

## **Pelvic Physical Therapy Distance Journal Club**

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Women's techniques for making vaginal penetration more pleasurable: results from a nationally representative study of adult women in the US.

Hensel DJ, von Hippel DC, Lapage CC et al. PLoSONE 2021;16(4):e0249242.

Doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0249242.

### **Introduction:**

- A sexual concern is not simply a “body-specific medical problem” or “psychological problem” that needs to be solved, but it is a human right to enjoy sexual experiences.
- The World Association for Sexual Health (WAS) and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) both include “pleasure” as integral to sexual health, but few studies attempt to understand the “how” behind what exactly feels good and how individuals enjoy pleasurable sexual sensation.
- Most of the research in this area focuses on specific body parts, positions, or toys that people enjoy. For example, “women tend to prefer face-to-face insertion rather than rear entry” but very few discuss techniques for any of these activities.
- The ICS (International Continence Society) has defined sexual dysfunction; the terminology for sexual pleasure is also important.

### **Primary Aim**

- This study was funded by OMGYES; a company that teaches women specific techniques for self pleasure because there is a lack of research in this area.
- The first article written by this group of researchers discussed external clitoral stimulation techniques. In doing so, it helped to demonstrate the wide range of techniques used for pleasure rather than defining a “typical”. The purpose of this study was to do the same for vaginal insertion specifically.
- When there is a lack of understanding about techniques that could promote pleasure, women rely on what popular media says “should” feel good, even if this is not true for them.
- Another aim of this study was to provide vocabulary for sexual techniques that is both easy to understand and not “too clinical”.
- Another aim of this study was to normalize that women's sexual experiences are diverse and to inspire women that there may be more techniques to explore that can enhance pleasurable insertion.

### **Study Design/Study Format**

- Survey study of 4,270 adult women from around the world.
- I have included additional information on statistical weighting that was used in the references
  - The key take-home messages are generally that:
    1. Statistical weighting is often done so that the survey data are more generalizable to the population

2. From the author Debra Herbaneck: “In this study the weighted vs. unweighted data don’t vary by much at all. Most results are the same, others vary by tiny amounts, but it’s still important to use the weights and so we do.”

## Methods

- Participants were recruited with social media advertisements. Of those individuals, 1,000 women participated in online interviews.
  - The median age was 48-years-old. The average respondent was self-described heterosexual, married, committed, or dating.
- These interviews were recorded and the data was used to find similarities for which they have given specific names.
- The data found four commonalities of techniques used for pleasurable insertion including “Angling, Rocking, Shallowing, and Pairing.”
- There is an image of these techniques in the references
  - **Angling** - Rotating, raising or lowering the pelvis or hips during penetration to adjust where inside the vagina the toy or penis will be
    - Rated with a yes or no response
  - **Rocking Measures** - The base of the penis or sex toy rubbing against the clitoris constantly during penetration, by staying all the way inside the vagina rather than thrusting in and out
    - Rated with 4 point Likert Scale (not pleasurable to very pleasurable)
  - **Shallowing Measures** - Penetrative touch just inside of the entrance of the vagina - not on the outside, but also not deep inside - with a fingertip, sex toy, penis tip, tongue, or lips
    - Rated with 4 point Likert Scale (not pleasurable to very pleasurable)
  - **Pairing Measures** - When a woman herself or her partner reaches down to stimulate the clitoris with a finger or sex toy at the same time as her vagina is penetrated
    - Rated with a yes or no response

## Results

- **Angling** - Used by 87.5% of women with a higher incidence in angling the hips higher
- **Rocking** - Used by 76.4% of woman with a higher incidence in rocking with a penis over a sex toy
- **Shallowing** - Used by 83.8% of women and was more common with a tip of a penis, tongue, or finger rather than a toy.
- **Pairing** - 69.7% of women had used pairing techniques with clitoral stimulation to aid in pleasurable insertion. The results found partner pairing more common with a finger than with a toy. 1/3rd of women describe using a finger for clitoral pairing with less using a toy.

## Discussion

- There has been a lack of research on pleasure techniques and therefore subjective experiences may be swayed by a response within the socially constructed model for which we live.

- These results validate that 70% of women choose many approaches to aid in increased pleasure during vaginal insertion.
  - The exact percentages are not that applicable
- Many limitations exist in this study:
  - The survey was limited to women without a detailed explanation of the criteria for “women” or what type of insertion they were partaking in. For example, it is unclear if someone that was not Assigned Female At Birth (AFAB) but self-identified as a woman was included in the study
  - The wording of questions were not always geared towards the reason why someone was choosing that technique. Assumptions may have been made that the technique was chosen for pleasure, whereas the reason could have been to move from an unpleasant sensation.
- Confirmation bias regarding creating the questions. How do the questions themselves affect the results?

### Conclusion/ Summary

- This study contributes to the philosophy that in order to help our clients we need to center the person’s experience over the body part or psychological symptoms involved.
- This study identified both vocabulary that could be used to aid in identifying pleasurable vaginal stimulation including angling, rocking, shallowing, and pairing.
- Having terminology of these techniques can enable women to better identify what they like, communicate this, and increase their sexual health.

### Clinical Applications

- Viewing sex as “person centered” instead of “body part or pathology centered” empowers women to know what they like, even if society says that it should be different.
  - This means as clinicians we can try and empower our clients to build confidence on their truth and tools to communicate what they want out of sexual experiences with their partners.
  - Clinicians and researchers can assist this by assessing what makes sex enjoyable for each individual, instead of making assumptions that everyone likes the same thing.

### Questions

- **What are your thoughts on “pleasure is a vital part of sexual health?”**
  - What do you feel is our role as pelvic floor physical therapists in treating all the aspects of sexual health including pleasure?
  - Does our education and role currently overlap with the overall definition of sexual health and include education regarding pleasure?

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### **Book Recommendations**

- **Come As You Are** - Emily Nagoski
- **Solo Sex** - How To Guide on Masturbation For Vulva Owners - Afrosexology
- **The Wonder Down Under** - Insider's Guide to the anatomy, Biology, and Reality of the Vagina - Ellen Stokken Dahl and Nina Brochmann MD
- **The Come As You Are Workbook** - A Practical Guide to the Science of Sex - Emily Nagoski, PhD
- **Better Sex Through Mindfulness: How Women Can Cultivate Desire** - Lori Brotto, PhD
- **Woman's Anatomy of Arousal** - Sherri Winston - mechanics of arousal
- **The Return of Desire** - Gina Ogdon
- **The Erotic Mind** - Jack Morin
- **Why Woman Have Sex** - Orgasm is only one reason
- **Finding Your Sexual Voice** - Barry MCarthy
- **Sexual Intelligence**- Marty Klien



