

Report on the outcomes of a Short-Term Scientific Mission¹

Action number: CA18124

Grantee name: Dr. Verena Klein

Details of the STSM

Title: A cross-cultural examination of gender differences in sexual behavior: The undervalued role of sexual pleasure (?)

Start and end date: 01/10/2022 to 14/10/2022

Description of the work carried out during the STSM

Description of the activities carried out during the STSM. Any deviations from the initial working plan shall also be described in this section.

People all over the world have sex. Sex research is however dominated by Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) samples (Klein et al., 2021). Given that cross-cultural research on sexual behavior has been largely neglected, the present STSM supported me in setting up a research cooperation with leading researchers in South-Korea.

Studying sexuality from a cross-cultural perspective allows the testing of explanations for gender differences in sexual behaviors (e.g., masturbation, sexual desire; with men scoring higher in all cases). The main purpose of the STSM was to set up a research cooperation to examine the neglected role of sexual pleasure in explaining gender differences across cultural contexts.

As part of the STSM, I stayed two weeks as visiting scholar at the Psychology Department, Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul, South Korea to work with Prof. Chang and Kyeongwoo Park, MA. The lab includes an inspiring, passionate group of fellow young researchers. From the very onset, all team members were fantastic. They were welcoming and inclusive, informative, and especially interested in establishing this joined, new line of research.

¹ This report is submitted by the grantee to the Action MC for approval and for claiming payment of the awarded grant. The Grant Awarding Coordinator coordinates the evaluation of this report on behalf of the Action MC and instructs the GH for payment of the Grant.

In this STSM period, we developed the measure and specified our research hypotheses. In addition, during my stay we prepared the planned survey and discussed recruitment strategies in more detail. Several of our lab meetings focused on designing the planned research and aligning the topic to our specific interest in sexual medicine. I highly profited from the discussions with my hosts to conduct cross-cultural sex research. Furthermore, I was invited to join another research cooperation on compulsive sexual behavior that additionally includes researchers from Japan. We also planned a session to discuss country specific barriers for sexual health for additional clinical knowledge transfer. Sharing and hearing new research ideas provided me with a great scope to develop and execute my planned project.

As part of the STSM, I also had the opportunity to present my current line of research in the University's colloquium entitled "Gender differences in sexual pleasure and the role of sexual entitlement". I highly appreciate the very helpful discussion and feedback of all lab members. I was also highly encouraged to meet with researchers from other labs.

That said, the STSM and its outcomes nicely matched the two goals of the ESMN namely "research coordination and capacity building in scientific research" as well as "training and clinical practice concerning sexual medicine and sexual health".

Description of the STSM main achievements and planned follow-up activities

Description and assessment of whether the STSM achieved its planned goals and expected outcomes, including specific contribution to Action objective and deliverables, or publications resulting from the STSM. Agreed plans for future follow-up collaborations shall also be described in this section.

Sample diversity matters a great deal for sex research and sexual medicine. Historically, the scientific study of sexuality has been a Western-European enterprise (Agocha et al., 2014). Scientific and medical discourses have set norms about sexual behavior based on this Western-European tradition, often pathologizing non-White and non-heterosexual people (Somerville, 1994). Sex research continues to be dominated by WEIRD samples. This obviously creates a barrier to understanding the complexities and multitude of realities in human (sexual) experience.

Based on the above-described activities, the STSM met the action objectives in several ways: (a) by establishing an interdisciplinary research cooperation with researchers from South Korea, (b) by planning the data collection for the joined research, and (c) the foreseen dissemination of results in form of a joint publication/ presentation on a scientific conference. That said, the proposed STSM was the seed corn for a larger project on sexuality and culture.

The STSM resulted in future collaboration with the host institution. During my stay, we have designed the joint research and started developing the questionnaire. Data will be collected in a next step. I will then closely collaborate with all STSM team members in analyzing and interpreting the data, and in writing a manuscript for publication. My STSM experience was more than I could have anticipated. I am looking forward to continuing working on this joined project. More importantly, the research project will make an important contribution to advancing knowledge about sexual pleasure and gendered power relations.