

MDMA and Human Sexual Function

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Although many MDMA users describe sexual enhancement from MDMA, there are no published reports of studies that systematically examine the effects of MDMA on sexual function. In an unpublished study of 29 patients undergoing MDMA-augmented psychotherapy, Greer (1983) reported one occurrence of anorgasmia the day after ingestion and one occurrence of decreased sexual desire lasting one or two days. One couple in the study reported enhanced sexual enjoyment following an MDMA session, partly due to delayed orgasm.

METHODS

Because of numerous unpublished anecdotal reports about sexual enhancement from MDMA and the lack of published information, a study was designed to survey the effects of MDMA on sexual function. A self-rating questionnaire was devised to assess sexual function and provide some demographic data.

The respondents ranged in age from 20 to 63, had taken MDMA and lived primarily in the San Francisco Bay Area. The questionnaire was anonymous to encourage participation in the study and candor in the responses. The four-page questionnaire was distributed and tabulated between December 1985 and September 1986. (Copies of the questionnaire are available from the authors.)

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RESULTS

Of the 300 questionnaires distributed, 76 (25%) were filled out and returned. Table I shows the demographic characteristics of the sample. The respondents included some one-time MDMA users (nine females and one male), but 76 percent of the females and 97 percent of the males had taken MDMA two or more times. Except for seven females and one male, all indicated prior use of other hallucinogens.

The most common dose taken was 125 mg of MDMA. Very few respondents indicated that they took unknown doses of MDMA. Most indicated that they had never taken MDMA more than once a week. While everyone indicated oral use, four women (11%) and six men (15%) had also used it intranasally and one male (3%) as well as one female (3%) used it by intramuscular and subcutaneous injection. No one acknowledged intravenous use of MDMA.

When asked whether or not MDMA had caused them health or emotional problems, 28 females (76%) and 29 males (76%) answered no. Of the nine females and nine males who responded affirmatively, one male and one female reported that they had sought professional counseling due to these problems. The complaints attributed to MDMA use included urinary tract infections, tiredness and malaise, more colds, headaches, and mild depression and low energy the next day.

Changes in Sexual Behavior

In response to the question "While under the influ-

TABLE I
DESCRIPTIVE DATA

	Females (N = 37)	Males (N = 39)
Mean Age ± S.D. (years)	39.41 ± 10.27	40.23 ± 11.26
Age Range	20-63	23-61
Education		
College Graduate	31 (89%)	32 (82%)
Masters Degree	12 (32%)	10 (26%)
Doctoral Degree	6 (16%)	14 (36%)
Marital Status		
Married	14 (38%)	19 (49%)
Never Married	7 (19%)	11 (28%)
Separated/Divorced/Widowed	16 (43%)	9 (23%)
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	30 (81%)	36 (92%)
Homosexual	0 (0%)	3 (8%)
Bisexual	7 (19%)	0 (0%)
Used MDMA as Psychotherapy Adjunct		
Yes	0 (0%)	4 (10%)
No	37 (100%)	35 (90%)

TABLE II
INTEREST IN INITIATING SEXUAL ACTIVITY WHILE ON MDMA

Interest	Sexual on MDMA		Not Sexual on MDMA		Total	
	Females (N = 25)	Males (N = 26)	Females (N = 10)	Males (N = 12)	Females (N = 35)	Males (N = 38)
Increased	7 (28%)	6 (23%)	1 (10%)	3 (25%)	8 (23%)	9 (24%)
Decreased	6 (24%)	5 (19%)	2 (20%)	3 (25%)	8 (23%)	8 (21%)
Sometimes increased/ Sometimes decreased	9 (36%)	11 (42%)	3 (30%)	2 (17%)	12 (34%)	13 (34%)
No effect	3 (12%)	4 (15%)	4 (40%)	4 (33%)	7 (20%)	8 (21%)

TABLE III
RECEPTIVITY TO BEING SEXUAL WHILE ON MDMA

Receptivity	Sexual on MDMA		Not Sexual on MDMA		Total	
	Females (N = 25)	Males (N = 26)	Females (N = 10)	Males (N = 12)	Females (N = 35)	Males (N = 38)
More	12 (48%)	14 (52%)	0 (0%)	4 (33%)	12 (34%)	18 (46%)
Less	2 (8%)	4 (15%)	1 (10%)	1 (8%)	3 (9%)	5 (13%)
Sometimes more/ Sometimes less	9 (36%)	5 (18%)	2 (20%)	2 (17%)	11 (31%)	7 (18%)
No effect	2 (8%)	4 (15%)	7 (70%)	5 (42%)	9 (26%)	9 (23%)

TABLE IV
TYPES OF PARTNERED SEXUAL ACTIVITY

	Females (N = 26)		Males (N = 26)	
	On MDMA	Off MDMA	On MDMA	Off MDMA
Penile-Vaginal Intercourse	22 (85%)	24 (92%)	20 (77%)	24 (92%)
Fellatio	19 (73%)	22 (85%)	9 (35%)	10 (38%)
Cunnilingus	14 (54%)	18 (69%)	17 (65%)	19 (73%)
Anal Intercourse (with a male)	1 (4%)	2 (8%)	2 (8%)	2 (8%)
Anal Intercourse (with a female)	1 (4%)	2 (8%)	2 (8%)	4 (15%)
Sadomasochistic Activity	2 (8%)	3 (12%)	1 (4%)	4 (15%)
Heavy Petting	17 (65%)	17 (65%)	18 (69%)	16 (62%)
Group Sex (or swinging)	4 (15%)	4 (15%)	3 (12%)	5 (19%)
Other (please specify)	3 (12%)*	2 (8%)*	3 (12%)**	1 (4%)**

*"one other man," "my hand—his penis contact," "masturbating"
**"masturbation—self-piercing for erotic stimulation"

ence of MDMA did you feel the desire to take part in any behavior that is not usually part of your sexual pattern? , 29 women (81%) and 34 men (87%) responded no. Five of the males who responded yes also added comments: "Salad oil session—no holes barred"; "Attraction to males"; "Except for more variety of sexual positions"; "Group sex more frequent"; "Two extramarital—not normal"; and "Very much so—lots of variety fantasies with real desire to act them out. I want to make sexual love with several of my close friends, including threesomes and foursomes. Seems to be a large emotional component to it." The women reported: "I was much more orally oriented and enjoyed the tactile sensations of his body."; "No inhibition regarding presence of third person"; "Extreme roughness"; "Warm oil massage"; "Touching and hugging people, kissing people I wouldn't otherwise"; "Was tripping with girlfriend and her husband—was tempted to make love to the husband, but just kissed"; and "I wanted to have sex with the other guy—not my husband." One woman, who indicated no sexual behavioral changes secondary to MDMA, qualified her answer: "No, yet the experience itself felt more magical than not under the influence."

The responses to the question "While under the influence of MDMA, how did it affect your interest in initiating sexual activity?" are tabulated in Table II. The results were mixed. On the other hand, when asked "While under the influence of MDMA, how did it effect your receptivity to being sexual?", the results were more conclusive (see Table III). Increased receptivity to being sexual was reported by 12 of the women (34%) and 18 of the men (46%). Only three of the women (9%) and five of

the men (13%) indicated that they were less receptive. Another 11 women (31%) and seven men (18%) reported that MDMA use resulted in their being sometimes more or sometimes less receptive. An additional nine women (26%) and nine men (23%) indicated no effect on receptivity.

Of the entire sample, 26 women (72%) and 27 men (69%) engaged in sexual activity while under the influence of MDMA. From this group, sexual effects of MDMA were inferred. Twenty-three (23) of these women (88%) and 20 of these men (74%) responded that the sensuality of the sexual experience was enhanced by MDMA.

The type of sexual activity while on MDMA did not differ from the type of sexual activity engaged in when not on MDMA (see Table IV). In most cases there was more of each type of sexual activity while not on MDMA. The exceptions to this are in the "Heavy Petting" and "Other" categories.

Several respondents commented that for them MDMA was "a sensual drug, not a sexual drug." Problems in achieving orgasm while under the influence of MDMA were reported by 16 males (62%) and four females (17%). Four females (17%), but none of the males, claimed that it was easier to achieve orgasms on MDMA. Additionally, seven of the females (29%) and six of the males (23%) found orgasms neither harder nor easier to achieve, just different. Six of the women (25%) and two of the men (8%) had not been able to achieve orgasm on MDMA, while two women (8%) and two men (8%) indicated that it was sometimes easier and sometimes harder to reach orgasm while on MDMA.

Quality of Orgasms

When questioned about the quality of the orgasms they had on MDMA when compared to their usual orgasmic experience the results were inconclusive: six females (26%) and seven males (28%) said it was better; two females (9%) and four males (16%) stated it was worse; eight women (35%) and eight men (32%) stated that orgasms were not better or worse on MDMA, just different; three women (13%) and four men (16%) noted no difference; and three women (13%) and two men (8%) said they had not had an orgasm with MDMA.

Potential Therapeutic Applications

In response to the question "Do you feel that MDMA has helped you overcome any sexual inhibitions or concerns?" a majority of the respondents (15 females or 65% and 17 males or 63%) said no. From the eight women (35%) who stated that MDMA helped them overcome sexual inhibitions, the following comments were obtained: "Used it to forgive my childhood molestations and clear pelvic blocks"; "Jealousy had reduced due to the love shared in tricky sexual scenes."; "Has enabled me to enjoy sex more"; "I feel more relaxed and open since."; "To relax more"; "Lessening of armor/resistance"; "More awareness of my physical feelings"; and "MDMA helped me determine that I'm bisexual." From the 10 men (37%), who also said that MDMA helped them overcome sexual inhibitions, the following comments were obtained: "More open"; "More sensitive to one's own and other's levels of sensuality—better sensual communication"; "Allowed more sensuality—less purely sexual"; "More receptive to my partner's love and sensuality toward me"; "More relaxed to just let things happen"; "It's easier to ask for sexual activity."; and "No. It helped my wife a little, but it was only temporary—though she takes it every two weeks."

Effect on Sexual Pattern

When questioned as to whether or not MDMA caused any temporary changes in their sexual pattern, 15 of the women (62%) and 20 of the men (74%) said no. Of the nine women who responded that MDMA caused temporary changes in their sexual pattern, the following comments were obtained: "More experience of trust and safety"; "Feeling less sexual for a few days"; "Increased frequency and duration of sexual relations with my husband; lovely orgasms at night in my dreams; increased feeling of emotional intimacy with husband"; "Opened the doors to sharing sex with others and seeking like-minded partners"; "At the end of the trip, partner's sexuality is decreased."; and "To enjoy sex, I must be relaxed." Of the seven men who said MDMA caused

temporary changes in their sexual pattern, the following comments were obtained: "Not as hard on MDMA"; "Need seems less urgent—or compulsive"; "Hard to climax in peak times"; "Less need for ejaculation"; "Delay of orgasm, but building up to more total orgasms lately"; and "It's easier to ask for sexual activity."

When asked if the MDMA experience caused any long-lasting changes in sexual pattern, 16 of the women (73%) and 18 of the men (69%) said no. The six women (27%) that said yes had the following comments: "Desire to express much positiveness, also serious concerns, but never willing to make my partner uncomfortable, so there was always a gentleness and honesty; Increased communication on all counts and increased perception of needs"; "More open and relaxed"; "More experience of trust and safety"; and "There is only eight months worth of information here, but it feels long lasting—bringing me in contact with people who are like-minded and creating the reality of sharing what we do." The eight men (31%) who indicated long-lasting changes they associated with MDMA made the following comments: "More receptive, more loving and sensitive"; "Psychic/emotional aspects, especially with MDMA tripping partner"; "Attitude"; "More just being—less expectations—more relaxed"; "More relaxed about success and failure"; "More relaxing"; and "Need seems less urgent or compulsive; Less need for orgasm."

Does MDMA increase feelings of emotional closeness? All 35 of the women thought so, as did 34 (87%) of the men. Most of the men (64%) and most of the women (62%) felt that the MDMA effects were not related to dose.

MDMA as an Enhancer of Sexual Experience

When asked if they had ever used MDMA specifically to enhance a sexual experience, 17 of the women (74%) and 22 of the men (81%) said no. However, when asked if they would ever use MDMA specifically to enhance a sexual experience, 18 of the women (75%) and 17 of the men (71%) said they would.

As shown in Table V, MDMA has mixed effects on female self-report of sexual function. There appears to be no consistency in ability to lubricate, desire for sex or ability to have an orgasm.

MDMA has a clearer effect on male sexuality. As shown in Table VI, 69 percent of the men stated that MDMA increased their ability to delay ejaculation and 46 percent said it decreased their ability to achieve an erection, whereas only four percent said it increased it. A decreased ability to have an orgasm or ejaculation was reported by 70 percent of the men, whereas no one said that it increased their orgasmic ability.

TABLE V
MDMA EFFECTS ON SEXUAL FUNCTIONING IN FEMALES

	Increases	Decreases	No Effect	Mixed Reaction
Ability to Lubricate	6 (27%)	3 (14%)	10 (45%)	3 (14%)
Desire for Sex	8 (32%)	2 (8%)	4 (16%)	11 (44%)
Ability to Have Orgasm	5 (22%)	8 (35%)	6 (26%)	4 (17%)
Ease of Attaining Orgasm	5 (21%)	8 (33%)	6 (25%)	5 (21%)

TABLE VI
MDMA EFFECTS ON SEXUAL FUNCTIONING IN MALES

	Increases	Decreases	No Effect	Mixed Reaction
Ability to Delay Ejaculation	18 (69%)	2 (8%)	4 (15%)	2 (8%)
Ability to Attain Erection	1 (4%)	12 (46%)	9 (35%)	4 (15%)
Ability to Maintain Erection	0 (0%)	10 (40%)	12 (48%)	3 (12%)
Desire for Sex	8 (32%)	4 (16%)	5 (20%)	8 (32%)
Ability to Have Orgasm or Ejaculation	0 (0%)	19 (70%)	4 (15%)	4 (15%)
Ease of Attaining Orgasm or Ejaculation	0 (0%)	18 (69%)	3 (12%)	5 (19%)

DISCUSSION

Inasmuch as the present study involved a self-selected sample, generalization of these results is tenuous. Nevertheless, it appears that MDMA does not increase sexual excitation or sexual desire in a majority of individuals (as would a true aphrodisiac). For both males and females, MDMA enhances the sensual aspects of sex. This may be due to the increased feelings of emotional closeness.

Almost half of the males and a third of the females indicated that they felt more receptive to being sexual while under the influence of MDMA, but this effect was not paralleled by an increased interest in initiating sexual activity in either the men or the women. While a majority indicated that they would use MDMA as a sexual enhancer, most of the subjects who had used MDMA during sex reported increased emotional closeness. It is curious that a drug, which can increase emotional closeness, enhance receptivity to being sexual and would be chosen as a

sexual enhancer, does not increase the desire to initiate sex.

The subjects who were surveyed found that MDMA makes orgasm more difficult to achieve, especially for males. Erectile ability was decreased in almost half of the males. No other sexual effects occurred in a majority of subjects. Compared with other hallucinogens, MDMA is most similar to MDA in its lack of visual hallucinations as well as its enhancement of communication and emotional feelings. This may account for its similarity in facilitating sexuality (Buffum, Moser & Smith, In press).

Although the present study was not designed to determine the usefulness of MDMA in the treatment of sexual concerns, a few people reported resolving sexual concerns through its use. Unfortunately, any promise this drug has for the treatment of sexual concerns will be especially difficult to explore while it remains restricted as a Schedule I drug.

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