



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sexual diversity in the United States: Results from a nationally representative probability sample of adult women and men

Debby Herbenick, Jessamyn Bowling, Tsung-Chieh (Jane) Fu, Brian Dodge, Lucia Guerra-Reyes, Stephanie Sanders

Abstract

In 2015, we conducted a cross-sectional, Internet-based, U.S. nationally representative probability survey of 2,021 adults (975 men, 1,046 women) focused on a broad range of sexual behaviors. Individuals invited to participate were from the GfK KnowledgePanel[®]. The survey was titled the 2015

Sexual Exploration in America Study and survey completion took about 12 to 15 minutes. The survey was confidential and the researchers never had access to respondents' identifiers.

Respondents reported on demographic items, lifetime and recent sexual behaviors, and the appeal of 50+ sexual behaviors. Most (>80%) reported lifetime masturbation, vaginal sex, and oral sex. Lifetime anal sex was reported by 43% of men (insertive) and 37% of women (receptive).

Common lifetime sexual behaviors included wearing sexy lingerie/underwear (75% women, 26% men), sending/receiving digital nude/semi-nude photos (54% women, 65% men), reading erotic stories (57% of participants), public sex ($\geq 43\%$), role-playing ($\geq 22\%$), tying/being tied up ($\geq 20\%$), spanking ($\geq 30\%$), and watching sexually explicit videos/DVDs (60% women, 82% men).

Having engaged in threesomes (10% women, 18% men) and playful whipping ($\geq 13\%$) were less common. Lifetime group sex, sex parties, taking a sexuality class/workshop, and going to BDSM parties were uncommon (each <8%).

More Americans identified behaviors as "appealing" than had engaged in them. Romantic/affectionate behaviors were among those most commonly identified as appealing for both men and women.

The appeal of particular behaviors was associated with greater odds that the individual had ever engaged in the behavior. This study contributes to our understanding of more diverse adult sexual

behaviors than has previously been captured in U.S. nationally representative probability surveys. Implications for sexuality educators, clinicians, and individuals in the general population are discussed.

Citation: Herbenick D, Bowling J, Fu T-C(, Dodge B, Guerra-Reyes L, Sanders S (2017) Sexual diversity in the United States: Results from a nationally representative probability sample of adult women and men. PLoS ONE 12(7): e0181198. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0181198

Editor: Junjie Xu, China Medical University, CHINA

Received: February 10, 2017; **Accepted:** June 27, 2017; **Published:** July 20, 2017

Copyright: © 2017 Herbenick et al. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Data Availability: The minimal data set underlying the findings is available in the openICPSR (Inter-University Consortium of Political and Social Science Research) data repository (Indiana University Sexual Diversity Study)[<http://doi.org/10.3886/E100426V1>].

Funding: Funding for this study was provided by No. 9 Ventures LLC (Debby Herbenick, Principal Investigator).

Competing interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Introduction

Materials & methods

Results

Discussion

Conclusions

References

Figures (6) ▶

About the Authors ▶

Metrics ▶



DOWNLOAD ARTICLE (PDF)

DOWNLOAD CITATION

EMAIL THIS ARTICLE

PLOS Journals

PLOS Blogs

Back to Top





[About Us](#)

[Full Site](#)

[Feedback](#)

[Contact](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

[Media Inquiries](#)

PLOS is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation,
#C2354500, based in San Francisco, California,
US