

## **Bachelor's thesis review – Supervisor's evaluation**

Title: *Primary Sexual Experiences and Sexual Orientation*

Author: Petr Šupa

Supervisor: RNDr James G. Pfaus, PhD, IF

Opponent: Zsófia Csajbók, MA, PhD.

Petr Šupa's thesis examines the situational factors of people's first sexual experiences of masturbation and partnered sexual activity, and how those might influence sexual orientation. Specifically, Petr asked about the sexual orientation of fantasy and erotic visual cues during first masturbation, the gender of first sex partners, and the age of first masturbation and first partnered sexual activity. These questions were organized into an online questionnaire using Qualtrix that was open for a 6-month period, yielding 427 participants that answered the questionnaire fully. Most respondents identified as heterosexual males and females, while a reasonable proportion of respondents identified as homosexual males and females, and bisexual females. The epidemiological characteristics indicated a good sampling of sexual orientations that would normally be expected to exist in the population. Results indicated that males' first masturbation and partnered sexual activities were consistent with their self-identified sexual orientations, whereas females' first masturbation and partnered sexual activities were more variable between the gender of preferred fantasy and erotic visual cues, and first sex partners. However, more consistency in orientation for both male and female orientation was found if the first sex partners were of the gender consistent with the orientation, suggesting a two-stage process in which self-identified attraction to specific genders precedes sexual activity, and in which subsequent partnered sexual activity "seals the deal." This suggests that sexual pleasure and reward are important experiential variables in the development of consistent sexual orientations. This research is among the first to examine how early sexual experiences influence sexual orientation, and the data will be written up as a paper for the journal *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.

The thesis was divided into two parts, a theoretical background and the experiments. The theoretical background was thorough regarding human sexual experience, although it could have had more on the role of early learning in animals. The limitations of the animal data were discussed, especially as they concern the self-identification of sexual orientation, but I was happy that Petr suitably extracted the important implications of learning during first sexual experiences. The experiments were written simply with both demographic characteristics and main effects being shown in a more "epidemiological" fashion (e.g., percentages of individuals in different categories). This is normal when taking a first stab at a phenomenon, and Petr's data certainly suggest further studies are warranted to examine different aspects of sexual

arousal and orgasm patterns during an individual's first masturbation and partnered sexual experiences.

I was very pleased by the outcome of the research, and by Petr's comprehensive understanding of the research question, data gathering, statistical analyses, and his ability to place the acquired data into a simple and clear framework within the larger phenomenological issue of the development of sexual orientation. That pleasurable early sexual experiences consistent with orientation might "seal the deal" shows how learning about one's own sexual attractions and sexual pleasures are crucial in the development of sexual orientation. Once developed into a self-identification, it is likely very difficult, if not impossible, to alter. That females' early experiences were less consistent with their self-identified orientations compared to males, is consistent with the idea of greater sexual "fluidity" in females, which suggests that more recent experiences may play a greater role in determining female sexual orientation.

I would rate Petr's thesis as Very Good to Excellent.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Pfaus', written in a cursive style.

In Prague, 30 August 2023

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James G. Pfaus, PhD IF