

Getting Turned on Turns People Off



Sexual Arousal is Seen as Less Moral than Other Visceral States

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Motivation

Sexual arousal is a natural drive rooted in our shared physiology. As with other visceral states like hunger or thirst, satisfying this drive is crucial to human well-being. Accordingly, the global market for sexual gratification is massive, with sex workers, makers of adult entertainment, and sex toy manufacturers all earning billions in revenue each year. Yet unlike other visceral states, the onset and satisfaction of sexual arousal often seem to be morally stigmatized. We explore whether this is the case, what makes sex unique, and what it means for individual well-being.

Method

Three pre-registered studies (n = 792) show that people who experience sexual drive states are judged as less moral than those who experience other visceral drive states.

Study 1: Moral Judgments of Others' Self-Control Failures

- 5-group (Visceral Drive State: Thirst vs. Sleepiness vs. Pain vs. Hunger vs. Sexual Arousal) within-subjects design
- **Primary Finding:** *Self-control failures related to sexual arousal elicit more negative moral character and behavior judgments compared to thirst, sleepiness, pain, and hunger.*

Study 2: Moral Judgments of Own vs. Others' States

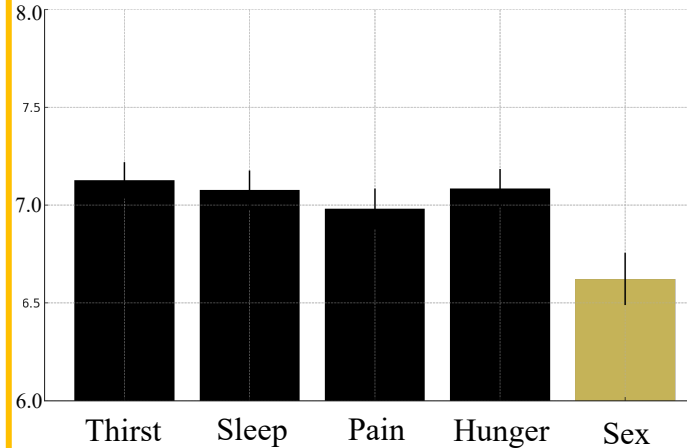
- 6 (Visceral Drive State) x 2 (Target: Self vs. Other) x 2 (Order: Self vs. Other First) x mixed factorial design
- **Primary Finding:** *Experiencing sexual arousal reduces moral perceptions of both oneself and others versus other visceral states.*

Study 3: Moral Judgments by Target Gender

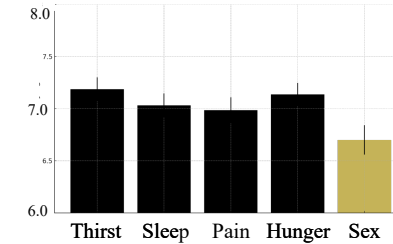
- 5 (Visceral Drive State) x 2 (Target Gender: Male vs. Female) mixed factorial design
- **Primary Finding:** *Sexual arousal in both males and females elicits similarly negative judgments compared to other visceral states.*

Results (Studies 1–3)

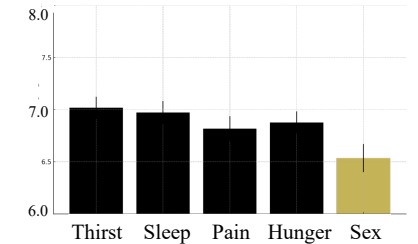
Study 1: Perceived Moral Character



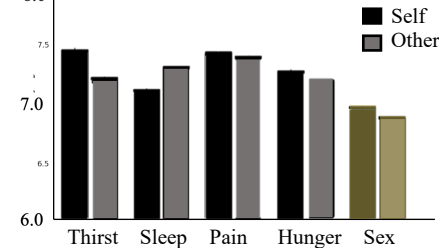
Study 1: Expected Moral Behavior Toward Others



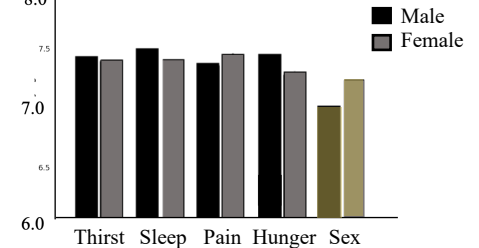
Study 1: Expected Moral Behavior Toward Oneself



Study 2: Moral Judgments of Own vs. Others' States



Study 3: Moral Judgments by Target Gender



Example Stimuli (Study 2)

Hunger / Sexual Arousal: Imagine an individual, Michael, who grows extremely *hungry* / *sexually aroused* (i.e., *horny*) while spending time alone at home one afternoon. His *hunger* / *arousal* intensifies to the point that all he can think about is *eating* / *having* an orgasm and alleviating this powerful desire for *hunger* / *sexual gratification*.

Initial Conclusions & Future Directions

Compared to other visceral states, the individual described as experiencing Sexual Arousal is judged to be significantly:

- Lower in moral character
- Less likely to behave in ways that are good for themselves
- Less likely to behave in ways that are good for others

Is sexual gratification seen as more “individuating” than satisfying other natural drives? Are these perceptions mutable and practically important?