

# Petting study could dispel myths

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Why would anyone want to engage in breast-petting research? After all, isn't breast-petting a rather personal subject that experimenters ought to leave well enough alone?

Perhaps, but had researchers ignored all personal topics in the past, man would know very little about himself today. As it is, research about petting, dating and sex can help rid society of myths that have plagued people for years.

As this study has indicated, a very large majority of males and females at college age engage in and enjoy breast-petting. Despite present enjoyment however, a tenth of the males and near half the females felt the activity was immoral before their first experience. After the first experience, many changed their attitude toward petting, though a significant number felt guilty. Increased experience changed the attitude further, teaching some males when the activity was appropriate and showing some females that sincerity was not always within the male's intentions. For some males, the activity "got old".

A study of this nature allows comparison of male and female attitudes toward the joint venture and has revealed that there are only minor differences in many cases. In one area, there was disagreement as to the nature and extent of the first experience, with males perceiving more extensive activity and more intense enjoyment.

If it weren't for questionnaires, would we ever know that in two and three-quarter years, 100 females engaged in 6134 separate breast-petting experiences? Would it be possible to know that the activity is common and extensive in terms of

degree of fondling? Certainly we could guess, but there would be no empirical evidence without research.

But the real issue is why breast-petting and when is it considered permissible? The only way to know is to ask those involved.

What did the respondents think of the breast-petting research (a 70 item questionnaire which took an average of 31 minutes to complete during the week before finals)?

When asked if they thought breast-petting was a subject that ought to be investigated with surveys, 48 per cent of the females said yes. About half of the males agreed (46 per cent).

The affirmative opinion could be summarized as one male expressed it, "Strength through knowledge," or, "Everyone has questions about it and should have factual answers for their questions." A male who felt the survey was out-of-place wrote, "What difference does it make in the long run? Why not devote time and money on a topic that will do somebody (anybody) some good besides a bunch of . . . S.O.B.'s."

Supporting the idea of research on breast-petting, one girl wrote, "It is a touchy subject — also the American male has a breast obsession and I think it would be interesting to find out why."

Another female wrote, "I'd like to learn how other people answer — especially guys." Opposing her view was a girl who replied, "I don't think something as personal as a way of expressing feeling towards a person should be exploited."

Some respondents tended to question the significance of the study, but most agreed that the subject was interesting.

Fifty-three per cent of the females felt there was something to be gained from the research and 53

per cent of the males agreed.

In general, those who stated they felt nothing could be gained from the research also failed to see the relevancy or applicability of the knowledge to human sexuality and its effect on most humans in one way or another.

A significant 94 per cent of the males and 88 per cent of the females expressed the view that they wanted to read the results of the study in the newspaper.

Regarding ethics, some respondents felt the questionnaire should not have been produced at all, although they were out-numbered in opinion. As for publication, one respondent wrote, "I think publication of this may be harmful to those who do not engage in it but feel they must because 'everyone else does.'" Naturally, comments of this nature concern the experimenter of sex research. It is important to emphasize to readers that the data presented is based upon 200 volunteer subjects and the opinions of these respondents should not be allowed to affect the reader any more than a logical, mature consideration of any idea. This is, after all, the nature and purpose of education.

But is the study valid? Since subjects were volunteer and not randomly selected, wouldn't there be a tendency for people who enjoy breast-petting to respond and those who do not enjoy the activity to shy away? Apparently the answer is no. By examining the data it can be seen that roughly half of the respondents felt the subject should not be investigated and that nothing could be gained from this research. But, they responded anyway, despite their negative attitude. In addition, all subjects gave information regarding their attitude toward breast-petting before and after they had had the experience, which provides essentially two samples, a naive one and an experienced one.

Volunteer studies can always be criticized as non-random samples, but in the area of human sexuality, it is difficult to find a better index of behavior. A questionnaire of this sort certainly could not be required in the classroom, nor could subjects be paid to submit information since payment would attract a certain type of respondent. Half the females said that they answered the questionnaire out of interest or curiosity as did 37 per cent of the men. Twenty-three per cent of the entire sample responded to the questionnaire at a request from a friend.

Honesty of responses can be

questioned, but surprisingly, people have a very strong tendency to tell the truth when a survey is taken seriously and is anonymous. One male wrote, "Modesty is assured through anonymous responses." Comparison of responses across redundant questions for each subject revealed no evidence of dishonesty.

So, that is breast-petting, and this concludes the report based on the study carried out recently. It is hoped that this research can provide a step in the right direction in taking some of the touchiness out of an otherwise very touchy subject.

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