive at all* to 4 = *Entirely positive*) and how negative (0 = *Not negative at all* to 4 = *Entirely negative*) the effect was. If participants answered no, their response was coded as not positive at all (0) and not negative at all (0) to reflect that there was no effect.

Study Completion Questions

At the end of the survey, participants answered forced-response questions regarding the number of times they took the survey and whether their answers included jokes. No participant reported that they took the survey more than once. Three participants reported that they included jokes – I excluded their data from analyses.

Procedure

I obtained approval for this study from the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the General Research Ethics Board (GREB) at Queen's University. Before I collected data, I pilot-tested the survey with members in my laboratory (including undergraduates, graduate students, and postdoctoral associates) to ensure that all questions were clearly worded and offered face validity. Online recruitment advertisements directed participants to follow a link where they consented to study participation. Participants completed a short screening questionnaire to determine their eligibility. Once deemed eligible, participants completed health and demographics questions, the relationship and sexuality questionnaires, the orgasm pressure questions, and the study completion questions. Participation were compensated through entry into a raffle to win one of twelve \$25 Amazon.com gift certificates. E-mail addresses were separated from participant responses to ensure anonymity. Upon completion of the study, participants were directed to a debriefing form that described the purpose of the study and provided additional resources regarding sexual coercion.

Analyses

All quantitative analyses and qualitative coding were completed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24.0.

For descriptive information, I reported frequencies and averages. To calculate frequencies of participants' responses to being pressured to orgasm (which were qualitative), I conducted descriptive content analyses. In this approach, researchers establish categories based on the data that can be used to provide descriptive summaries of the informational contents (Bloor & Wood, 2006; Sandelowski, 2000; J. A. Smith, 2015; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). See description of H3 analyses for the approach to coding and interrater reliability.

I also conducted Pearson chi-square tests of independence to test associations between having ever experienced orgasm pressure (yes vs. no) and gender/sex/ual identity; this included comparisons of column proportions using Benjamini-Hochberg adjusted p-values for multiple comparisons. Gender/sex/ual identities were grouped according to minority or majority gender/sex/ual identity status and included: sexual minority women, sexual majority women, gender/sex/ual minorities, sexual minority men, and sexual majority men (see Table 4.1 for specific identities included in each group). Participants who did not report their gender/sex or sexual identity were not included in this analysis.

H1. To test whether orgasm pressure was associated with sexual coercion, I used chi-square tests of independence. I also conducted bivariate Pearson correlations to test associations between participants' reported frequency of experiencing orgasm pressure and frequency of experiencing sexual coercion.

H2. To test whether ever experiencing orgasm pressure was associated with ever faking an orgasm, I conducted a logistic regression. To test associations between participants' reported frequency of experiencing orgasm pressure and frequency of faking orgasms, I conducted a linear regression. I considered the possibility that orgasm pressure and/or faking orgasms more frequently might be explained by a lower frequency of orgasming with partners in general (Harris et al., 2019). Thus, I included participants' reported frequency of orgasming with partners in general as a control variable and tested for interactions between orgasm pressure and orgasm frequency in each regression analysis. Finally, I also examined participants' qualitative descriptions of their reactions to being pressured to orgasm.

H3. I conducted a deductive content analysis – which tests whether a theory or concept maps onto a new context (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) – to test whether the tactics used to pressure a

partner to orgasm were analogous to the tactics used in sexual coercion (i.e., tactics used to pressure people into having sex). The first step in deductive content analysis is to create a pre-determined categorization matrix based on the original theory or concept. Thus, I created a categorization matrix comprised of sexual coercion tactics listed in previous literature. The categorization matrix drew from Struckman-Johnson, Struckman-Johnson, and Anderson's (2003) study, which listed the following categories of sexual coercion tactics: continued sexual activity (e.g., persistent kissing and touching or explicit insistence on continuing the sexual activity), emotional manipulation and deception (e.g., repeatedly asking, implying fault, making emotional threats), exploitation of the intoxicated (e.g., purposefully getting a target drunk), and physical force and threats (e.g., blocking the target's retreat, using or threatening physical harm). The categorization matrix also drew from Livingston et al.'s (2004) study of sexual coercion, which additionally included emotional manipulation tactics like pouting or making the target feel sorry for perpetrator (i.e., making the target feel guilty) and positive verbal persuasion tactics (i.e., sweet-talking).

The next step in deductive content analysis is to apply the pre-determined categorization matrix to the new concept. Thus, I and a research assistant used the pre-determined categorization matrix to code participants' descriptions of what a partner has said or done in general and/or during the most recent incident that made them feel pressured to orgasm. If we were unable to code a tactic using the pre-determined categorization matrix, we created a new code for that tactic. Note that participants sometimes included more than one tactic in their descriptions; thus, we applied multiple codes to single participants when relevant.

To establish reliability of code application between myself and the research assistant, we applied codes from the pre-determining categorization matrix to 75 descriptions (22.06% of all

descriptions). We calculated interrater reliability based on agreement that the code was present and set the minimum agreement level to 80% (as per Boyatzis, 1998). Interrater reliability calculations showed that we applied some codes with less than 80% agreement during the first round. We also noted that we were unable to code some tactics using the pre-determined matrix. As such, we discussed discrepancies, refined our code application decision rules, and added codes that described the new tactics. Using this new coding scheme, we then coded the same 75 participant descriptions again, at which point we reached 80% agreement on all codes. Importantly, the point of this process was to train coders to apply the codes in a similar way, not to establish that the coding scheme itself was somehow a “more accurate” reflection of participants’ experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As such, once we reached 80% agreement for each code on the first 75 participants, I and the research assistant coded the rest of the descriptions independently. We resolved any remaining discrepancies via discussion.

H4. To test whether experiencing orgasm pressure was associated with negative outcomes, I conducted bivariate Pearson correlations to assess associations between participants’ reported frequency of experiencing orgasm pressure with the partner from the most recent incident and participants’ ratings of the relationship and psychological/emotional effects.

Results

Descriptive Information for Participants’ Experiences of Orgasm Pressure

Experiences of Orgasm Pressure in General

I first asked participants about their experiences of orgasm pressure in general; 43.4% ($n = 396$) of my participants said yes they have ever felt pressured by a partner to orgasm and 56.6% ($n = 516$) said no. The majority of participants (85.9%) who had ever experienced orgasm pressure provided a description of their experience(s) ($n = 340$). See Table 4.2 for a list of the

tactics partners used to pressure participants to orgasm and for examples of what these tactics looked like. Note that the list of tactics from participants' descriptions of orgasm pressure in general was the same as the list of tactics described in the most recent incident; thus, Table 4.2 provides information on how many participants described each tactic overall and quotes from all qualitative descriptions combined. Participants who had experienced orgasm pressure reported that they had experienced it between rarely and occasionally ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 1.17$).

Experiences of Orgasm Pressure by Gender/Sex/ual Identity

A Pearson chi-square test of independence showed that gender/sex/ual identity was significantly associated with whether or not participants had ever experienced orgasm pressure, $\chi^2(4) = 38.73$, $p < .001$. Using comparisons of column proportions, I found that a significantly higher percentage of sexual minority women (58%) and gender/sex/ual minorities (60%) reported that they had ever been pressured to orgasm compared to sexual minority men (38%), sexual majority women (37%), and sexual majority men (35%), all $ps < .03$. There were no significant differences between sexual minority men, sexual majority women, and sexual majority men or between sexual minority women and gender/sex/ual minorities.

The Most Recent Incident in which Participants Experienced Orgasm Pressure

Participants ($n = 318$) described the most recent incident in which they were pressured by a partner to orgasm and answered follow-up questions regarding the incident. On average, the most recent incident in which participants were pressured by a partner to orgasm took place between six months and one year ago ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 2.15$). Most participants stated that the incident took place with a relationship or ex-relationship partner ($n = 215$; 63.2%), though other participants reported that the partner was a hookup partner ($n = 30$; 8.8%), friend with benefits ($n = 25$; 7.4%), dating/casual partner ($n = 17$; 5.0%), one night stand ($n = 11$; 3.2%), a sex work

client ($n = 6$; 1.8%), or someone they were having an affair with ($n = 2$; 0.6%). The gender/sex identities of the partners who pressured participants included men ($n = 198$), women ($n = 111$), and gender/sex minorities ($n = 5$). One participant said the incident included a woman and a man (in a threesome) and two participants were not sure of their partner's gender/sex identity.

In response to being pressured to orgasm by their partner: 27.4% of participants said they faked an orgasm ($n = 93$), 19.7% said that they tried to have and/or had an orgasm ($n = 67$), 6.2% said that they stopped the activity ($n = 21$), 25.0% said that they reassured/communicated with their partner regarding the situation ($n = 85$), 4.7% said that they had an emotional reaction ($n = 16$), and 15.0% said that they did nothing or continued what they were doing ($n = 51$).

Is Pressuring a Partner to Orgasm a Coercive Behavior? (H1-H4)

Hypothesis 1 (H1)

Results largely supported hypothesis 1, that orgasm pressure would be associated with sexual coercion (i.e., being pressured into having sex). Chi-square tests of independence showed that experiencing orgasm pressure (yes vs. no) was significantly associated with being pressured into having unwanted sex (yes vs. no) because a partner made them feel guilty, $\chi^2(1) = 72.60, p < .001$, emotionally threatened them (i.e., the partner became angry or threatened to break up), $\chi^2(1) = 19.88, p < .001$, or threatened the participant with physical violence, $\chi^2(1) = 13.67, p < .001$. More specifically, odds ratios demonstrated that participants who had ever experienced orgasm pressure were 3.34 times more likely to have ever been guilted into having unwanted sex, 2.49 times more likely to have ever been emotionally threatened into having unwanted sex, and 3.28 times more likely to have ever been physically threatened into having unwanted sex.

Additionally, a higher frequency of experiencing orgasm pressure was significantly correlated with a higher frequency of experiencing sexual coercion via guilt, $r(375) = .26, p <$

.001, and emotional threats, $r(374) = .20, p < .001$. There was no significant association between frequency of experiencing orgasm pressure and frequency of being coerced via threats of physical violence, $r(373) = .07, p = .21$.

Hypothesis 2 (H2)

Results supported hypothesis 2, that orgasm pressure would be associated with faking orgasms. Specifically, a logistic regression model ($\chi^2[2] = 77.69, p < .001, \text{Nagelkerke } R^2 = .11$) showed that participants who had ever been pressured to orgasm were 2.58 times more likely to report that they had ever faked an orgasm when controlling for how often participants orgasmed with partners in general (see Table 4.3). Similarly, a linear regression model ($F[2, 374] = 66.30, p < .001, R^2 = .26$) showed that, among those who had ever been pressured to orgasm, being pressured to orgasm more often predicted faking orgasms significantly more often, also when controlling for how often participants orgasmed with partners in general (see Table 4.4). I tested interaction terms between orgasm pressure and frequency of orgasming in both models; interaction terms were not significant and were therefore not included in the reported analyses.

Additionally, I assessed participants' descriptions of the most recent incident in which they experienced orgasm pressure and found that faking an orgasm was the most common response (27.7%). Also of note, some participants explained that the pressure they experienced from their partner motivated faking orgasms in the *future*, highlighting a potential link between orgasm pressure and faking orgasms beyond the immediate context. As one participant said: "It made me more likely to just fake it next time" (Queer Trans Non Binary Genderfluid, 22).

Hypothesis 3 (H3)

Results largely supported hypothesis 3, that the tactics used to pressure people to orgasm would be analogous to sexual coercion tactics. The only code from the pre-determined

categorization matrix that did not apply to orgasm pressure was exploitation of intoxication. Notably, participants also described some tactics that were not a part of the pre-determined categorization matrix. Specifically, participants additionally reported that their partner made them feel pressured to orgasm by demanding an orgasm (e.g., the partner made a statement like “come for me.”), acting impatient (i.e., the partner implied or told the participant that their orgasm was taking too long), and/or telling them that they wanted to have a child. See Table 4.2 for a complete list of the orgasm pressure tactics described by participants (i.e., including those from the pre-determined categorization matrix and the additional tactics), the overall number and percentage of participants who described each tactic, and example quotes from participants that demonstrated how each tactic was used to pressure them to orgasm (in general and/or in the most recent incident). Within example quotes, words in brackets reflect descriptions that I added for clarification. Characteristics of participants who provided each quote include the participant’s gender/sex/ual identity as they reported it and their age in years.

Of note, some participants ($n = 26$) also suggested they did not feel pressured to orgasm because of something a partner said or did but because the participant put pressure on themselves to orgasm; I do not discuss these descriptions further given that feeling internally pressured to orgasm is covered by previous research (e.g., Fahs & Swank, 2013; Opperman et al., 2014; Roberts et al., 1995; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014), and the current study specifically aimed to assess external pressure from partners.

Hypothesis 4 (H4)

Results supported hypothesis 4, that experiencing orgasm pressure would be associated with negative relationship and psychological/emotional outcomes. I conducted bivariate Pearson correlations to assess whether the frequency of experiencing orgasm pressure with the partner

from the most recent incident was associated with relationship and/or psychological/emotional outcomes related to the most recent incident. Correlations showed that a higher frequency of experiencing orgasm pressure with the partner from the incident was significantly associated with worse self-perceived negative relationship outcomes, $r(296) = .32, p < .001$, and worse self-perceived negative psychological/emotional outcomes, $r(293) = .36, p < .001$. Frequency of experiencing orgasm pressure with the partner from the most recent incident was not significantly associated with positive relationship outcomes, $r(296) = -.08, p = .16$, or positive psychological/emotional outcomes, $r(289) = .09, p = .14$.

Discussion

In this study, I explored people's experiences of orgasm pressure – i.e., being pressured by a partner to orgasm. To do this, I asked participants to describe what partners have said or done that made them feel pressured to orgasm. Participants also answered a series of questions regarding the most recent incident in which orgasm pressure occurred. Using mixed quantitative and qualitative methods, I gathered descriptive information of participants' orgasm pressure experiences. I also explored the possibility that pressuring a partner to orgasm is coercive by testing for similarities between orgasm pressure and sexual coercion via four hypotheses. Results supported my hypothesis that pressuring a partner to orgasm can be coercive, demonstrating that “orgasm coercion” exists. Below, I discuss these findings and their implications.

Who are the Targets of Orgasm Coercion?

My study was not aimed at quantifying orgasm coercion in the population and does not offer any conclusions regarding prevalence. However, my results suggest that orgasm coercion is not rare. Even though I recruited broadly for a study on sexuality, I found that almost half of my participants had felt pressured to orgasm because of something their partner said or did. These

participants were of diverse gender/sex/ual identities, as were the gender/sex/ual identities of orgasm coercion perpetrators. As such, my findings suggest that orgasm coercion is not isolated to one type of sexual relationship or gender/sex experience.

Notably, however, compared to sexual minority men and sexual majority women and men, sexual minority women and gender/sex/ual minorities were significantly more likely to have ever experienced orgasm coercion. Importantly, the majority of sexual minority women group were bisexual, suggesting that results for sexual minority women may have been driven by bisexual women's experiences. These findings align with research demonstrating that bisexual women and gender/sex/ual minorities experience sexual exploitation more often than their heterosexual and cisgender peers (Ford & Soto-Marquez, 2016; Johnson et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2011; Martin-Storey et al., 2018; Murchison et al., 2017; Satinsky & Jozkowski, 2014). According to Minority Stress Theory, this higher rate of sexual aggression is due to externalized and internalized expressions of homophobia and/or transphobia (Brooks, 1981; Martin-Storey et al., 2018; Meyer, 2003), calling to question whether pressuring a partner to orgasm might serve similar functions. Findings from Chapter 2 support this possibility – I found that bisexual and gender/sex minority individuals sometimes felt pressured to orgasm to combat partners' fears that 1) they were “lying” about their sexual identity and 2) that their identity threatened sexual attraction to the partner (Chadwick et al., 2019). However, such implications are speculative – more research is needed to understand the relationship between gender/sex/ual identities and orgasm coercion.

What Does Orgasm Coercion Look Like?

Participants answered questions about the most recent incident in which they were pressured by a partner to orgasm, providing insight into the contexts in which orgasm coercion

occurs. For example, most participants reported that the incident took place with a relationship partner, suggesting that orgasm coercion behaviors may be especially common in committed relationships relative to casual sexual encounters. These findings align with research on the role of partner orgasm, sexual communication, and sexual coercion in relationships. That is, research has shown that men care more about women partners' orgasm occurrence in the context of relationships compared to casual sexual encounters (Salisbury & Fisher, 2014). As such, orgasm coercion may be more likely to occur in relationships because individuals are more invested in the sexual satisfaction of their partners than they otherwise would be. Additionally, because sexual communication tends to increase with the level of commitment in a relationship (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Montesi et al., 2011), those who want their partner to orgasm may be more likely to explicitly pressure their partner to orgasm as they become more familiar and/or intimately engaged. In support, research has suggested that sexual precedence can increase the likelihood of sexual coercion behaviors because perpetrators feel more comfortable demanding and/or entitled to sex with a partner who has previously consented (Livingston et al., 2004).

Is Pressuring a Partner to Orgasm Coercive?

A central goal of the present research was to assess whether pressuring a partner to orgasm is a coercive behavior. As such, I tested four hypotheses that examined similarities between orgasm pressure and sexual coercion as it is more traditionally defined (i.e., being pressured into having sex). Support for each hypothesis provided compelling evidence that “orgasm coercion” exists – that is, that pressuring a partner to orgasm is a coercive behavior.

Evidence for Orgasm Coercion

Orgasm Pressure was Associated with Sexual Coercion. Results largely supported my first hypothesis (H1), that experiencing orgasm pressure would be associated with experiencing

sexual coercion. Specifically, I found that participants who had ever experienced orgasm pressure were significantly more likely to report that they had ever been pressured into having unwanted sex via guilt, emotional threats, and physical threats. Additionally, being pressured to orgasm more often was significantly correlated with experiencing sexual coercion via guilt and emotional threats – though not physical threats – more often.

The significant associations between orgasm pressure and sexual coercion support that pressuring a partner to orgasm is coercive by demonstrating that orgasm pressure and sexual coercion are linked through a common behavioral thread. In the most direct sense, both behaviors involve pressuring a partner to do something sexual. However, research on the larger context in which sexual coercion takes place has shown that sexual coercion perpetration is associated with power and control motivations (DeGue et al., 2010; Eaton & Matamala, 2014; Hines, 2007; Muehlenhard & Falcon, 1990; Schatzel-Murphy et al., 2009; Wright et al., 2010), raising the suggestion that pressuring a partner to orgasm reflects an exertion of power and control, too. Given what people stand to gain from a partner's orgasm occurrence, this certainly seems plausible. That is, because partner orgasm occurrence (especially for men partnered with women) is socially positioned as a personal achievement and symbol of mastery over another person's body (Chadwick & Anders, 2017; Gilfoyle et al., 1992; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014), partner orgasm is perhaps an opportune site for exercising power and control. In support, research has demonstrated that other power and control behaviors tend to co-occur. For example, research has shown that sexual coercion in itself is connected to a broader web of destructive conflict patterns such as psychological aggression, partner monitoring, and emotional abuse (Katz & Myhr, 2008). As such, my findings suggest that pressuring someone to orgasm at its

best may reflect an isolated attempt to exert power over a partner's body, while at its worst, it may be an expression of someone's destructive conflict tendencies.

Orgasm Pressure was Associated with Faking Orgasms. Results also supported my second hypothesis (H2), that experiencing orgasm pressure would be associated with faking orgasms. I found that participants who had ever experienced orgasm pressure were significantly more likely to report that they had ever faked an orgasm with a partner; and, being pressured to orgasm more frequently was also significantly associated with faking orgasms more frequently. These associations were significant even when controlling for how often participants orgasmed with partners in general, which suggested that experiencing orgasm pressure and faking orgasms are not just a result of someone's difficulty with having orgasms overall. Additionally, participants' qualitative descriptions of the most recent incident in which a partner pressured them to have an orgasm showed a direct link between being pressured to orgasm and faking an orgasm as a result. That is, when I asked participants to describe what they did in response to being pressured to orgasm by a partner, the most common response was to fake an orgasm.

The links between orgasm pressure and faking orgasms support that pressuring a partner to orgasm is coercive because they demonstrated how orgasm pressure communicates meaningful threats associated with noncompliance (i.e., not orgasming). More specifically, findings indicated that individuals perceive not orgasming as having worse consequences than going along with their perpetrators' demands, so much so that individuals would rather fake the desired result than face the consequences. Some participants even suggested that their partner's pressuring behaviors motivated them to fake orgasms in future encounters, highlighting the salience of these threatened consequences over time. Notably, these patterns are similar to compliance in sexual coercion scenarios, where targets "give in" and have sex after being

pressured to do so (Katz & Tirone, 2010; Livingston et al., 2004; Willis & Nelson-Gray, 2020). As such, faking an orgasm may be a form of compliance, too, given that it is also implemented as a strategy for mitigating negative consequences threatened by a coercive partner. Importantly, this perspective offers new insights into why people fake orgasms. That is, although research has noted that people fake orgasms to avoid disappointing a partner or to protect a partner's ego (Roberts et al., 1995; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014), scholars have often framed individuals' anticipated partner reactions as speculative rather than experientially-grounded. The present study demonstrates that partners do react to orgasm absence in accordance with what people expect (i.e., it is not just speculation), and that faking orgasm can function as a protective strategy for avoiding very real negative consequences (e.g., the partner's anger, disappointment, and/or violence).

Orgasm Pressure Tactics were Analogous, Similar, or Equivalent to Sexual Coercion Tactics. Results also largely supported my third hypothesis (H3), that the tactics used to pressure people to orgasm would be analogous, similar, or equivalent to sexual coercion tactics. To test this hypothesis, I created a pre-determined categorization matrix comprised of sexual coercion tactics defined in previous literature (Livingston et al., 2004; Struckman-Johnson et al., 2003) and applied them to participants' descriptions of tactics their partners used to pressure them to orgasm. The tactics included: emotional manipulation (e.g., repeatedly asking, implying fault, making the target feel guilty, making an emotional threat), continuing sexual activity, positive verbal persuasion, physical force and threats, and exploitation of the intoxicated. I successfully applied all codes to participants' descriptions with the exception of one – that is, no participant reported that their partner pressured them to orgasm via exploitation of intoxication. I note that exploitation of intoxication could still be a part of orgasm coercion

even though it did not come up in this study. Some research has shown that, although large amounts of alcohol and other substances tend to inhibit orgasm response, low to moderate levels can sometimes facilitate arousal and orgasm (Malatesta et al., 1982; McKay A, 2005).

In addition to the tactics outlined by the pre-determined categorization matrix, I also found three orgasm pressure tactics that were not listed as tactics in the sexual coercion literature I used to establish the matrix; these tactics included demanding an orgasm, expressing impatience, and wanting to have a child. Below, I describe each tactic from and beyond the pre-determined categorization matrix and summarize how it was used to pressure participants to orgasm:

Emotional Manipulation. Emotional manipulation is a form of sexual coercion that includes a variety of sub-tactics (Livingston et al., 2004; Struckman-Johnson et al., 2003). I found that these same sub-tactics were used to pressure participants to orgasm. For example, repetitively asking for sex can be a form of sexual coercion because it implies that the requests will continue until the partner “gives in” (Livingston et al., 2004; Struckman-Johnson et al., 2003). In the present study, many participants reported that their partner repeatedly asked them if they had an orgasm in ways that made them feel pressured.

In another form of emotional manipulation, perpetrators of sexual coercion may pressure sexual partners to have sex by implying that there is something wrong with them if they say no (Livingston et al., 2004; Struckman-Johnson et al., 2003). Participants in the present study similarly reported that their sexual partner made them feel pressured to orgasm by implying that the participant was at fault if the participant’s orgasm did not occur.

Furthermore, perpetrators of sexual coercion may try to guilt a partner into having sex; this guilting can include behaviors such as pouting or making the partner feel sorry for the

perpetrator, among others (Livingston et al., 2004; Struckman-Johnson et al., 2003). Again, participants in the present study reported experiencing similar behaviors; for example, they stated that they felt pressured to orgasm because their partner accused them of not enjoying the encounter, not being attracted to the perpetrator, and/or because the perpetrator pouted or acted sad when the participant's orgasm did not occur.

Finally, another emotionally manipulative sexual coercion tactic involves the perpetrator making emotional threats (e.g., threatening to break up, withdrawing attention, giving the "silent treatment") to get a target to engage in sex (Livingston et al., 2004; Struckman-Johnson et al., 2003). Participants in the present study stated that a partner sometimes invoked these same emotional threats or punishments if the participant did not orgasm.

Continuing Sexual Activity. Continuing sexual activity is also a form of sexual coercion that involves perpetrators pressuring partners into having sex by continuing to kiss, touch, or initiate sexual activity despite the target's disinterest or explicit refusal (Struckman-Johnson et al., 2003). Highlighting how this tactic can be used to pressure people to orgasm, participants in the present study stated that their partner sometimes continued or insisted on continuing sexual activity until the participant's orgasm occurred, even when the participant was disinterested or explicitly stated that they wanted to stop.

Positive Verbal Persuasion. Additionally, positive verbal persuasion or "sweet-talking" is a form of sexual coercion that can be used to manipulate a partner into having sex (Livingston et al., 2004). Examples include perpetrators giving compliments, making promises, or saying things like, "I want to have sex because it will be good for our relationship" to get a target to have sex. Participants in the present study similarly reported that their partner communicated (implicitly or

explicitly) positive/altruistic intentions (e.g., they said things like, “but I want to make you feel good”) in ways that made the participant feel pressured to orgasm.

Physical Threats. One of the more extreme forms of sexual coercion involves physically harming or threatening someone to get them to have sex (Struckman-Johnson et al., 2003). Some participants in the present study reported that sexual partners sometimes used physical threats and/or violence (e.g., threatening to continue a sexual assault, destroying a participant’s property) in ways that pressured them to have an orgasm.

Demanding an Orgasm. Demanding an orgasm (e.g., saying things like “cum for me!”) was a tactic used to pressure participants to orgasm, but it was not a part of the pre-determined categorization matrix. Notably, demanding an orgasm was sometimes framed by participants as dirty talk, which communicated that it was perhaps meant to spice up the sexual encounter or be a well-intended form of dominance play in line with bondage-discipline, dominance-submission, sadism-masochism (BDSM) practices. This might explain why some participants thought that their partners were trying to be “hot” when they demanded an orgasm, while others suggested that it crossed a line (especially when coupled with aggression). That is, research has shown that while BDSM practices can be a healthy part of sex, they can also become abusive if partners do not respect or have previously agreed upon practices and/or safe words (Pitagora, 2013).

Expressing Impatience. In another tactic that was not a part of the pre-determined categorization matrix, partners expressed impatience with the participant’s orgasm in a way that made participants feel pressured to orgasm. Using this tactic perhaps reflects sexual scripts that position orgasm occurrence as signaling the “end” of a sexual encounter (Fahs, 2014b; Opperman et al., 2014; Potts, 2000). As such, it makes sense that people might express

impatience with their partner's orgasm if they think the encounter cannot end or will be a failure unless orgasm happens.

Wanting to Have a Child. The final additional tactic that was not included in the pre-determined categorization matrix involved communicating the desire for a child. Although the sexual coercion studies I used for the current study did not list wanting to have a child as a coercion tactic, previous research on infertility and reproductive coercion has shown that individuals sometimes coerce partners into having sex for purposes of conception (Miller et al., 2010; Nikolajski et al., 2015; Peterson & Buday, 2020). Thus, it perhaps makes sense that this can be used to pressure someone to orgasm, too.

Summary of Orgasm Coercion Tactics. Outlining the tactics used to pressure people to orgasm also showed that orgasm coercion can include behaviors that are clearly coercive – such as outright ultimatums – or more ambiguous – such as indirect threats and seemingly positive comments. That some orgasm coercion tactics are less clearly coercive suggests that some forms of orgasm coercion may be more difficult to identify than others. For example, orgasm coercion via sweet-talking (e.g., pressuring someone to orgasm by saying “I want to make you feel good”) is seemingly motivated by positive intentions, which conflicts with notions of coercion as exploitative. Thus, people may not identify pressuring someone to orgasm via sweet-talking as a coercive behavior. As such, it is perhaps important to reiterate that one of the central features of coercion is the perpetrator's use of threats or implied consequences to get what they want. That is, while sweet-talking in itself may not be coercive, it arguably becomes so when the perpetrator simultaneously implies (explicitly or implicitly, or via past responses) that they will be disappointed or upset if the target's orgasm does not occur. Identifying orgasm coercion in this

way aligns with feminist perspectives that highlight how negative liberty – that is, freedom from having to do what others tell us to do – is essential to true sexual liberation (Fahs, 2014a).

More Frequent Orgasm Pressure was Associated with Worse Relationship and Psychological/Emotional Effects. Finally, results supported my fourth hypothesis (H4), that experiencing more orgasm pressure in a given sexual relationship would be associated with worse self-perceived psychological/emotional and relationship outcomes. Specifically, I found that, when reflecting on the most recent incident in which participants were pressured to orgasm, participants who had experienced pressure from the partner more often reported significantly stronger negative psychological/emotional and relationship outcomes. The significant associations between more frequent orgasm pressure and perceptions of worse relationship and psychological/emotional effects supported the hypothesis that pressuring a partner to orgasm is coercive because it demonstrated that orgasm pressure has negative impacts, similar to those that emerge from sexual coercion (Livingston et al., 2004). These findings align with those in Chapter 2 and 3; specifically, they contradict the notion that trying to ensure a partner’s orgasm is inherently positive and demonstrate that this behavior has meaningful negative impacts on people’s sexual lives.

Limitations and Future Directions

Sampling and Study Setup

My sample represents an online convenience sample that was recruited via social media; generalizations beyond the study sample are limited. Participants had to access particular online websites (e.g., Facebook, Reddit, Twitter) to see advertisements for the study and therefore represent individuals who visit these sites. The majority of participants found the study through Twitter and are therefore more reflective of this online community. Additionally, although my

inclusion of open-ended demographics questions created one way to screen for bot activity, I did not include other bot screeners such as the Completely Automated Public Turing Test to Tell Computers and Humans Apart (CAPTCHA), attention checks, or trap questions (Yarrish et al., 2019). As such, quantitative results may have been affected by undetected bot activity.

An advantage to asking qualitative research questions using non-interactive online survey format is the convenience offered to participants. Participants can take the survey on their own time (i.e., there is no need to schedule appointments) and in the space of their choosing; thus, this format may attract participants who would otherwise decline research participation because of scheduling or location constraints. However, there are disadvantages to a non-interactive format, too. For example, I was unable to ask follow-up questions, clarify unclear statements from participants, or answer questions that participants might have had about prompts. The level of detail provided also differed across participants, and long descriptions with more detail were more likely to be represented in example quotes even though they are not necessarily more representative of people's experiences. Furthermore, I asked participants to recall past events that often took place six months to many years ago. Retrospective research is subject to recall bias, and some participants stated that they were unable to remember some of the details I requested. Additionally, some participants may have been more subject to recall bias than others because more time had passed since the incident occurred.

When assessing associations between gender/sex/ual identity and orgasm pressure, I consolidated participants of heterogenous gender/sex/ual identities into groups based on majority versus minority status. Consolidating participants likely erased important nuances within these groups. For example, previous research on sexual coercion has suggested that sexual minority women and gender/sex/ual minorities are at particularly high risk for being sexually victimized if

their sexual partners include men (Martin-Storey et al., 2018); however, groupings did not account for the gender/sex identity of participants' partners. As such, it is possible that sexual minority women and gender/sex/ual minorities have a higher risk of experiencing orgasm coercion only when they have sex with men. Additional research is needed to better understand the gender/sex/ual identity dynamics of orgasm coercion behaviors.

Furthermore, although the sample was diverse in terms of gender/sex/ual identities, participants were relatively homogenous in others ways (e.g., race/ethnicity, education level, class). Other social locations that were not represented in the sample are sure to be relevant for understanding orgasm coercion as a broader behavioral phenomenon. Future research should consider how other social location factors shape orgasm coercion as a phenomenon.

Defining Orgasm Coercion

Results demonstrating similarities between orgasm pressure and sexual coercion provided compelling evidence that pressuring a partner to orgasm can be coercive. However, participants' different reactions to their experiences of orgasm pressure brought up meaningful questions about how coercion is defined. As a researcher, I defined coercion as perpetration of a behavior – that is, as pressuring someone to do something by implying that there will be negative consequences associated with noncompliance. But, some philosophers have argued that the intention of the perpetrator, the perception of the target, and/or the effects of the behavior matter, too (Anderson, 2017; Berman, 2002; Gorr, 1986; Nozick, 1969; Rhodes, 2000; Wall, 1988). For example, some participants who said that they felt pressured to orgasm because their partner said “cum for me!” explained that their partner was trying to be sexy, not trying to pressure them. But, the phrase unintentionally made the participant feel pressured anyway. As such, one might ask: should researchers conclude that the phrase “cum for me!” is coercive in general, or is the

coerciveness of the phrase dependent on the fact that the target felt pressured in response? What if the perpetrator never intended to exert pressure and/or did not realize that their behavior had a pressuring effect? Or, what if the participant consented to and/or enjoyed feeling pressured, which could be the case with, for example, some BDSM encounters (Dunkley & Brotto, 2019)? The answers to these questions are perhaps contextually-dependent, demonstrating the complicated role of interactive behaviors in definitions of coercion. As such, it is difficult to be certain that every behavior or encounter described in the study was coercive.

Of course, that coercion is sometimes ambiguously defined does not negate that coercion was present in the encounters that participants described. Rather, such ambiguities shine a light on how some instances of orgasm coercion may difficult to identify, especially for those who experience it. Similar issues have arisen when assessing sexual coercion – research has shown that targets of sexual coercion are often hesitant to conceptualize their experiences as such if they think that any aspect of the encounter was a result of something they did or did not do in response to the perpetrator’s behaviors (Katz & Myhr, 2008; Livingston et al., 2004; Mynatt & Allgeier, 1990). Future research should include participants in the discussion of what constitutes orgasm coercion to better understand how individuals perceive experiences of orgasm pressure.

Conclusion

Overall, results from the current study highlight that “orgasm coercion” exists – that is, pressuring a partner to orgasm can be a coercive behavior. Findings refute the notion that wanting to ensure a partner’s orgasm is always positive and demonstrate how orgasm can be a site for exerting power and control over a partner. I hope that the findings of this study will draw attention to an understudied phenomenon and help individuals to make sense of negative sexual experiences in which they were pressured to orgasm by a partner.

CHAPTER 5

General Discussion

In this dissertation, I determined that orgasm experiences during consensual sex can be bad, demonstrated that such experiences are associated with negative outcomes, and identified “orgasm coercion,” a previously unnamed form of coercion. I also considered the role of gender/sex and/or sexual identity in these assessments. Together, the findings of my dissertation challenged the assumptions laid out in Chapter 1, i.e., that sex is always positive or pleasurable when orgasm is present and that trying to facilitate a partner’s orgasm is necessarily a positive behavior.

First, in Chapter 2, my research sought to identify some of the ways that orgasms can co-occur with negative affect during consensual sexual encounters. To do this, I asked participants of diverse gender/sex/ual identities about a subset of consensual sexual scenarios that seemed likely to set the stage for bad orgasm experiences to occur: 1) having an orgasm during coerced sex (that individuals feel is consensual), 2) having an orgasm during compliant sex, and 3) having an orgasm after feeling pressured to have an orgasm (i.e., orgasm pressure). I also asked participants to describe how their identities shaped these experiences. Using mixed quantitative and qualitative analyses, I found compelling evidence that orgasm experiences can be “bad” during consensual sex. Specifically, many participants described their experiences in negative and/or non-positive ways despite orgasm occurrence, reported that their orgasms were less pleasurable compared to other experiences, and suggested that their orgasm experiences had negative impacts on their relationships, sexuality, and/or psychological health. Participants also

reported that social location shaped their bad orgasm experiences, citing gender/sex and sexual identity, gender identity conflict, race/ethnicity, and religion as important to their perceptions of and responses to their experiences. These results directly challenged the assumption that orgasms during consensual sex are always and/or universally positive experiences and laid the groundwork for understanding the types of circumstances that contribute to making an orgasm experience “bad.” Notably, this research is the first of its kind to show that orgasm and negative affect can co-occur during consensual sex, challenging decades of scientific and medical research.

In Chapter 3, I extended my work on bad orgasm experiences by using quantitative methods to test associations between bad orgasm experiences that included coerced sex and/or coerced orgasms and negative psychological, relationship, and sexual outcomes. To do this, I asked women and men who were currently in a relationship to indicate whether they had ever experienced three types of scenarios with their partner: 1) having a non-coerced orgasm during coerced sex, 2) having a coerced orgasm during non-coerced sex, and 3) having a coerced orgasm during coerced sex. Participants also completed measures of their approach and avoidance motivations, psychological distress, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, sexual functioning, and sexual desire. Using structural equation modeling, I found that each bad orgasm experience predicted stronger avoidance motivations, which in turn predicted worse psychological distress, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual functioning. However, analyses of gender/sex differences demonstrated that having a non-coerced orgasm during coerced sex only predicted worse sexual satisfaction, functioning, and desire for women, but not for men. Together, these findings bolstered assertions from Chapter 2 that orgasm does not necessarily equate desire, arousal, and enjoyment by showing how the negative outcomes

associated with experiencing coercive behaviors can persist despite the presence of orgasm and consent. Also, results suggested that, while outcomes were generally negative across women and men, different types of coercion (i.e., sexual coercion vs. orgasm coercion) may contribute to outcomes that vary by social location in ways that warrant further inquiry.

In Chapter 4, I focused on a behavioral trend that emerged in participants' descriptions of bad orgasm experiences in Chapter 2 and that characterized bad orgasm experiences tested in Chapter 3 – being pressured by a partner to have an orgasm. Findings from the research in Chapters 2 and 3 suggested that pressuring a partner to have an orgasm overlapped with the behavioral patterns typically associated with sexual coercion (i.e., pressuring a partner into having sex). As such, the research in Chapter 4 sought to test if pressuring a partner to orgasm is a coercive behavior. Participants of diverse gender/sex and sexual identities completed an online survey that asked them whether they had ever felt pressured by a partner to orgasm, to describe what partners have said or done to pressure them, and to answer a series of questions about the most recent incident in which this occurred. Mixed quantitative and qualitative results showed that orgasm pressure tactics were analogous to sexual coercion tactics, and that being pressured to orgasm was associated with experiencing sexual coercion, faking orgasms, and negative psychological/emotional and relationship outcomes. Together, these findings challenge the assumption that trying to ensure a partner's orgasm occurrence is necessarily positive and demonstrate that orgasm coercion exists. Notably, these findings therefore also provide additional context to results from Chapters 2 and 3: specifically, they bolster the idea that being pressured to orgasm by a partner perhaps contributes to bad orgasm experiences because it reflects a harmful form of coercion.

Contributions to the Field

My dissertation research is the first to acknowledge that bad orgasm experiences and orgasm coercion exist. Acknowledging these phenomena via empirical research matters because research can serve to legitimize the existence of experiences that may otherwise be ignored or doubted.

For example, although sexuality researchers have critiqued the notion that orgasms represent the ultimate symbol of sexual satisfaction and sexual health (Attwood, 2005; Barker et al., 2018; Denman, 2004; Frith, 2015; Koedt, 1973; Lavie-Ajayi & Joffe, 2009; Opperman et al., 2014; Tiefer, 2004), orgasms are still assumed to be desired, enjoyed, and/or something of a bonus when they do occur (Beres, 2014; Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007). This assumption means that people may doubt or ignore individuals' negative experiences if they have an orgasm during a sexual encounter that is consensual, even if the encounter includes coercion, lack of arousal, compliance, or other elements that elicit negative affect. Chapter 2 offered poignant evidence that this occurs. One heterosexual man described an instance where he protested as his partner performed an unwanted sexual act during what was otherwise consensual sex. The man ended up having an orgasm, but when he later tried to address the unwanted behavior, his partner replied, "you enjoyed it, didn't you?" before "brushing him off." Accordingly, Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated how bad orgasm experiences can raise problems for people's sexual and romantic relationships. For example, participants in Chapter 2 made statements such as, "over time I began to dislike sex all together" and "it was a major emotional strain and it definitely took a toll on our relationship." And, results from Chapter 3 showed that bad orgasm experiences predicted stronger avoidance motivations, and worse psychological distress, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual

functioning. My research therefore directly challenges the assumption that orgasm and consent are an indisputable positive duo by demonstrating how orgasm experiences during consensual sex can be “bad” and have negative impacts on people’s lives.

Furthermore, although research has demonstrated that people sometimes exert unwanted pressure on their partners to have orgasms, trying to facilitate a partner’s orgasm is still often assumed to be a necessarily positive behavior (Braun et al., 2003; Cohen et al., 2008; Gordon, 2006; Potts, 2000; Salisbury & Fisher, 2014). As such, pressuring a partner to orgasm may be positioned as good, or even necessary, even if this pressure manifests in coercive ways. This was evident in Chapter 4, where participants described their experiences of being pressured to orgasm by a partner. For example, one heterosexual woman described how, in many sexual encounters, their partners “keep trying [to make me orgasm] even though I want them to stop once they have one [an orgasm].” By identifying these types of behaviors as a form of coercion, my research serves to label such behaviors as problematic and demonstrate how “encouraging” a partner to orgasm is not necessarily positive.

When taken together, demonstrating that bad orgasm experiences and orgasm coercion exist addresses an important point of epistemic injustice. Epistemic injustice refers to when individuals’ knowledge contributions are wrongly discredited and/or when individuals are rendered unable to understand their unjust experiences because 1) there is no known framework for explaining how the experiences are unjust or 2) the individuals are deemed to be non-credible because of their marginalized status (Dotson, 2012; Fricker, 2007). More specifically, my research provides a framework for dethroning orgasm from its typical position as the great equalizer of negative sexual encounters. As such, my findings offer meaningful contributions to the field of sexuality research by reconceptualizing the role of orgasm and pointing out

previously unnamed coercive spaces. And, my research has the potential to help people who have had bad orgasm experiences and/or experienced orgasm coercion to better understand their negative sexual encounters, and/or discourage people from perpetrating sexual behaviors that they may have otherwise justified.

Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation across my dissertation studies is my consistent reliance on online convenience samples. Notably, I used convenience samples because I aimed to explore topics that had been unassessed in previous research; and, part of my goal was to establish that certain sexual phenomena existed in general by using broad samples. Convenience samples therefore offered a useful starting point of inquiry into bad orgasm experiences and orgasm coercion, but there were some disadvantages. For example, using convenience samples meant that I was unable to make claims about the prevalence of bad orgasm experiences or orgasm coercion. It would be useful to understand how common these types of experiences are given that they have otherwise gone unacknowledged as a part of people's sexual lives. As such, my research will need to be replicated with population-level studies.

Additionally, using convenience samples meant that I was unable to conduct certain social location-based analyses due to small sample sizes of certain identity groups. For example, the research in Chapter 2 demonstrated that social location factors – such as gender/sex and sexual identity, gender identity conflict, race/ethnicity, and religion – shape bad orgasm experiences in important ways. These findings suggested that the outcomes associated with bad orgasm experiences might differ based on social location. However, in Chapter 3, I was only able to focus on gender/sex differences because convenience sampling did not result in large enough groups to test other social location axes (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender/sex majority vs. minority

status, sexual majority vs. minority status). This issue also emerged in Chapter 4 when assessing associations between gender/sex/ual identity and experiences of orgasm coercion. That is, because there were not enough participants to assess individual gender/sex/ual identities, I consolidated participants of heterogenous gender/sex/ual identities into groups based on majority versus minority status.

Consolidating participants likely erased important nuances – for example, there was evidence that higher rates of orgasm coercion among sexual minority women may have been driven by sexual minority women who specifically identified as bisexual. As such, to truly understand how bad orgasm experiences and orgasm coercion functions in people’s lives, additional research using recruitment strategies aimed towards diversity is needed. Notably, this will be a central point of my future research. For example, I plan to conduct more research to better understand how gender/sex/ual identity is connected to perpetration and outcomes associated with experiencing orgasm coercion. Given that women’s orgasms are considered “difficult,” and men are expected to elicit them (Chadwick & van Anders, 2017), I predict that men may be more likely to perpetrate orgasm coercion against women. Additionally, given findings from Chapter 4, I predict that men may perpetrate orgasm coercion against bisexual women partners more often than heterosexual women partners, and that women and/or sexual minorities will have worse outcomes when pressured to orgasm compared to heterosexual men.

Another limitation was that participants in all three studies were relatively homogenous in terms of racial/ethnic identity; each sample was majority white. I was therefore unable to assess how racial/ethnic identity might be relevant to bad orgasm experiences and orgasm coercion more broadly; though, a few racial/ethnic minority participants in Chapter 2 offered preliminary insights into ways that racial/ethnic identity might shape bad orgasm experiences.

The low number of racial/ethnic minorities across all three studies suggests that the recruitment advertisements – and specifically those targeting people of color in Chapters 3 and 4 – were ineffective for recruiting racial/ethnic minorities. As such, future research should consider alternative strategies for increasing diversity. For example, research has suggested that social network approaches may be useful for recruiting Black participants; this strategy involves asking Black participants who have already participated to share the survey with people in their social network who are also Black (Fuqua et al., 2012). Additionally, some companies that offer use of their participant pools for a fee allow researchers to specify diversity requirements (e.g., MTurk, Qualtrics). Using these companies is more expensive than the online convenience sampling with lottery prizes approach used in the present study, but this could be an effective option for increasing diversity in future research.

In a further limitation, all of my studies used online surveys, which have certain disadvantages. For example, results from the research in Chapter 2 and 4 were based on participants' qualitative descriptions, which were provided in open-ended text boxes through online surveys. This format did not allow me to ask follow-up questions, which means I was unable to clarify unclear statements from participants or acquire more details about the meaning behind participant's responses. This also means that some participants provided short responses and some participants provided long descriptions. Long descriptions are more likely to be represented in quotes because they typically include more details and explanations, but this does not mean that they better represent all participants' experiences. Additionally, while the research in Chapter 3 did not use qualitative data, I asked participants to consider three bad orgasm experience scenarios that might seem similar without careful attention. I explained this in participant instructions and bolded words in descriptions of each scenario type to clarify

differences, but it is still possible that participants may have been confused or misunderstood the types of scenarios I asked them about. Using an online, non-interactive format meant that participants were unable to ask questions about the survey instructions if they had them.

Research has also suggested that data from online surveys can be compromised by computer bots (i.e., computer programs that complete online forms automatically) and human bots (i.e., humans who complete surveys quickly and repeatedly without attending to questions thoughtfully). To account for potential bot activity in the survey, I assessed all open-ended questions to ensure that responses made sense and corresponded to the questions asked; this is one effective strategy for identifying bot activity, as bots often write nonsensical answers to open-ended questions (Yarrish et al., 2019). However, I did not include other bot screeners such as the Completely Automated Public Turing Test to Tell Computers and Humans Apart (CAPTCHA), attention checks, or trap questions (Yarrish et al., 2019). As such, quantitative results may have been affected by undetected bot activity.

Another limitation across my studies is that I used broad terms – like “bad” and “coercive” – to characterize participants’ orgasm experiences, but I did not ask participants whether or not they agreed that these terms applied to the encounters they described. For example, in Chapters 2 and 3, I characterized orgasm experiences that included negative affect as “bad,” but it is certainly possible that participants might disagree with this – perhaps because they have mixed (but not entirely “bad”) feelings about their encounters, they do not wish to portray their partner as “bad,” or other reasons. Additionally, although the overlaps between pressuring a partner to orgasm and sexual coercion provided evidence for “orgasm coercion,” it is possible that participants would not define their partner’s pressuring behaviors in this way. This seems plausible in light of research showing that targets of sexual coercion can be hesitant

to conceptualize their experiences as such, especially if they think that any aspect of the encounter was a result of something they did or did not do in response to the perpetrator's behaviors (Katz & Myhr, 2008; Livingston et al., 2004; Mynatt & Allgeier, 1990). As such, future research should include participants in conversations about what constitutes negative (i.e., "bad") and coercive experiences.

Conclusion

This dissertation challenged assumptions that orgasm experiences are universally positive and highlighted how gender/sex/ual identity shapes how these assumptions play out in people's lives. Specifically, my research identified that orgasms can co-occur with negative affect during consensual sex to form "bad" orgasm experiences, and, that pressuring a partner to orgasm is a coercive behavior. I also found that people of diverse gender/sex/ual experiences have these experiences and are affected by negative outcomes, but that gender/sex/ual identities shaped these experiences in different ways. Together, I hope that my dissertation findings will draw attention to understudied phenomenon and help individuals make sense of their negative/non-positive sexual experiences related to orgasm.

Table 2.1. Participant Characteristics in Quantitative (N = 726) and Qualitative (N = 289) Datasets

<u>Demographic</u>	<u>Quantitative n (%)</u>	<u>Qualitative n (%)</u>
Age		
18-24	244 (33.6)	92 (31.8)
25-34	354 (48.8)	143 (49.5)
35-44	88 (12.1)	39 (13.5)
45-54	32 (4.4)	12 (4.2)
55-66	8 (1.1)	3 (1.0)
Gender/Sex Identity		
Women	389 (53.6)	162 (56.0)
Transgender (as noted by participant)	60 (8.3)	33 (11.4)
Men	265 (36.5)	92 (31.8)
Transgender (as noted by participant)	13 (1.8)	9 (3.1)
Non-Binary/Agender/Genderqueer/Genderfluid	64 (8.8)	33 (11.4)
Transgender (as noted by participant)	11 (1.5)	5 (1.7)
Questioning	1 (.1)	1 (0.3)
Did Not Answer	7 (1.0)	1 (0.3)
Sexual Orientation/Identity ^a		
Heterosexual/Straight	299 (41.2)	103 (35.6)
Bisexual/Pansexual	243 (33.5)	109 (37.7)
Gay/Lesbian	83 (11.4)	32 (11.1)
Queer	38 (5.2)	12 (4.2)
Heteroflexible/Mostly Heterosexual/Bicurious	24 (3.3)	13 (4.5)
Asexual/Romantic/Demisexual	7 (1.0)	3 (1.0)
Alternative Descriptions	8 (1.1)	6 (2.1)
Homoflexible/Mostly Gay or Lesbian	5 (0.7)	4 (1.4)
Multilabel	2 (0.3)	1 (0.3)
Questioning	3 (0.4)	1 (0.3)
Did Not Answer	14 (1.9)	5 (1.7)
Indicated Identity Plus Queer	24 (3.4)	13 (4.5)
Race/Ethnicity/Nation ^a		
Caucasian/White	568 (78.2)	227 (78.5)

Multiracial	50 (6.9)	23 (8.0)
East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean)	24 (3.3)	7 (2.4)
African American/Black	22 (3.0)	13 (4.5)
Latinx/Hispanic	23 (3.2)	9 (3.1)
Indian/Bengali/Pakistani	6 (0.8)	1 (0.3)
Jewish/Ashkenazi Jewish	7 (1.0)	4 (1.4)
Middle Eastern/Arab	4 (0.6)	1 (0.3)
Malaysian	1 (0.1)	0
Native American	1 (0.1)	0
No response	20 (2.8)	4 (1.4)
Occupation Status		
Student only	92 (12.7)	31 (10.7)
Student and employed (part- or full-time)	157 (21.6)	60 (20.8)
Employed non-student	401 (55.2)	170 (58.8)
Unemployed non-student	74 (10.2)	27 (9.3)
Currently Living in the United States		
Yes	547 (75.3)	232 (80.3)
No	179 (24.7)	57 (19.7)
Relationship Status		
Single (no sexual or romantic contacts)	88 (12.1)	26 (9.0)
Single (no relationships, some sexual contacts)	97 (13.4)	36 (12.5)
Dating	60 (8.3)	30 (10.4)
Committed relationship	269 (37.1)	101 (34.9)
Married/Common Law/Life Partnership	172 (23.7)	77 (26.6)
Alternative Description	40 (5.5)	19 (6.6)

^aCategories were created by the authors based on participants' self-identification in response to an open-ended item.

Table 2.2. *Categorization Matrix with Number of Descriptions in Each Category*

Felt Pressured to Orgasm	Type of Sexual Encounter		
	Coerced	Compliant	Desired
No Pressure	$n = 23$	$n = 96$	$n = 3$
Internally	$n = 3$	$n = 24$	$n = 40$
Externally	$n = 18$	$n = 16$	$n = 51$

Table 2.3. Examples of Negative and/or Non-Positive Orgasm Experience Descriptions

Orgasm Experience Type	Example Description
Non-Pressured Orgasm during Coerced Sex	I did not want to have any sort of sex but I did it to shut my partner up at the time because he was relentless and would mentally torture me until I did. This was a frequent occurrence and over time I began to really dislike sex all together. I no longer wanted it, it was so rare that I initiated any kind of sexual activity with that partner. It [the orgasm] was less pleasurable and even though it felt good, I felt bad immediately after (Heterosexual Woman, 33).
Internally Pressured Orgasm during Coerced Sex	[I] was coerced into a threesome with another woman by an abusive ex. I was the focal point. They made me get off. I think my body went into autopilot from previous sexual experience with that boyfriend. As it was happening I had a feeling of, "well, I might as well get off if I'm going to be doing this." I felt disgusted with them and myself the whole time. I was angry that the other woman knew I had been coerced and didn't care. I knew I couldn't continue a relationship with my boyfriend after that, though it took a few months to successfully get out of it (Heterosexual Woman, 24).
Externally Pressured Orgasm during Coerced Sex	I didn't want to have sex in the first place but he kept touching me and pretty much made me, and he likes it when I orgasm so I did that for him. I felt dirty and couldn't even look at him afterwards. I hated it. It's more pleasurable when I actually want to have one [an orgasm]. The ones I was pressured to have were weak while the ones I had when I was really into what was going on were amazing. I am a transgender man and the situation where I was pressured to orgasm made me feel invalid and emasculated. I felt like I was weak (Pansexual Trans Man, 23).
Non-Pressured Orgasm during Compliant Sex	More than once I engaged in sexual activities with my ex-fiancée while I was tired, stressed, or otherwise unexcited because I felt an obligation to

	do so. I felt that my partner's sexual needs were important to maintaining a positive relationship...My orgasm was a by-product of the sexual encounter...Mostly the sexual activities felt hollow and mechanical because I felt obligated to perform them, rather than wanting to. Orgasms were generally less pleasurable when pressured (Heterosexual Man, 23).
Internally Pressured Orgasm during Compliant Sex	I was at an acquaintance's house when he began making sexual advances. I was not interested in a sexual relationship with this person, but it felt easier at the time to just get it over with than make the situation awkward. Orgasm was the natural ending to the encounter, so the faster I could get there the sooner it could be over. It [the orgasm] was not as pleasurable because I wasn't mentally engaged in the encounter (Gay Man, 24).
Externally Pressured Orgasm during Compliant Sex	I wasn't really attracted to her, but I was in a dry spell and she came onto me. She made me feel pressured because she eventually started crying and asked why I couldn't orgasm. That really killed the mood, not a good experience. [The orgasm was] much less pleasurable. More like relief than pleasure (Bisexual Man, 20).
Non-Pressured Orgasm during Desired Sex	I felt nauseous and gassy and was self-conscious about my body, although I wanted to have sex. [The orgasm was] about the same physically, less pleasurable mentally (Lesbian Woman, 19).
Internally Pressured Orgasm during Desired Sex	I think there is a dynamic that you want to please a partner, and also the dynamic of man/woman, and the reward for the man giving the woman orgasm, and I often orgasm, but then also squirt, so sometimes I push myself to do more sex (a little past my limit, or energy level) in order to show off/give my partner that "success" feeling. I do not know why I do that, I think it is hot, but maybe just it's hot that he thinks it's so hot, [because] if I have to put the work in to get there, I'm already mentally concentrating on it, and not as in my head living in the moment. It [the orgasm] is less pleasurable, [because] I am taken out of the "drunkenness"

of sex/love/intimacy when I "concentrate" on a result/end goal (Bisexual Woman, 24).

Externally Pressured Orgasm
during Desired Sex

I had an ex (a woman) who could be very into my pleasure during sex, but also put a lot of performance pressure on me to come every time we had sex, and also to have multiple orgasms...often if I didn't come or didn't come as much as she wanted me to, she'd get frustrated and accuse me of not being attracted to her, or prioritizing too many other things over our sex life, or she would complain about how the sex we had was vanilla and boring. Physically, it [the orgasm] was enormously less pleasurable. The build up to orgasm would feel kind of irritating and uncomfortable, and then when I came it was just sort of a spasm, without much pleasure associated with it. I sometimes would end up uncertain whether I had even come or not (Bisexual Woman, 26).

Table 3.1. Participant Characteristics (N = 430)

<u>Demographic</u>	<u>n (%)</u>
Age	
18-24	19 (4.4)
25-34	181 (42.1)
35-44	148 (34.4)
45-54	46 (10.7)
55-64	29 (6.7)
65-72	7 (1.6)
Gender/Sex ^a	
Women	179 (41.6)
Men	251 (58.4)
Sexual Identity ^a	
Heterosexual/Straight	383 (89.1)
Bisexual/Pansexual	31 (7.2)
Gay/Lesbian	11 (2.6)
Queer	1 (.2)
Heteroflexible/Mostly Heterosexual/Bicurious	3 (.7)
Did not specify	1 (.2)
Race/Ethnicity/Nation ^a	
White	336 (78.1)
Multiracial	21 (4.9)
Black (African American, African, Caribbean)	30 (7.0)
Asian (American, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese)	26 (6.0)
Wrote "European"	1 (.2)
White Hispanic	1 (.2)
Latinx	11 (2.6)
Mestizo/a	2 (.5)
Pacific Islander	1 (.2)
Native American	1 (.2)
Disability Status	
No disability	412 (95.8)

Yes disability	18 (4.2)
Religion/Religious Affiliation ^a	
None/Non-Religious	229 (53.3)
Christian	172 (40.0)
Spiritual	13 (3.0)
Jewish	2 (.5)
Muslim	1 (.2)
Buddhist	8 (1.9)
Hindu	1 (.2)
Did not specify	4 (.9)
Occupation Status	
Student only	2 (.5)
Student and employed (part- or full-time)	26 (6.0)
Employed non-student	350 (81.4)
Unemployed non-student	51 (11.9)
Relationship Status	
Dating	16 (3.7)
Committed relationship	215 (50.0)
Married/Common Law/Life Partnership	199 (46.3)
Household Income (Yearly)	
Less than \$10,000	10 (2.3)
\$10,000 - \$14,999	14 (3.3)
\$15,000 - \$24,999	37 (8.6)
\$25,000 - \$49,999	135 (31.4)
\$50,000 - \$99,999	181 (42.1)
\$100,000 - \$149,999	35 (8.1)
\$150,000 - \$199,999	16 (3.7)
\$200,000 or more	2 (.5)

^aCategories were created by the authors based on participants' self-identification in response to an open-ended item. Note that, for gender/sex identity, none of our participants identified as trans.

Table 3.2. Associations (Chi-Square Tests and Spearman Correlations) between Bad Orgasm Experiences (IVs), Motivations (Mediators), and Outcomes (DVs)

	Models 1a-b IVs			Models 2a-b IV								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
IVs												
1. Coerced Sex	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Coerced Orgasm	^a 10.94**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3. Coerced Orgasm & Sex	^a 59.59***	^a 17.02***	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4. Number of Bad Orgasm Experience Types	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mediators												
5. Approach Motivations	-.06	-.004	-.06	-.05	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6. Avoidance Motivations	.24***	.17***	.19***	.28***	-.11*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DVs												
7. Psychological Distress	.11*	.14*	.07	.16**	-.16**	.28***	-	-	-	-	-	-
8. Sexual Satisfaction	-.11*	-.09	-.10	-.14**	.41***	-.25***	-.34***	-	-	-	-	-
9. Relationship Satisfaction	-.12*	-.11*	-.12*	-.17***	.38***	-.29***	-.44***	.71***	-	-	-	-
10. Sexual Functioning	-.12*	-.11*	-.03	-.15***	.28***	-.15**	-.25***	.53***	.34***	-	-	-
11. Dyadic Sexual Desire	.01	.02	.03	.02	.23***	.02	-.05	.39***	.15**	.61***	-	-

Note. IVs in Models 1a-b were measured as 0 = *Never had the experience* or 1 = *Has ever had the experience*. Models 2a-b included IV 4 only, which was measured from 0-3. After assessing the associations in this table, approach motivations and dyadic sexual desire were excluded from Models 1a-b and Models 2a-b.

^a χ^2 values where $df=1$.

*Benjamini-Hochberg $p < .05$; **Benjamini-Hochberg $p < .01$; ***Benjamini-Hochberg $p < .001$.

Table 3.3. Parameter Estimates for Tests of Additive Moderation

Predictors for Each Dependent Variable	B	SE(B)	t	Benjamini-Hochberg p	95% CI
Psychological Distress					
Coerced Sex (A)	1.75	4.26	.41	.91	[-6.62, 10.11]
Coerced Orgasm (B)	-5.45	4.06	-1.34	.71	[-13.43, 2.53]
Coerced Sex & Orgasm (C)	3.75	6.84	.55	.89	[-9.71, 17.20]
Approach Motives (D)	-.45	.30	-1.48	.64	[-1.04, .15]
Avoidance Motives (E)	.44	.18	2.43	.18	[.08, .79]
A x D	-.14	.41	-.34	.93	[-.93, .66]
A x E	-.16	.32	-.49	.89	[-.80, .48]
B x D	.65	.39	1.66	.64	[-.12, 1.42]
B x E	.27	.28	.95	.89	[-.29, .83]
C x D	-.25	.63	-.39	.91	[-1.48, .99]
C x E	-.49	.42	-1.17	.88	[-1.30, .33]
Sexual Satisfaction					
Coerced Sex (A)	2.71	3.23	.84	.89	[-3.64, 9.06]
Coerced Orgasm (B)	.43	3.08	.14	.95	[-5.63, 6.49]
Coerced Sex & Orgasm (C)	-2.74	5.19	-.53	.89	[-12.95, 7.47]
Approach Motives (D)	1.03***	.23	4.48	< .001	[.58, 1.48]
Avoidance Motives (E)	-.35	.14	-2.60	.11	[-.62, -.09]
A x D	-.30	.31	-.97	.89	[-.90, .31]
A x E	.03	.25	.10	.95	[-.46, .51]
B x D	-.11	.30	-.37	.91	[-.70, .47]
B x E	.04	.22	.18	.95	[-.39, .46]
C x D	.30	.48	.62	.89	[-.64, 1.23]
C x E	-.15	.32	-.47	.89	[-.77, .47]
Relationship Satisfaction					
Coerced Sex (A)	-2.41	2.53	-.95	.89	[-7.37, 2.5]
Coerced Orgasm (B)	1.27	2.41	.53	.89	[-3.47, 6.01]
Coerced Sex & Orgasm (C)	-3.62	4.06	-.89	.89	[-11.61, 4.36]
Approach Motives (D)	.96	.18	5.36	< .001	[.61, 1.31]

Avoidance Motives (E)	-.17	.11	-1.63	.64	[-.38, .04]
A x D	.20	.24	.83	.89	[-.27, .67]
A x E	.06	.19	.29	.93	[-.32, .43]
B x D	-.17	.23	-.73	.89	[-.63, .29]
B x E	-.08	.17	-.48	.89	[-.41, .25]
C x D	.19	.37	.50	.89	[-.55, .92]
C x E	.37	.25	1.49	.64	[-.12, .85]
Sexual Functioning					
Coerced Sex (A)	.60	2.14	.28	.93	[-3.61, 4.81]
Coerced Orgasm (B)	.49	2.05	.24	.93	[-3.53, 4.51]
Coerced Sex & Orgasm (C)	.56	3.45	.16	.95	[-6.22, 7.33]
Approach Motives (D)	.38	.15	2.49	.11	[.08, .68]
Avoidance Motives (E)	-.14	.09	-1.50	.64	[-.31, .04]
A x D	-.12	.20	-.59	.89	[-.52, .28]
A x E	-.08	.16	-.51	.89	[-.40, .24]
B x D	-.15	.20	-.77	.89	[-.54, .24]
B x E	.09	.14	.65	.89	[-.19, .37]
C x D	.03	.32	.10	.95	[-.59, .65]
C x E	-.11	.21	-.52	.89	[-.52, .30]
Sexual Desire					
Coerced Sex (A)	1.38	5.42	.26	.93	[-9.27, 12.02]
Coerced Orgasm (B)	2.55	5.17	.49	.89	[-7.61, 12.71]
Coerced Sex & Orgasm (C)	4.00	8.71	.46	.89	[-13.12, 21.12]
Approach Motives (D)	1.00	.38	2.56	.11	[.24, 1.75]
Avoidance Motives (E)	-.30	.23	-1.33	.71	[-.75, .14]
A x D	-.03	.52	-.06	.98	[-1.04, .98]
A x E	-.44	.41	-1.07	.89	[-1.25, .37]
B x D	-.33	.50	-.67	.89	[-1.31, .65]
B x E	.32	.36	.89	.89	[-.39, 1.03]
C x D	.02	.80	.03	.98	[-1.55, 1.59]
C x E	-.96	.53	-1.82	.55	[-2.00, .08]

*Benjamini-Hochberg $p < .001$; **Benjamini-Hochberg $p < .01$; ***Benjamini-Hochberg $p < .001$

Table 3.4. Bootstrap Analysis of Magnitude and Statistical Significance of Indirect Effects

Indirect Pathways	β (Standardized Indirect Effect)	Benjamini- Hochberg <i>p</i> -value	<i>SE</i>	95% CI
Model 1a (Never vs. Ever had Each Bad Orgasm Experience)				
Coerced Sex → Avoidance Motives → Psychological Distress	.04*	.01	.02	[.01, .08]
Coerced Sex → Avoidance Motives → Sexual Satisfaction	-.04*	.01	.02	[-.08, -.01]
Coerced Sex → Avoidance Motives → Relationship Satisfaction	-.05*	.01	.02	[-.09, -.02]
Coerced Sex → Avoidance Motives → Sexual Functioning	-.03*	.02	.02	[-.08, -.01]
Coerced Orgasm → Avoidance Motives → Psychological Distress	.02*	.04	.01	[.001, .05]
Coerced Orgasm → Avoidance Motives → Sexual Satisfaction	-.02*	.04	.01	[-.05, -.001]
Coerced Orgasm → Avoidance Motives → Relationship Satisfaction	-.02*	.04	.01	[-.05, -.002]
Coerced Orgasm → Avoidance Motives → Sexual Functioning	-.02*	.04	.01	[-.04, -.001]
Coerced Sex & Orgasm → Avoidance Motives → Psychological Distress	.04*	.01	.02	[.01, .08]
Coerced Sex & Orgasm → Avoidance Motives → Sexual Satisfaction	-.03*	.01	.02	[-.08, -.01]
Coerced Sex & Orgasm → Avoidance Motives → Relationship Satisfaction	-.04*	.01	.02	[-.09, -.01]
Coerced Sex & Orgasm → Avoidance Motives → Sexual Functioning	-.03*	.01	.02	[-.07, -.01]
Model 2a (Number of Bad Orgasm Experience Types)				
Number of Types → Avoidance Motives → Psychological Distress	.07**	.002	.02	[.03, .12]
Number of Types → Avoidance Motives → Sexual Satisfaction	-.06**	.002	.03	[-.12, -.03]
Number of Types → Avoidance Motives → Relationship Satisfaction	-.08**	.003	.02	[-.14, -.04]
Number of Types → Avoidance Motives → Sexual Functioning	-.05*	.02	.03	[-.11, -.01]

Note: CI = Confidence Interval; *Benjamini-Hochberg $p < .05$; **Benjamini-Hochberg $p < .01$

Table 3.5. Comparisons between the Indirect Effects of Each Bad Orgasm Experience

Indirect Pathways	ΔB (Unstandardized Indirect Effect)	<i>p</i> - value	<i>SE</i>	95% CI
Model 1a (Never vs. Ever had Each Bad Orgasm Experience)				
Coerced Sex & Orgasm vs. Coerced Sex → Psychological Distress	.02	.71	.05	[-.07, .12]
Coerced Sex & Orgasm vs. Coerced Orgasm → Psychological Distress	.05	.17	.05	[-.02, .16]
Coerced Sex vs. Coerced Orgasm → Psychological Distress	.04	.31	.04	[-.03, .11]
Coerced Sex & Orgasm vs. Coerced Sex → Sexual Satisfaction	-.02	.78	.08	[-.20, .13]
Coerced Sex & Orgasm vs. Coerced Orgasm → Sexual Satisfaction	-.08	.20	.08	[-.26, .04]
Coerced Sex vs. Coerced Orgasm → Sexual Satisfaction	-.05	.28	.05	[-.16, .04]
Coerced Sex & Orgasm vs. Coerced Sex → Relationship Satisfaction	-.02	.69	.05	[-.12, .08]
Coerced Sex & Orgasm vs. Coerced Orgasm → Relationship Satisfaction	-.05	.15	.05	[-.16, .03]
Coerced Sex vs. Coerced Orgasm → Relationship Satisfaction	-.04	.25	.03	[-.11, .03]
Coerced Sex & Orgasm vs. Coerced Sex → Sexual Functioning	-.01	.74	.05	[-.12, .07]
Coerced Sex & Orgasm vs. Coerced Orgasm → Sexual Functioning	-.04	.27	.04	[-.14, .03]
Coerced Sex vs. Coerced Orgasm → Sexual Functioning	-.02	.42	.03	[-.10, .03]

Note: CI = Confidence Interval

Table 3.6. Regressions Testing Gender/Sex as a Moderator of Models 1-2a Pathways

	B	SE(B)	p	OR [95% CI]
<u>IVs on Mediator</u>				
<i>Model 1a</i>				
Coerced Sex (CS) → Avoidance	1.26*	.45	.01	[.38, 2.14]
Gender/Sex → Avoidance	-.12	.30	.69	[-.71, .48]
CS x Gender/Sex → Avoidance	.34	.60	.57	[-.84, 1.53]
Coerced Orgasm (CO) → Avoidance	.78*	.38	.04	[.03, 1.53]
Gender/Sex → Avoidance	.14	.32	.67	[-.49, .76]
CO x Gender/Sex → Avoidance	.08	.56	.88	[-1.01, 1.17]
Coerced Sex & Orgasm (CSO) → Avoidance	1.98**	.64	.002	[.73, 3.24]
Gender/Sex → Avoidance	.13	.27	.64	[-.41, .67]
CSO x Gender/Sex → Avoidance	-.35	.82	.67	[-1.96, 1.26]
<i>Model 2a</i>				
Number of Types (N) → Avoidance	.91***	.23	< .001	[.45, 1.36]
Gender/Sex → Avoidance	-.10	.33	.77	[-.75, .55]
N x Gender/Sex → Avoidance	.04	.30	.90	[-.63, .56]
<u>Mediator on DVs</u>				
Avoidance → Psychological Distress	.65***	.18	< .001	[.30, 1.00]
Gender/Sex → Psychological Distress	.95	.90	.29	[-.81, 2.72]
Avoidance x Gender/Sex → Psychological Distress	-.01	.26	.96	[-.53, .50]
Avoidance → Sexual Satisfaction	-.17	.14	.24	[-.44, .11]
Gender/Sex → Sexual Satisfaction	.07	.72	.93	[-1.33, 1.47]
Avoidance x Gender/Sex → Sexual Satisfaction	-.53*	.21	.01	[-.94, -.12]
Avoidance → Relationship Satisfaction	-.33**	.11	.004	[-.55, -.11]
Gender/Sex → Relationship Satisfaction	-.11	.57	.85	[-1.24, 1.02]
Avoidance x Gender/Sex → Relationship Satisfaction	-.13	.17	.44	[-.46, .20]

Avoidance → Sexual Functioning	.01	.09	.92	[-.16, .18]
Gender/Sex → Sexual Functioning	-1.54**	.44	.001	[-2.40, -.68]
Avoidance x Gender/Sex → Sexual Functioning	-.35**	.13	.006	[-.60, -.10]
Avoidance → Sexual Desire	.45*	.22	.04	[.02, .88]
Gender/Sex → Sexual Desire	-2.65*	1.12	.02	[-4.86, -.45]
Avoidance x Gender/Sex → Sexual Desire	-1.01**	.33	.002	[-1.65, .36]

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 3.7. *Logistic Regression for Bad Orgasm Experiences Predicting Fake Orgasms*

Predictor	B	SE(B)	df	p	OR [95% CI]
Coerced Sex	.47	.32	1	.14	1.60 [.86, 2.97]
Coerced Orgasm	.63*	.28	1	.03	1.88 [1.08, 3.26]
Coerced Sex & Orgasm	.90*	.40	1	.02	2.47 [1.13, 5.37]
Frequency of Orgasm	-.95***	.12	1	< .001	.39 [.30, .49]

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4.1. *Participant Characteristics in Quantitative (N = 912) and Qualitative (N = 340) Analyses*

<u>Demographic</u>	<u>Quantitative n (%)</u>	<u>Qualitative n (%)</u>
Age		
18-24	248 (27.2)	91 (26.8)
25-34	395 (43.3)	165 (48.5)
35-44	175 (19.2)	61 (17.9)
45-54	72 (7.9)	20 (5.9)
55-69	22 (2.4)	3 (0.9)
Gender/Sexual Identity		
Sexual Majority Women (Heterosexual)	230 (25.2)	74 (21.8)
Sexual Majority Men (Heterosexual)	301 (33.0)	86 (25.3)
Sexual Minority Women	243 (26.6)	129 (37.9)
Bisexual/Pansexual	171 (18.8)	91 (26.8)
Lesbian/Gay	29 (3.2)	13 (3.8)
Heteroflexible/Mostly Heterosexual	14 (1.5)	7 (2.1)
Asexual/Biromantic/Demisexual	10 (1.1)	6 (1.8)
Queer	13 (1.4)	9 (2.6)
Unsure/Questioning	2 (0.2)	2 (0.6)
Multilabel	3 (0.3)	1 (0.3)
Alternative Answer	1 (0.1)	0
Sexual Minority Men	89 (9.8)	28 (8.2)
Bisexual/Pansexual	38 (4.2)	16 (4.7)
Gay	34 (3.7)	6 (1.8)
Heteroflexible/Mostly Heterosexual	6 (0.7)	4 (1.2)
Queer	6 (0.7)	1 (0.3)
Mostly Gay	1 (0.1)	1 (0.3)
Multilabel	1 (0.1)	0
Alternative Answer	2 (0.2)	0
Did not specify	1 (0.1)	0
Gender/Sexual Minorities	47 (5.2)	22 (6.5)
(Non-Binary/Agender/Genderqueer/Genderfluid)		
Bisexual/Pansexual	28 (3.1)	12 (3.5)

Lesbian/Gay	6 (0.7)	3 (0.9)
Asexual/Biromantic/Demisexual	1 (0.1)	1 (0.3)
Queer	11 (1.2)	5 (1.5)
Multilabel	1 (0.1)	1 (0.3)
Race/Ethnicity/Nation ^a		
White	719 (78.8)	275 (80.9)
Multiracial	52 (5.7)	23 (6.8)
Black (African American, African, Caribbean)	24 (2.6)	9 (2.6)
Asian (American, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese)	22 (2.4)	3 (0.9)
Listed a Country or Wrote “European”	19 (2.0)	6 (1.8)
White Hispanic	18 (2.0)	6 (1.8)
Latinx	16 (1.8)	4 (1.2)
South Asian (Indian)	14 (1.5)	4 (1.2)
Middle Eastern	9 (1.0)	3 (0.9)
Jewish (Ashkenazi, White)	9 (1.0)	4 (1.2)
Indigenous (Maori, Native American)	5 (0.5)	2 (0.6)
Pacific Islander	2 (0.2)	0 (0)
Did not specify	3 (0.3)	1 (0.3)
Disability Status		
No disability	800 (87.7)	280 (82.4)
Yes disability	110 (12.1)	60 (17.6)
Religion/Religious Affiliation ^a		
Agnostic/Atheist/Non-Religious	579 (63.5)	233 (68.5)
Christian	196 (21.5)	62 (18.2)
Spiritual/Pagan	45 (4.9)	21 (6.2)
Jewish	29 (3.2)	11 (3.2)
Muslim	13 (1.4)	3 (0.9)
Buddhist	8 (0.9)	3 (0.9)
Hindu	8 (0.9)	2 (0.6)
Did not specify	34 (3.7)	5 (1.5)
Occupation Status		
Student only	90 (9.9)	23 (6.8)
Student and employed (part- or full-time)	223 (99.8)	86 (25.3)

Employed non-student	531 (58.2)	209 (61.5)
Unemployed non-student	66 (7.2)	22 (6.5)
Currently Living in the United States		
Yes	565 (62.0)	216 (63.5)
No	345 (37.8)	124 (36.5)
Relationship Status		
Single (no sexual or romantic contacts)	113 (12.4)	41 (12.1)
Single (no relationships, some sexual contacts)	103 (11.3)	52 (15.3)
Dating	73 (8.0)	31 (9.1)
Committed relationship	297 (32.6)	108 (31.8)
Married/Common Law/Life Partnership	280 (30.7)	83 (24.4)
Alternative Description	46 (5.0)	25 (7.4)
Household Income (Yearly)		
Less than \$10,000	90 (9.9)	32 (9.4)
\$10,000 - \$14,999	53 (5.8)	21 (6.2)
\$15,000 - \$24,999	108 (11.8)	42 (12.4)
\$25,000 - \$49,999	203 (22.3)	85 (25.0)
\$50,000 - \$99,999	215 (23.6)	82 (24.1)
\$100,000 - \$149,999	109 (12.0)	34 (10.0)
\$150,000 - \$199,999	65 (7.1)	21 (6.2)
\$200,000 or more	57 (6.3)	21 (6.2)
Did not specify	12 (1.3)	2 (0.6)

^aCategories were created by the authors based on participants' self-identification in response to an open-ended item.

Note: The qualitative dataset included participants from the quantitative dataset who provided qualitative descriptions of their experiences of orgasm pressure. Percentages are out of the total number of participants included in the relevant dataset.

Table 4.2. *Orgasm Pressure Tactics and Example Quotes (from N = 340 descriptions)*

Tactic (n of participants who described the tactic; %)^a	Example Quote
Continued Sexual Activity (n = 81; 23.8%)	[My] ex-partner would not take ‘no/it’s not happening today’ as a response and insisted on reciprocation even when it did not make sense for me. (Bisexual Woman, 28).
	[My sexual partner said] ‘I won’t finish until you have an orgasm.’ I’ve had a partner that felt the need to get even rougher and insert himself more intensely with the belief that I would orgasm that way (Heterosexual Woman, 24).
	[My sexual partner] made it seem like sex wasn’t over until both of us ‘finished.’ Even though I didn’t want/feel the need to orgasm, they wanted me to get off (Gay Man, 26).
Emotional Manipulation^b Asking/Repetitive Asking (n = 56; 16.5%)	[My partner] asked ‘Did you come?’ and very clearly and expectantly wanted me to say that I had (Bisexual Woman, 24).
	She asked me to cum a several times, even though I wasn’t so turned on. (Heterosexual Man, 24).
Implying Fault (n = 36; 10.6%)	What’s wrong with you that you can’t come? (Bisexual Cisgender Female, 37).
	I was talking about how it’s hard for me to orgasm during sex without clitoral stimulation. He seemed surprised and said his last girlfriend always came during sex (Straight Woman, 31).
	My ex-fiancé (cis woman) would regularly make me feel bad if I did not orgasm...by saying ‘Oh you would have come if I had a dick’ (Queer/Pansexual Cisgender Woman, 28).
Making the Participant Feel Guilty (n = 150; 44.1%)	‘You don’t love me’ or ‘I can’t even make you cum. You must think I’m ugly’ (Heterosexual Man, 36).

My partner pouted and acted frustrated and saddened by his own [in]ability to make me come (Heterosexual Woman, 27).

[He] stated that what he is sexually excited by is making his partner orgasm, therefore hinging his pleasure on mine, despite the fact that I explicitly stated that I am unlikely to orgasm (Bisexual Woman, 33).

Emotional Threats
(*n* = 13; 3.8%)

He [my partner] told me I was going to find someone else and that we were never going to work out because he couldn't make me orgasm (Straight Woman, 24).

I learned to fake orgasm because if she did not think that I came, she would be angry. She would sleep on the couch, tell me to get out of the house, go on a long drive without communicating with me, that sort of thing (Queer Pansexual Cisgender Woman, 28).

**Positive Verbal Persuasion/
Sweet-Talking**
(*n* = 30; 8.8%)

They keep trying [to make me orgasm] even though I want them to stop once they have one [an orgasm]. Conversation gets weird. Them: But I want to make you feel good. Me: I already feel good; you can stop now. I learned to fake it so they leave me alone (Heterosexual Woman, 39).

[He] emphasized how important orgasms are to him. Also through some pseudo-feminist bullshit like talking about how sad he thinks it is that I don't have orgasms often [and] how I should keep advocating for orgasms for myself. I have no problem advocating for orgasms, I just don't have them very often (Straight Woman, 31).

Physical Threats
(*n* = 21; 6.2%)

My ex would get angry and beat me if I didn't cum before he did (Trans Female, Sexual Identity: unsure, 19).

They were very forceful, and it was during an act of sexual assault. [They said] 'I'm doing this until you finish. I know you want this.' (Lesbian Woman, 19).

One partner destroyed my personal property as a response to one occurrence in which I did not have an orgasm during sex (Pansexual Woman, 30).

Demanding an Orgasm
(*n* = 111; 32.6%)

The partner said “I want you to have an orgasm” or “come for me!” (Multiple Participants).

It's never of malice. But she would say ‘I want you to cum for me right now’ which, in the moment is and for lack of a better term, hot. But, it's hard for me to orgasm (Gay Cisgender Woman, 25).

He thrust into me very hard and practically yelled in my ear to orgasm. He began rubbing my clitoris very hard and repeating that he wanted me to orgasm. It hurt and he seemed like he wouldn't give up, so I faked the orgasm to get him to stop (Bisexual Cisgender Woman, 25).

Impatience^c
(*n* = 68; 20.0%)

[My partner pressured me via] body language (acting bored or in a hurry) or saying things like, ‘are you close?’ in a clearly frustrated way. She would insist I orgasm regardless [of] if I tried to end the encounter, which is the reason for there being a kind of pressure (Straight Man, 32).

[My partner] gave me a time limit for how long he would try to make me come before he'd walk away. He told me I had five minutes to orgasm. After five minutes, if I wanted to orgasm, I was on my own (Pansexual Woman, 38).

Wanting to Have a Child
(*n* = 3; 0.9%)

The partner communicated that they wanted to have a child (Multiple Participants).

^a*n* and % reflect the number of participants out of the 340 participants who described experiencing the tactic either in general or during the most recent incident. ^bWe categorized emotional manipulation tactics into sub-tactics that aligned with behaviors listed in previous literature on sexual coercion (Livingston et al., 2004; Struckman-Johnson et al., 2003). ^cExpressing impatience sometimes served to guilt the participant, suggesting that impatience and guilt are overlapping sub-tactics of emotional manipulation. However, we created a new category for impatience because it was not a tactic in previous literature on sexual coercion.

Table 4.3. *Logistic Regression Predicting Whether Participants Have Ever Faked an Orgasm (Yes vs. No)*

Predictor	B	SE(B)	df	p	OR [95% CI]
Orgasm Pressure (Yes vs. No)	.95***	.14	1	< .001	2.58 [1.95, 3.41]
Frequency of Orgasm	-.19***	.04	1	< .001	.83 [.76, .90]

*** $p < .001$

Table 4.4. *Linear Regression Predicting Participants' Frequency of Faking Orgasms*

Predictor	B	SE(B)	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	[95% CI]
Frequency of Orgasm Pressure	.25***	.05	.22	4.74	< .001	[.15, .36]
Frequency of Orgasm	-.33***	.04	-.42	-9.28	< .001	[-.40, -.26]

*** $p < .001$

Raw Dataset ($N = 1051$)

Exclusions for Ineligibility and Inaccurate Responses ($n = 325$)

Missing Data, Ineligibility, and Joke Responses

-
-
-
-
-
-

Inaccurate Responses to Research Questions

-
-
-

orgasm experiences prompt, but their qualitative response suggested that they did not respond to the prompt correctly (e.g., the participant reported faking an orgasm, a nonconsensual sexual encounter, etc.).



Quantitative Dataset ($N = 726$)



Exclusions for Not Providing a Qualitative Description ($n = 437$)

When asked if they have experienced a bad orgasm experience, participants answered:

-
- “No” and therefore did not provide a qualitative description ($n = 265$).



Qualitative Dataset ($N = 289$)

Figure 2.1. Flowchart of Participant Exclusions to Create Quantitative and Qualitative Datasets

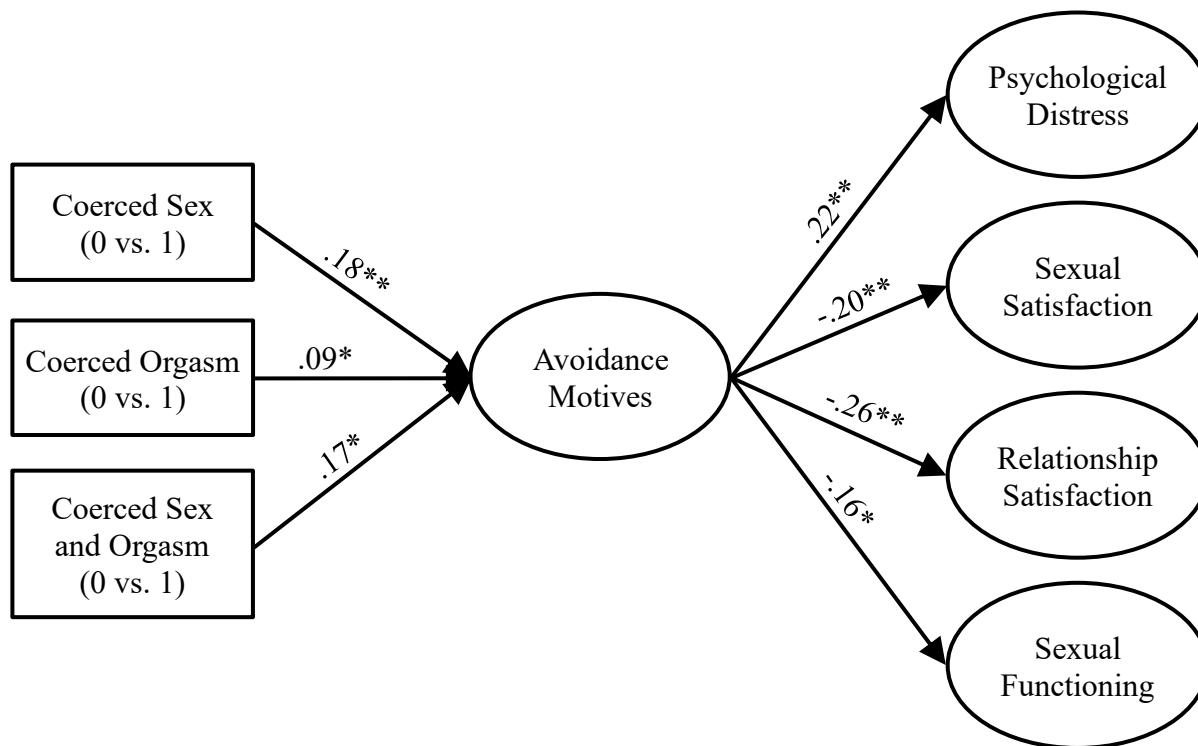


Figure 3.1. Model 1a with standardized coefficients. For clarity, error terms and covariances are not shown. Each bad orgasm experience was rated as 0 = *Never had the experience* or 1 = *Ever had the experience*. *Benjamini-Hochberg $p < .05$; **Benjamini-Hochberg $p < .01$

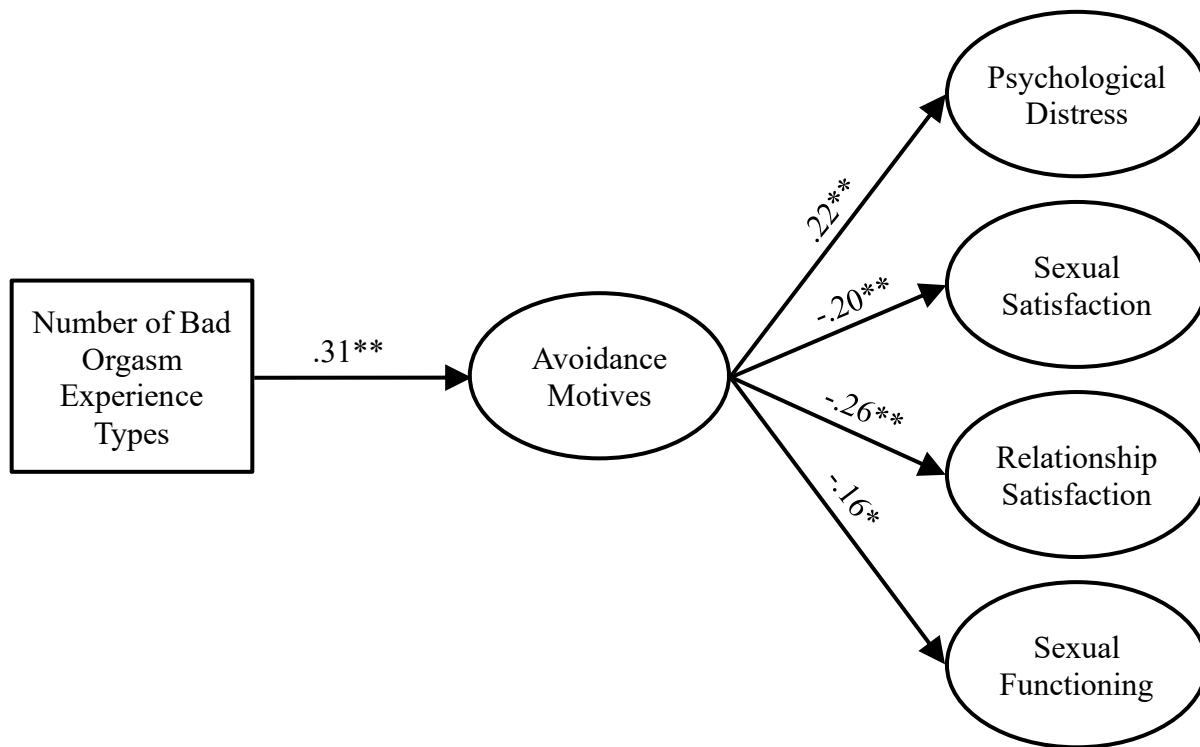


Figure 3.2. Model 2a with standardized coefficients. For clarity, error terms and covariances are not shown. Number of bad orgasm experience types was coded from 0 to 3. *Benjamini-Hochberg $p < .05$; **Benjamini-Hochberg $p < .01$

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